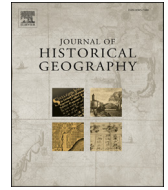




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Archiving and the aspirational politics of self-determination: Non-state claims to legitimacy amongst the Nagas in Northeast India

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ABSTRACT

Archives are paradigmatic state institutions. However, states are not the only actors to construct national archives: Indigenous, minority, and stateless groups also engage in archival practices. Yet, there is little analysis of how archives support these communities' geopolitical projects. To what extent can these groups harness archival power to produce subjectivities and legitimate political claims? What is the relationship between official state repositories and non-state actors' unofficial collections? How are such attempts at national archiving entangled with other 'big space' political projects, including internationalism? This paper explores how archives-as-institutions shape claims to political legitimacy and self-determination amongst Naga communities in Northeast India. It argues that archives undergird efforts to realise alternative Naga nationalist geopolitical futures. Drawing upon research with Naga twentieth-century collections, alongside interviews with Naga activists, I tell two archive stories. First, that of the 'missing' archival collection of the late Naga anticolonial nationalist leader Angami Zapu Phizo. By exploring the ongoing tensions over stewardship of Phizo's papers, I explain how, despite their inaccessibility, Phizo's archive looms large in Naga communities, illustrating how the (missing) archive informs contemporary Naga geopolitical imaginaries and claims to international recognition, and reproduces colonial relations between the Nagas and their international supporters. Second, efforts by Naga activists to construct an alternative Naga 'national' archive in Nagaland. By examining the space, materiality, and form of that collection, I illustrate how through archival curation Naga nationalists rehearse collective futures amidst political stasis. I conclude by describing the broader significance of archives as legitimacy-claiming instruments for non-state actors.

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Archives are paradigmatic institutions of modern statehood. The 'play of archivists, historians, and history', argues Todd Shepard, 'always involves more than the struggle to tell accurate and well-documented histories: this dynamic participates in the constitutive relationships linking people to institutions and states to a unique history'.¹ National archives as repositories of historical evidence enable historians and governments to articulate a collective past, while as symbolic and material spaces, archives project state authority within and beyond territorial boundaries.² Through

expressing the historical and contemporary relationship between state and citizen national archives serve as both source – and potential challenge – to the legitimate exercise of state power.³ Thus, argues Jennifer Milligan in her account of the establishment of the *Archives Nationales de France*, as an 'institution' an archive can be 'just as potent a political tool as its contents – and therefore politically dangerous'.⁴

Yet states are not the only actors to construct putatively 'national' archives. Non-state actors, namely Indigenous, minority, and stateless communities, also engage in archival practices. There is a paucity of analysis, however, as to how archives support these

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¹ Todd Shepard, "'Of Sovereignty": Disputed Archives, "Wholly Modern" Archives, and the Post-Decolonization French and Algerian Republics, 1962–2012', *The American Historical Review* 120 (2015) 869–883 (p. 870).

² Tony Ballantyne, 'Mr Peal's Archive: Mobility and Exchange in Histories of Empire' in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fiction and the Writing of History*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) pp. 87–110.

³ Jennifer Milligan, 'Publicité in the Archives of Second Empire France', in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. by Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: Michigan, 2007), pp. 20–35.

⁴ Milligan, 'Publicité', pp. 21–22.

groups' geopolitical projects. How far do the archival practices of these non-state actors mirror those of states? To what extent are these communities able to harness 'archival power' to produce subjectivities, claim self-determination, and construct political legitimacy?⁵ What is the relationship between 'official' state repositories and 'unofficial' collections of non-state actors? What are the entanglements between such attempts at 'national' archiving and other 'big space' political projects, namely internationalism, transnationalism, and imperialism?⁶

I address these questions by asking how 'archives-as-institutions' – over and above their documentary contents – shape claims to political legitimacy and self-determination amongst Naga nationalist claimants and their international supporters.⁷ An Indigenous community divided by the Indo-Myanmar border, the Nagas have campaigned for self-determination since 1929, when Naga leaders petitioned the British Government for the right to determine their own political future.⁸ In 1947 the recently inaugurated Naga National Council (NNC) declared Naga independence from British India and sought to establish a Naga state. Since then, Naga activists have variously employed discourses of sovereignty, self-determination, and Indigeneity to make their claim internationally legible. They have, however, been forestalled by the Indian government's refusal to recognise Naga nationhood and persistent claims that the so-called 'Naga issue' is of purely domestic Indian concern.

While maps are often understood as quintessential tools of geopolitical claims-making, Naga actors deploy historical materials to demonstrate eligibility for international rights. This paper considers one facet of Naga documentary claims-making by describing two attempts to create a Naga 'national archive'. I first discuss efforts by transnational supporters of Naga self-determination to build a Naga 'archive-in-exile' in the UK in the 1990s. That archive was intended to house the papers of the late Naga anticolonial nationalist leader Angami Zapu Phizo. The project was abandoned amidst tensions over the stewardship of Phizo's collection and the archive is now missing. Nevertheless, despite their inaccessibility, Phizo's papers loom large within Naga communities, raising questions about the role of (missing) archives in both informing Naga geopolitical imaginaries and claims to international recognition, and in reproducing relations of coloniality between Nagas and their international supporters. I juxtapose this episode with recent endeavours by Naga activists to construct an alternative Naga national archive in Nagaland – the Naga Archives and Research Centre (NARC). By examining the space, materiality, and form of that collection, I illustrate how archival curation constitutes a means through which Naga nationalists rehearse national futures amidst political stasis.⁹

⁵ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), p. 52.

⁶ Jake Hodder, Michael Heffernan, and Stephen Legg, 'The Archival Geographies of Twentieth-Century Internationalism: Nation, Empire and Race', *Journal of Historical Geography* 71 (2021) 1–11 (p. 2).

⁷ I adopt 'archives-as-institutions' from Shepard, 'Sovereignty', p. 870.

⁸ Some Nagas eschew the label 'Indigenous', arguing that it naturalises the Nagas' inclusion within India. For instance, see: The Morung Express (online), 'Nagas are not a minority group or an Indigenous People of India: NNC', 10 August 2021. <https://morungexpress.com/nagas-are-not-a-minority-group-or-an-indigenous-people-of-india-nnc>, last accessed 29 November 2024.

⁹ I adopt the term 'national futures' from Longkumer to describe aspirations towards collective political futures by Naga communities based upon common claim(s) to nationhood. Arkotong Longkumer, 'Indigenous Futures: The practice of sovereignty in Nagaland and other places', in *Indigenous Religion(s): Local Grounds, Global Networks*, ed. by Siv Ellen Kraft, Bjørn Ola Tafjord, Arkotong Longkumer, Gregory D. Alles, and Greg Johnson (London: Routledge, 2020) pp. 89–119 (p. 92). I am grateful to one of the paper's reviewers for highlighting the utility of this chapter for understanding these case studies.

Through historicizing the production and mobilisation of both collections, I address two lacuna in the literature on archives and the development of geopolitical projects. First, I expand the empirical gaze of scholarship on archives and nation-building by foregrounding the archival practices of Naga nationalist actors who lack the strategic resources of the state while campaigning for collective self-determination in international fora and negotiations with India. Drawing on geographical scholarship on the legitimizing strategies of non-state actors, I demonstrate how self-conscious acts of collecting, cataloguing, combining, and displaying records inform the crafting of Naga political claims at multiple scales.¹⁰ The cases below demonstrate how the archive's institutional significance is thus not confined to its association with the state. Instead, debates over the stewardship of Phizo's collection speak to the question of who has the authority to speak for and make claims on the Nagas' behalf, while the NARC shows how the archive-as-institution offers space for reconciling between Naga political futures past and present. Second, I respond to Hodder and colleagues' call to use 'geographical methodologies' to understand the historical geographies of archival collections.¹¹ I therefore attend both to the relationship between the content of Naga collections and the production of nationalist imaginaries, and to how the *place* of the archive – its form, location, and physical setting – undergirds its institutional power. I demonstrate how while Phizo's collection is embroiled in a dispute concerning where the archive *should* be located, the space of the NARC fosters the subjectivities of both Naga and non-Naga visitors.

Both case studies thus reveal the archive's institutional significance as a site where multi-scalar practices of worldmaking are materialised. Here, I follow Liane Hartnett in understanding worldmaking as 'those disparate political attempts to imagine and enact worlds beyond those that exist'.¹² For subaltern geopolitical actors, worldmaking is invariably multi-scalar, involving efforts to overcome relations of colonial domination and transform the hegemonic international order in, through, and across specific sites.¹³ In conceptualising Naga archival practices as 'worldmaking', I echo the concerns of this special issue by suggesting that attempts to construct a Naga 'national' archive – both real and imagined, realised and unrealised – exceed the bounds of state- and nation-building. Instead, these archival practices have also been entangled with creative efforts to realise diverse multi-scalar Naga geopolitical futures encompassing nationalism, internationalism, and transnationalism.¹⁴ Attending to the multiscalarity of worldmaking also foregrounds the relationship between the 'micro' geography of archival space(s) and the 'big space' geographical imaginaries advanced within and through their collections.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section two makes the case for using 'archives-as-institutions' to understand non-state actors' archival practices. Section three introduces the Naga self-determination struggle and the role of historical production in Naga nationalism. Sections four and five then narrate the two

¹⁰ Alex Jeffrey, Fiona McConnell, and Alice Wilson, 'Understanding Legitimacy: Perspectives from Anomalous Geopolitical Spaces', *Geoforum* 66 (2015) 177–183.

¹¹ Hodder, Heffernan, and Legg, 'Archival', p. 1.

¹² Hartnett's definition draws on the scholarship of Nelson Goodman and Adom Getachew. Liane Hartnett, 'Love is Worldmaking: Reading Rabindranath Tagore's Gora as International theory', *International Studies Quarterly* 66 (2022) sqac037 (footnote 1). Also see Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1978) and Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

¹³ On the meaning of 'subaltern geopolitics', see Joanne Sharp, 'Subaltern geopolitics: Introduction', *Geoforum* 42 (2011) 71–73.

¹⁴ Getachew, *Worldmaking*.

'archive stories' which are the subject of this paper.¹⁵ I conclude by reflecting on the significance of archives as legitimacy-claiming instruments for non-state actors.

Archives-as-institutions beyond the state

The 'archival turn' has seen academics rethink the 'materiality and imaginary of collections' and 'move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject'.¹⁶ Scholars increasingly attend to the politics of archiving and how practices of collecting, cataloguing, and displaying records underpin knowledge production. As Antoinette Burton argues, 'claims to objectivity associated with the traditional archive pose a challenge which must be met by telling stories about its provenance, its histories, its effect on its users, and ... its power to shape all the narratives which are to be "found" there'.¹⁷ This scholarship fostered methodological interventions in archival practice, including attention to the form of archival collections and to non-institutional repositories.¹⁸ Calls to 'evoke ... archival life' and to register the archive as a 'contact zone' between 'the past and the present' have been followed by reflections on those subjectivities constituted through archival research.¹⁹

This paper takes inspiration from scholarship on 'archives-as-subject' and the methodological challenges it poses to claims to archival truth. I take as my conceptual departure point, however, a distinct (but related) strand of research which understands 'archives-as-institutions'. Whereas 'archives-as-subject' considers how archiving processes condition claims to epistemic authority, 'archives-as-institutions' attends to how the very fact of the archive (over and above its documentary contents) can legitimate claims to political authority. Such scholarship has principally focused on archives as paradigmatic state institutions. As Shepard argues, 'through their existence' and functioning, archives 'help constitute a state insofar as their workings offer proof that it is an emanation of its people, a nation-state, and thus modern'.²⁰ Shepard's arguments build on those made by Milligan above, who documents how, at its founding in 1789, the *Archives Nationales* was seen to embody and legitimate the new relationship between the state and its citizens in 'modern' France. As an institution, the *Archives* thus 'actively helped shape the boundaries of the politically possible and the historically legible'. They were 'as saturated with historical and political significance as with historical and political information'.²¹

Outside of the West, the role 'archives-as-institutions' play in 'engender[ing] a common sense of nationhood, people and community' is punctuated by disputes between postcolonial states and their former colonisers concerning displaced collections from the

colonial period.²² Michael Karabinos demonstrates how the 'seized archives of Indonesia' provide a lens for tracing the fluctuating postcolonial relationship between Indonesia and the Netherlands amidst attempts by the Indonesian government to 'reclai[m]' its 'displaced history'.²³ Others unsettle the colony-to-metropole-trajectory of post-colonial archival displacements, by highlighting South-South displacements, and archival disputes between states and civil-society, sub-state, and private-sector actors.²⁴

An archive's institutional power is as much material as it is symbolic. 'The archive' – Achille Mbembe argues – 'has neither status nor power without an architectural dimension': 'a material presence which structures access' and 'imposes ... meanings on the evidence contained therein'.²⁵ As Tony Ballantyne contends, archive buildings 'can suggest certain types of historical vision and legitimate particular historical narratives'. Ballantyne shows how the 'architecture, decoration' and 'signage' of the National Library of New Zealand project an image of the Library as 'an embodiment of the nation's bicultural heritage and a repository of its bicultural past'.²⁶ Elsewhere, Caroline Elkins highlights the 'steril[ity]' and 'benign efficiency' of the British National Archives. Discussing documents concerning British rule in Kenya, Elkins suggests that out of this 'orderliness' a 'sense emerges of a coherent decolonization process', which belies the systematic violence which accompanied the transfer of power.²⁷

Of course, 'archives-as-institutions' are not merely state concerns. Ruth Craggs demonstrates how the micro-geography of London's Royal Empire Society Library cultivated an atmosphere of order commensurate with British claims as to Empire's civilising nature.²⁸ Elsewhere, Hodder and colleagues demonstrate how internationalism was also 'constituted' through archival practices and 'how the geographies of international archival records reveal bigger political struggles over who and where was able to claim to be internationalist in the past'. The authors document how at its founding in 1925, the decision to locate the archives of the International Institute of Cooperation (IIC) in Paris was a means of advancing 'France's cultural and imperial policies', based on the 'assumption that intellectual cooperation was an inherently French prerogative'.²⁹

Despite growing attention to these alternative sites of archival power, there has nevertheless been little attention paid to how archives-as-institutions undergird non-state communities' geopolitical practices. Through attending to the archival practices of Naga nationalist claimants and their international supporters this paper addresses this lacuna. In so doing, it also engages with geographical scholarship on the legitimating strategies of non-state actors. Legitimacy facilitates a focus on the 'processes, practices and discourses through which the authority of [non-state] actors is constructed, negotiated and presented' 66 (2015) 203–214 (p. 202).

¹⁵ Antoinette Burton, 'Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories', in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fiction and the Writing of History*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) pp. 1–24 (p. 8).

¹⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science* 2 (2002) 87–109 (p. 93).

¹⁷ Paul Ashmore, Ruth Craggs, and Hannah Neate, 'Working-with: Talking and Sorting in Personal Archives', *Journal of Historical Geography* 38 (2012) 81–99.

¹⁸ Burton, 'Fever', p. 6.

¹⁹ On 'archival life' see: Hayden Lorimer, 'Caught in The Nick of Time' in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, ed. by Dydia Delyser, Steve Herbert, Stuart Aitkin, Mike Crang and Linda McDowell (London: SAGE, 2010) pp. 248–273 (p. 250). On the archive as 'contact zone' see: Jeff Sahadeo, "'Without The Past There Is No Future": Archives, History, and Authority in Uzbekistan', in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fiction and the Writing of History*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) pp. 46–67 (p. 54). On the subjectivities constituted through archival research see: Ashmore, Craggs, and Neate, 'Working-with'.

²⁰ Shepard, 'Sovereignty', p. 870.

²¹ Milligan, 'Publicité', p. 31.

²² Cheryl McEwan, 'Building a Postcolonial Archive? Gender, Collective Memory and Citizenship in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29 (2003) 741–758 (p. 744).

²³ Michael Karabinos, 'Displaced Archives, Displaced History: Recovering Seized Archives of Indonesia', *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 169 (2003) 279–294 (p. 294).

²⁴ James Lowry, 'Introduction: Disputed Archival Heritage' in *Disputed Archival Heritage*, ed. by Lowry, (p. 3–17) pp. 1.

²⁵ Achille Mbembe, 'The Power of The Archive and Its Limits' in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. by Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002) pp. 19–27 (p. 19).

²⁶ Ballantyne, 'Peal', pp. 100–102.

²⁷ Caroline Elkins, 'Looking Beyond Mau Mau, Archiving Violence in the Era of Decolonization', *The American Historical Review* 120 (2015) 852–868 (pp. 852–854).

²⁸ Ruth Craggs, 'Situating The Imperial Archive: The Royal Empire Society Library, 1868–1945', *Journal of Historical Geography* 34 (2008) 48–46. p. 65.

²⁹ Hodder, Heffernan, and Legg, 'Archival', pp. 1–2, 4, 11.

and is therefore useful in 'opening up and exposing connections' between issues of 'power, authority, rights, recognition, consent [and] sovereignty' beyond the state.³⁰ Crucially, legitimacy is a 'mode of statecraft rather than an achieved status', and, I suggest, in the Naga case part of an ongoing exercise in worldmaking.³¹ Legitimacy thus offers a generative lens for understanding both the relationship between the content and form of the Naga nationalist archive and Naga political imaginaries, but also how archives-as-institutions are mobilised as legitimacy-claiming instruments, through which Naga and non-Naga political actors make multi-scalar claims to authority. Moreover, while scholars have considered how non-state actors construct legitimacy through discourses of good governance and diplomatic performances, this paper responds to calls to foreground the heterogeneous means through which subaltern geopolitical actors garner political recognition.³²

Histories of the Naga self-determination movement

The right to self-determination describes a peoples' right freely to choose their political status and to pursue their own form of economic, cultural, and social development.³³ Historically associated with the establishment of post-colonial states at administrative decolonization, for much of the second half of the twentieth century Naga politicians drew upon this right as articulated in the UN Charter to call for a Naga state. In reflecting upon how archives shape contemporary Naga self-determination claims, however, this paper draws upon geographical scholarship which reimagines self-determination outside of these restrictive bounds by attending to how self-determination is claimed and articulated by communities on the ground and in specific sites.³⁴ Indeed, Naga civil society activists have increasingly reclaimed the language of self-determination to articulate their political aspirations both locally and internationally, inspired in part by the recognition of the (qualified) right of Indigenous People to self-determination within the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).³⁵ Nonetheless, such articulations exceed purely rights-based framings. Naga activists instead embrace self-determination both as an embodied and processual practice through which Naga futures are decided, and as a vision for collective Naga political emancipation.³⁶ Self-determination is thus tied to a range of Naga political agendas, including cultural preservation, nation-building, and

reconciliation within Naga communities and between the Nagas and India.

A form of 'future-making', self-determination thus has a distinctive temporality; one in which, the Nagas' collective future, far from being pre-determined, is open, to be decided upon and prefigured by Naga communities in the present.³⁷ As Naga scholar Akum Longchari demonstrates, as 'praxis', self-determination offers Nagas space to envision and build plural geopolitical futures outside of the 'Westphalian order' and the limits of 'state pragmatism'.³⁸ In so doing, many Naga activists have sought to go beyond long-standing debates concerning whether the Nagas should pursue statehood or autonomy within India, articulating instead a vision for a Naga future 'without borders' according to Naga Indigenous practices.³⁹ Self-determination struggles, however, are never simply struggles to gain control over the future: they are also struggles over history and memory. Claims upon the past buttress claims to peoplehood (the 'self' to be determined) but also shape the horizons of the politically possible (the outcome of the process of 'determination').

The denial of self-determination underpins histories of Naga nationalism. Today, the Nagas comprise around 3 million people occupying a highland region in the Indian states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and in the Sagaing Region and Kachin State in Myanmar. The term 'Naga' was itself adopted as a tool of archival governance by British administrator-anthropologists in the 1830s.⁴⁰ Previously, there was no collective noun for the heterogeneous inhabitants of the area now known as the Naga Hills. By the early twentieth century, what began as an administrative tool had transfigured into the basis for claims to a collective Naga identity. The Nagas' first demanded separate administration in 1929, when Naga leaders submitted a memorandum to the Indian Statutory Commission (the 'Simon Commission'), a group of British MPs established to determine India's political future. If the British depart, the Memorandum's author Rüzühkhrie Angami demanded, the Nagas should be left 'alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times'.⁴¹

Calls for Naga self-determination re-emerged at the transfer of power, when members of a newly educated Naga tribal elite sought to subsume Naga clan, village, and tribal identities within a claim to collective Naga nationhood.⁴² In 1947, the recently inaugurated NNC, led by their charismatic president Angami Zapu Phizo, declared Naga independence via a memorandum to the UN. The Nagas re-affirmed their desire for independence in 1951 through a plebiscite in which 99.9 % of Nagas reportedly voted in favour.⁴³ The vote was derided as illegitimate by the Indian government. Following Indian military occupation of the Naga Hills, Phizo attempted to take the Nagas' claim to the UN, travelling via East Pakistan and Switzerland, before arriving in London in June 1960.⁴⁴ Despite the support of a network of western advocates and

³⁰ On the 'processes, practices, and discourses' of legitimacy see Alice Wilson and Fiona McConnell, 'Constructing legitimacy without legality in long term exile: Comparing Western Sahara and Tibet', *Geoforum* 66 (2015) 203–214 (p. 202). On legitimacy's connections' to 'power, authority, rights, recognition, consent [and] sovereignty' see Jeffrey, McConnell, and Wilson, 'Legitimacy', p. 179.

³¹ Fiona McConnell, *Rehearsing The State: The Political Practices of The Tibetan Government-in-Exile* (Oxford: Wiley, 2016) p. 114.

³² On the diplomatic performances of non-state actors' see Wilson and McConnell, 'Constructing'. On the plural nature of subaltern geopolitics see Christopher Browning and Antonio Ferraz de Oliveira, 'Reading Brand Africa Geopolitically: Nation Subaltern Geopolitics and The Persistence of Politics', *Geopolitics* 22 (2017) 640–664.

³³ Shona Loong, Alex Manby, and Fiona McConnell, 'Re-thinking self-determination: Colonial and relational geographies in Asia', *Territory, Politics, Governance* (2023) 2232410.

³⁴ Costas Constantinou, Fiona McConnell, Dilar Dirlik, Asebe Regassa, Shona Loong, and Rauna Kukkanen, 'Reimagining self-determination: Relational, decolonial and intersectional perspectives', *Political Geography* (2024) 103112.

³⁵ Loong, Manby, and McConnell, 'Self-determination'.

³⁶ Akum Longchari, 'Self-determination: at the heart of Indigenous humanisation', in *Handbook of Indigenous Public Policy* ed. by Sheryl Lightfoot and Sarah Maddison (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2024), pp. 70–97; Loong, Manby, and McConnell, 'Self-determination'.

³⁷ Asebe in Constantinou, McConnell, Dirlik, Regassa, 'Self-determination'.

³⁸ Longchari, 'Self-determination', p. 93.

³⁹ *Walking the Naga Day: Collection of Prayers, Songs & Speeches made on Naga Day*, ed. by FNR (Heritage Publishing House: Dimapur, 2018).

⁴⁰ Jelle Wouters, *In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency: Tribes, State, and Violence in Northeast India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 42–46.

⁴¹ Memorandum on the Naga Hills from the Secretary, Naga Club, Kohima, Naga Hills, 29 January 1929, to the Indian Statutory Commission, Assam Memoranda, British Library, London (hereafter BL)/India Office Records/Q/13/1/1.

⁴² John Thomas, *Evangelizing the Nation: Religion and the Formation of a Naga Political Identity* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2016).

⁴³ Dolly Kikon, 'Engaging Naga nationalism', *Economic and Political Weekly* 40 (2005) 2833–2837.

⁴⁴ On Phizo's efforts to internationalise the Naga cause from London, see Lydia Walker, 'Decolonization in the 1960s: On Legitimate and Illegitimate Nationalist Claims-Making', *Past and Present* 242 (2019) 227–264.

(reflecting the close ties between Naga nationalism and Baptist Christianity) Christian internationalists, the Naga claim went unheard both in the UK and internationally.⁴⁵ Phizo remained in London until his death in 1990.⁴⁶

Back in Phizo's homeland, the creation of the State of Nagaland in 1963 within India failed to satisfy Naga nationalists' desire for full independence. Amidst fierce fighting – both between Naga and India militaries and between representatives of different Naga political factions – a group broke away from the NNC in 1980 to form the Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN).⁴⁷

It is necessary briefly to elaborate on the subsequent trajectories of the NSCN to understand the case studies below. In 1988, the group split into two factions: the NSCN-Isak Muivah (the 'NSCN-IM') – and the NSCN Khaplang (the 'NSCN-K'). Both groups (along with several other Naga 'factions') claim to represent all Nagas in their self-determination struggle, support for the different Naga factions tends to follow pre-existing tribal divisions, and Naga society remains deeply divided. In 1997 India signed a ceasefire agreement with the NSCN-IM, which was later extended to the NSCN-K. Since the ceasefire, most Naga factions no longer demand statehood, calling instead for the integration of all contiguous Naga areas according to a geographical imaginary of 'Nagalim' or 'Greater Nagaland'.⁴⁸ Twelve years after the ceasefire, in 2015, NSCN-IM leaders signed an historic 'Framework Agreement' with India.⁴⁹ That agreement sought to lay the ground for the implementation of a *sui generis* 'shared sovereignty' arrangement which would establish an 'enduring inclusive relationship of peaceful coexistence between the two parties'.⁵⁰ Nearly a decade on however, and the Indo-Naga negotiations have reached a stalemate. There has been no progress implementing the Framework Agreement, and the Nagas appear no closer to realising collective self-determination.

The history of Naga nationalism is thus one characterised by both instability and stasis. On the one hand the numerous failed Indo-Naga accords and decades of Indo-Naga violence speak to a movement characterised by lingering uncertainty. On the other hand, the inability to resolve the so-called 'Naga issue' speaks to a society in political limbo. Amidst this temporal scalar tension lies a spatial scalar disconnect: while Naga claims to Indigeneity are common in international fora, the Indian government refuses to recognise Nagas as Indigenous, arguing that all people in India are Indigenous (and thus, in substance, that there are no Indigenous people).⁵¹ Naga and other Indigenous groups in Northeast India

must instead articulate claims to legal recognition through the Indian state's constitutional framework of 'Schedule Tribes'. As Elspeth Iralu and Dolly Kikon assert, however, this is a category 'defined by a presumed backwardness, remoteness, and need for improvement', one which necessitates that the Naga community break from their past and assimilate, through development, within the Indian nation.⁵² The denial both of the Nagas' collective history and right to self-determination is reinforced by the Indian state's ongoing militarisation and dispossession of Naga communities.

During both British and then Indian coloniality, Nagas have used historical and archival production to buttress nationalist claims locally and internationally. On the one hand, print facilitated the fashioning of the Nagas' twentieth-century political subjectivity, both within (British) India and in international fora. Print technologies in configuration with Baptist missionary education consolidated a pan-Naga identity across village and tribal lines in the late colonial period by facilitating the adoption of a shared Naga language (English) and script. As Arkotong Longkumer demonstrates, Christian print cultures (including Bible translations) fostered cultural unity amongst disparate communities, while the circulation of American newspapers by Baptist missionaries within Naga areas exposed Naga communities to Western notions of statehood, nationalism, and self-determination in the early twentieth century.⁵³ In the months before and after the transfer of power, debates concerning the Nagas' geopolitical future played out in the pages of the NNC's print organ, *The Naga Nation*.⁵⁴ English language proficiency would later also allow Naga politicians to tap into networks of international support which were inaccessible to neighbouring communities. Throughout the twentieth century, Naga politicians communicated their demands via a series of canonical memorandums and pamphlets, drawing on the spatial vocabularies deemed acceptable to international audiences.⁵⁵ As I discuss below, many of the Nagas' earliest political tracts continue to be deployed to legitimate contemporary claims to collective Naga political rights, while informing embodied articulations of self-determination on the ground. On the other hand, Naga actors have long promoted historical claims to legitimacy when seeking recognition for Naga nationhood, drawing from community oral histories, colonial-era anthropology, and archives in India and the U.K.⁵⁶ These popular assertions as to the 'Unique History of the Nagas' draw, *inter alia*, on claims that the Nagas were never formally subjugated by the British, histories of autochthony, claims to a collective identity which pre-dated colonial rule, and the fact that the Nagas submitted their 'Memorandum to the Simon Commission' eight years before Indian independence.⁵⁷

On the ground, however, the construction of Naga nationalist histories conflicts with a hegemonic project of Indian nation-

⁴⁵ Naga Christian conversions began in the nineteenth century and accelerated throughout the twentieth century alongside the emergence of Naga nationalism. Baptist Christianity has long informed Naga geopolitical ideologies, while the slogan 'Nagaland for Christ' has been a mantra for nationalist groups since the 1960s. As Thomas notes, Christianity provided a means through which the Nagas constructed a unified and putatively 'modern' national identity in the face of British and then Indian coloniality. Today, some 90 % of the population of Nagaland State identify as Christian. See Thomas, *Evangelizing*.

⁴⁶ Pieter Steyn, *Zapuphizo: Voice of The Nagas* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁷ For a Naga account of the Indo-Naga war, see Kaka Iralu, *Nagaland and India: The Blood and the Tears* ('Kohima: K. Iralu, 2017).

⁴⁸ Wouters, *Shadows*, p. 5.

⁴⁹ The NSCN-K were not signatories.

⁵⁰ Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty, 'Four Reasons Why the NSCN(I-M) Released the Confidential Nagaland Framework Agreement', *The Wire* (online), 17 August 2020. <https://thewire.in/politics/nagaland-framework-agreement-ns-cn-im/> last accessed 22 March 2024.

⁵¹ On Naga claims to Indigeneity across scale, see Arkotong Longkumer, 'Moral geographies: The problem of territoriality, sovereignty and indigeneity amongst the Nagas', in *Rethinking Social Exclusion in India: Caste, Communities and the State*, ed by Minoru Mio and Abhijit Dasgupta (New Delhi: Routledge, 2019), pp. 147–167.

⁵² Elspeth Iralu and Dolly Kikon, 'Indigenous pedagogies of love: Theorizing non-scalable worlds', *Political Geography* 114 (2024) 103184.

⁵³ Arkotong Longkumer, 'Along Kingdom's Highway': The proliferation of Christianity, education, and print amongst the Nagas in Northeast India, *Contemporary South Asia* 27 (2019) 160–178.

⁵⁴ *The Times of Kohima and The Naga Nation*, August 1946–September 1947, BL/Collections W. G. Archer (hereafter, 'Archer')/MssEur/F236/364.

⁵⁵ The significance of print to the development of Naga nationalism can be compared to Mizo nationalism which, Roluahpuia argues, was also fostered and 'vernacularized ... through a dominant oral tradition'. Roluahpuia, *Nationalism in the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), p. 7.

⁵⁶ Alex Manby, 'Geographies of Naga (Inter)nationalism, 1946–2022', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2023).

⁵⁷ Dolly Kikon, 'What Is Unique about Naga History?' *Economic and Political Weekly* 50 (2015) 10–13.

building which, as Kikon argues, has ‘appropriated the monopoly over historical events and processes’ across the subcontinent, enfolding Naga pasts within Indian nationalist historiographies and invisibilising a distinct Naga social, political, and cultural existence.⁵⁸ State-led education in Naga territories is ‘a ground of political struggle’ within ‘the Indian State’s aggressive policies to obliterate the Naga people’s histories’.⁵⁹ Moreover, as I elucidate below, there is a relative paucity of sources pertaining to Naga collective histories within Indian state archives – indeed, scholars of Naga history have often drawn heavily on imperial sources based in the UK when writing Naga political histories. The danger of relying upon such sources – particularly as they pertain to British colonial administration of Naga territories – is that the nature of British record keeping means that Naga voices are largely absent. Of course, as Naga scholar Iliito Achumi powerfully argues, for ‘the Nagas, the absence of archives is not an absence of history’.⁶⁰ Indeed, Naga scholars emphasise storytelling, performance, and orality as alternative means of addressing of archival silences, and contesting taken-for-granted histories.⁶¹

Nonetheless, despite such scholarly efforts to foreground alternative sources of political memory for non-state communities, the cases below speak to the continued potency of textual sources in informing Naga nationalist claims. These arguments draw from my research into the geographies of Naga internationalism conducted throughout 2020–2022. This included 31 interviews with members of Naga civil society organisations involved in campaigning for Naga self-determination. Most interviews centred around activist contemporary activities; however, a small number were oral history interviews focused on interviewees’ involvement with twentieth-century Naga politics. Interviewees were initially identified and approached via a gatekeeper international NGO known to the author and involved in Naga international advocacy. Subsequent interviewees were identified via snowball sampling. Archival practices were not the initial focus of the interviews. Instead, these topics emerged organically while discussing interviewees’ activist practices. Interviews were supplemented with textual analysis of Naga newspapers and Naga nationalist Facebook pages from this period, and archival research in the UK, Belgium, and Nagaland.⁶²

Institutional ethical approval was obtained prior to conducting this research, while informed consent was sought from research participants during fieldwork. Given the political sensitivities of the Naga context, participants’ names have been anonymised throughout. However, I refer to V. K. Nuh and David Ward (the respective holders of the collections discussed) by name in light of the fact that both are public figures, and that the existence of their respective collections is well-known because both frequently discuss them publicly. Nonetheless, as I outline, both collections remain entangled within the power relations which both constrain and enable expressions of Naga nationhood, including Indian coloniality and Naga intra-community tensions. For this reason, I limit the core factual details of my analysis to those rehearsed elsewhere

⁵⁸ Dolly Kikon, ‘Educating the Naga Headhunters: Colonial History and Cultural Hegemony in Post-Colonial India’, in *Cultural Genocide and Asian State Peripheries*, ed. by Barry Sautman (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), pp. 139–163. (p. 149).

⁵⁹ Kikon, *Headhunters*, p. 152.

⁶⁰ Iliito H. Achumi, ‘“Tell Them Our Story”: Memories of the Sumi Naga Labour Corps in World War I’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 46 (2023) 55–70. p. 56.

⁶¹ *The Cultural Heritage of Nagaland*, ed. by G. Kanato Choppy and Sarit K. Chaudhuri (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023).

⁶² In person archival research was conducted at The British Library (London), The National Archives (London), Bodleian Libraries (Oxford), Nagaland State Archives (Kohima), Archive for National Movements (Antwerp), and Naga Archives and Research Centre (Dimapur). Print media analysis focused on *The Morung Express*, *The Naga Republic*, *The Eastern Mirror*, and *The Nagaland Post*.

in publicly available materials including Naga newspapers. In short, I am not telling stories which no one has heard before.⁶³ Moreover, reflecting how ‘archival discovery’ can carry unforeseen risks in context of political uncertainty, I centre my discussion on the broad contours of both collections, and largely avoid discussion of specific materials within them.⁶⁴ This approach reflects the paper’s focus on ‘archives-as-institutions’ beyond their documentary contents while still accounting for the considerable affective power both collections hold within differentially positioned Naga communities.

Throughout, the archival and interview components of this paper are married: it was only via engagement with Naga activists that I was able to consult the NARC; while it was through interviews with Naga activists that I came to understand the salience of Phizo’s missing archive to contemporary Naga political imaginaries. The co-constitutive relationship between practices of archiving and political struggles is thus at the heart of both cases I discuss.

The ‘missing’ archive of Angami Zapu Phizo

During my fieldwork in Nagaland, conversations with Naga activists would invariably turn – often with a degree of hesitation – to whether I knew of a fellow Briton named David Ward. Born in Scotland in 1962, Ward spent his childhood living in Assam.⁶⁵ His concern for Naga politics, however, began in the 1980s, whilst incarcerated in Parkhurst prison for armed robbery.⁶⁶ Here, Ward’s interest in the Nagas was piqued after reading a Minority Rights Group (MRG) pamphlet documenting Indian human rights abuses against the Nagas.⁶⁷ Founded in 1969, the MRG is a UK-based NGO, established to further the rights of national minorities and Indigenous Peoples. The MRG’s founders included several Western human rights advocates who had supported Phizo to internationalise the Naga cause in London in the 1960s – most notably the former editor of *The Observer*, David Astor.⁶⁸ In 1989, having made contact with Astor and other transnational supporters of the Naga struggle, Ward established ‘Naga Vigil Human Rights Group’ (NVHRG): a ‘network of volunteers working with national and international pressure groups to aid and publicise the plight of the Naga people’.⁶⁹ NVHRG’s first activities included ‘The Naga Benefit Concert’ – a three-day variety show organised by Ward and his fellow prisoners involving performances of Naga songs and dances.⁷⁰

⁶³ The existence of both collections is also noted in other scholarly accounts. The NARC is discussed in Akshaya Tankha, ‘The Houseness of the Naga House Museum: Towards a Narrative of the Postcolonial South Asian House Museum’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 47 (2024) 133–158, while collection materials are depicted in Longkumer, ‘Indigenous futures’, p. 101–102. The disappearance of Phizo’s papers is documented by Lydia Walker, *States-in-Waiting: A Counterarchive of Global Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024) and Elspeth Iralu, *A Letter for Missing and Disappeared Archives ACME* (2023) 161–165.

⁶⁴ Iralu, ‘Letter’, p. 164.

⁶⁵ Randeep Ramesh and Sanjay Jha, ‘Briton is freed after Indian jail nightmare’, *The Guardian*, 30 July 2004.

⁶⁶ Janet Watts, ‘A Double Dream of Freedom’, *The Observer*, 15 September 1991.

⁶⁷ Beth Pearson, ‘David Ward tells of his struggle’, *The Herald*, 16 August 2004. The pamphlet in question was likely Neville Maxwell, *India, and the Nagas* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1973), though Walker suggests that Ward was inspired by the poetry of Easterine Kire. Walker, *States-in-Waiting*, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Astor’s involvement is documented in ‘Minority Rights Group, 1962–1966/1967–1968/1969–1971/1972–1975’ Bodleian Libraries, Oxford (BOD)/Archive of David Astor (Astor)/MSS.15363/221–224. Also see Walker, ‘Decolonization’.

⁶⁹ Watts, ‘Double’; also see ‘Naga Vigil: UNPO Membership Application’, National Movements Archive, Antwerp (ADV)/Archive of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (hereafter ‘UNPO’)/D1802(2/1).

⁷⁰ NVHRG, ‘The Naga Benefit Concert Festival of Freedom, 10th–11th–12th September, HMP Prison Wellingborough’, [1991], ADVN/UNPO/D18083(2/1).

Upon leaving prison, Ward continued involvement with NVHRG, including by providing humanitarian relief in Naga areas.⁷¹ Ward has, on any view, lived a colourful life, including twice been imprisoned in India for entering Nagaland without Indian government permission.⁷² During repeated visits to the region, Ward became embroiled in internecine rivalries between different Naga political factions. In recent years, these tensions have played out in the pages of Naga newspapers and online.⁷³ In 2007, NSCN-IM representatives used a press statement to accuse publicly the NVHRG leader of being 'hell bent on doing mischief to the Naga politics'.⁷⁴ For his part, Ward refuses to recognise the NSCN-IM as the Naga people's legitimate voice, branding the organisation's leaders as 'in league with the Government of India'.⁷⁵ He instead maintains that the NSCN-K are the Nagas' legitimate political representatives.⁷⁶

I first became aware of Ward while studying the archives of David Astor in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.⁷⁷ Letters in that collection between the two men describe how, following Phizo's death in 1990, Ward came into possession of the NNC leader's collection of 12,000 documents concerning the period 1951–1999.⁷⁸ While these letters do not describe how Ward acquired the papers, there is no suggestion that he did so in an underhand manner. However it came into his hands, Ward's acquisition of Phizo's archive did not pass without comment amongst Naga nationalist leaders at the time. Writing to Astor in April 1999, Ward notes that two Naga political factions – the NSCN-IM and the NNC – were already 'demanding' the files. For their part, the NSCN-K were 'happy' for the documents to remain in Ward's possession until Naga 'political re-unification'.⁷⁹

In 1989, while still incarcerated in Parkhurst Prison, Ward devised a plan to establish a 'national library for the Nagas ... in eastern Nagaland', and began collecting 'books, pamphlets, photographs, films, audio cassettes, and political papers ... specific to the Nagas'.⁸⁰ In 1999 Ward and other NVHRG supporters refocused their attention to establishing a formal home for the 'Naga Library' in the UK. The library's 'principal purpose' – NVHRG members argued in a proposal for the scheme – would be educational, offering students from around the world, including 'indigenous Naga scholars' the opportunity to 'research ... Naga oriented subjects'. Phizo's papers – described by Ward as the 'Naga national archives' – were to form an integral part of the 'Naga Library'.⁸¹ The papers, Ward maintained, were the 'property of the Naga Nation' and could only be included in the library as part of a 'classified' section, which, 'in the interests of [Naga] national security', would remain 'inaccessible to research scholars and the media'.⁸² NVHRG even

considered the purchase of a fire-damaged building in Kent to house both collections. The project was abandoned in the early 2000s, however, due to lack of financial resources and amidst tensions between Ward and both other Naga supporters in the UK, and Naga nationalist groups in Nagaland.

Since then, Ward has continued to act as the documents' self-appointed guardian-cum-gatekeeper. In 2007, Ward formally announced via a 'press communiqué' that he was disbanding NVHRG and that the 'the Naga national archives may be collected with the prior approval' of representatives of the 'Federal Government of Nagaland' and the NNC. 'For security reasons', Ward claimed, the archives were no longer 'housed under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom'.⁸³ In 2015, Ward issued a further public statement in the same newspaper, refusing to hand the documents to 'any Indian or Western Nagas' – namely members of the NSCN-IM – whose 'capitulation' in signing the Framework Agreement with the Indian Government earlier that year meant that they were not 'deemed a suitable or sustainable force to be the keepers of such sensitive archives'. Instead, Ward claimed, the 'future for the Nagas ... is from the Eastern Nagaland and as such' the archives 'will only be returned to the Eastern Nagas' – principally represented by the NSCN-K, who were not signatories to the Framework Agreement. Phizo's papers, Ward claimed, had been 'removed from Ireland and collated for onward handover'.⁸⁴ Today, however, the archive's exact location is unknown. Ward remains estranged from Naga activists in the UK and in Nagaland.

This episode speaks to four ways in which archives undergird Naga political claims. First, at the most basic level, ongoing Naga interest in the archive of Phizo's papers is indicative of the centrality of documentary material to the fashioning of Naga national and international imaginaries. Phizo's papers attract considerable interest amongst Naga activists and scholars of Naga history, many of whom maintain that the collection would provide valuable insights into Phizo's life and those critical decisions which underpinned the fashioning of a Naga nationalist subjectivity in the years immediately following the transfer of power. This confidence may be well-placed. Those who knew the NNC leader describe him as a prolific producer of documents.⁸⁵ Colleagues within the nationalist movement recount how he would carry his typewriter throughout the Naga jungle while fleeing Indian military forces in the 1950s. In the UK, his house, despite its modest size, was reportedly packed with carefully curated folders concerning the Naga struggle.⁸⁶ During my own time in Nagaland, traces of Phizo's collection also made themselves evident in the homes of contemporary Naga activists, many of whom had acquired copies of documents either from Phizo himself (or from Ward, when he was inclined to do so). I was shown facsimiles of Phizo's speeches and photographs of the Naga plebiscite, proudly displayed on the walls of one activists' living room.⁸⁷

Second, the significance of Phizo's papers illustrates the instrumental role the *missing* archive plays in defining the terms upon which Naga inter/national imaginaries are built. As Mbembe notes, far from stymying archival power, the destruction or displacement of archival collections 'only succeed[s] in inscribing the memory of the archive and its contents in a double register'. This 'prohibi[tion]' of 'the archive' transfigures it into a site of

⁷¹ NVHRG (2000), 'Rainbow Relief Medical Foundation', BOD/Astor/MSS.15363/260.

⁷² Jahansher Firoze, 'Naga Rights Campaigner Deported', *The Telegraph [India]*, 7 August 2004; Ian MacKinnon, 'An English Burglar Starves for Nagaland', *The Independent*, 21 March 1993.

⁷³ For instance, see 'FAKE NAGA VIGIL', NSCN Online, <https://nscn.livejournal.com/313829.html>, last accessed 1 February 2024.

⁷⁴ 'David Ward "Distorting the Facts" – NSCN (IM)', *The Morung Express*, 26 June 2007.

⁷⁵ 'Naga Vigil Cautions NSCN', *The Morung Express*, 17 May 2006. Also see 'Naga Vigil Questions UK Parliamentarian', *The Morung Express*, 19 June 2007.

⁷⁶ 'NVHRG to Hand Over Archival Docs to Eastern Nagas', *Nagaland Post*, 25 October 2015.

⁷⁷ 'Correspondence with and regarding David Ward, and papers of NVHRG. 1993–2001' BOD/Astor/MSS.15363/260.

⁷⁸ NVHRG (1999) 'The Establishment of a Naga Library', BOD/Astor/MSS.15363/260.

⁷⁹ Letter from David Ward to David Astor, 8 April 1999. BOD/Astor/MSS.15363/260.

⁸⁰ 'Library', BOD/Astor/MSS.15363/260.

⁸¹ 'Library', BOD/Astor/MSS.15363/260.

⁸² 'Library', BOD/Astor/MSS.15363/260.

⁸³ 'Naga Vigil Disbands; David Ward Resigns', *The Morung Express*, 23 August 2007.

⁸⁴ 'Naga Vigil on Naga National Archives', *The Morung Express*, 24 October 2015.

⁸⁵ Oral history interviews (hereafter 'OHI'), 15 August 2022 and 22 August 2022. Phizo's meticulous record keeping is also recounted in Jelle Wouters, 'Difficult Decolonization: Debates, Divisions, and Deaths Within the Naga Uprising 1944–1963', *Journal of North East Indian Studies* 9 (2019) 1–28, p. 16.

⁸⁶ OHI, 22 August 2022.

⁸⁷ Fieldnotes 22 August 2022.

'fantasy' – 'a space for all manner of ... additional content' – and a 'haunting spectre' for the state which contains within it the 'authority of a future judgement'.⁸⁸ In reflecting on the potential contents of Phizo's missing archive, it is thus not my intention to practice 'empirical positivism' and reduce the importance of Phizo's papers by suggesting that a more accurate account of the Naga struggle could be told, if only the full range of sources were available.⁸⁹ Instead, despite (and, indeed, because of) their absence, Phizo's papers remain an important political resource for contemporary Naga nationalists. The meaning which activists ascribed to these papers must be understood against the role that English-language print media has long played in fashioning the Nagas' political subjectivity. As described in section 3, Naga self-determination claims have long been litigated and legitimated with reference to a series of canonical documents. Thus, in a context where there is a preoccupation with archival legitimacy, Naga activists believed that the documents in Phizo's collection might hold the key to contemporary Naga international advocacy – if only they could be located.⁹⁰

Importantly, for several of those I interviewed, the archive did not offer a contingent or hypothetical benefit to the Nagas struggle. Instead, the very existence of Phizo's papers – as a site of speculation – supported current arguments for contemporary Naga political claims – even though their contents remain unknown. In interviews Naga activists mused on the riches Phizo's papers might offer up. One Naga activist who had known Phizo described how:

'Phizo had very clear vision for the state. He was very clear that as a nation we will be a nation among nations, we will have a foreign policy, an economic policy. He worked out that we could produce this much food in this many square miles, that we could feed this many families, that we could produce this much oil.'⁹¹

These 'detailed and specific' written plans – the activist suggested – were 'now with David Ward' along 'with all Phizo's documents, articles, and books'. However, should the papers be made public, the activist argued, they would certainly demonstrate how 'our small [Naga] nation could survive'. While for Phizo claims to Naga self-sufficiency were used to buttress calls for statehood, the activist argued that today the missing documents would support ongoing calls for Naga Indigenous self-determination based on a Naga 'economic and political system built along village lines'. Other interviewees speculated that the archive would provide treaties between Naga tribal leaders, or portions of the Naga plebiscite, which it was claimed would support Phizo's assertion of widespread public support for Naga statehood.⁹² In so doing, the missing archive was figured as the basis for Naga reconciliation – by demonstrating historical Naga unity, the documents would provide a ground for building a shared future. Thus, to paraphrase Milligan, interest in Phizo's papers demonstrates how the archive itself is 'just as potent a political tool' to the development and maintenance of Naga nationalist imaginaries 'as its contents'.⁹³ Phizo's papers are thus a site of speculative worldmaking, in which the archive's *imagined* contents are a driving force for contemporary action.

Third, and relatedly, disputes concerning stewardship of Phizo's papers reveal the role of archives in how political legitimacy and

international recognition are imagined and constituted in the Naga case. Despite their absence, Phizo's papers have become entangled in the broader power relations underpinning expressions of Naga nationalism and its international articulations. Indeed, Ward's possession of and vision for the future of Phizo's collection reflects tensions around who can access and draw from the Naga nationalist archive. Instructive in understanding this case is scholarship (detailed in section two) concerning 'displaced' colonial archives. Scholars have detailed how, before, during, and after administrative decolonization, leaders of newly independent states have sought control of colonial archives from their former colonisers to buttress claims to legitimate political authority.⁹⁴ Phizo's papers also speak to the nature of the relationship between the physical control of archives and claims to legitimate authority – but not between two nation-states.

Instead, Phizo's archive presents a dual complexity: the person in possession of the archive is not a former colonial power, but neither are the groups vying to be its keepers recognised as state actors. Thus, if – as Shepard argues – the production of history and control over archives are key to how political authority is constituted, then the transnational tensions over Phizo's papers raise two questions.⁹⁵ First, who should have physical control of this archive in a context where there are multiple groups claiming to be the Nagas' legitimate representatives? And second, who gets to decide that?

As the archive's self-appointed guardian, Ward evidently believes that this latter right of recognition is his own. Indeed, his public statements speak to his understanding that Phizo's archive confers legitimacy on its holder, as the bona fide representative of the Naga people, implying a direct continuity between the historical activities of the 'father' of Naga nationalism, and those who Ward sees as his political heirs (i.e. the NSCN–K). Ward has thus turned Phizo's archive into an international game of recognition: Ward refuses to recognise the NSCN-IM as the Naga people's legitimate representatives, so too the NSCN-IM in turn declines to acknowledge Ward as having a stake in determining the Nagas' geopolitical future, arguing in a 2007 public statement that it was 'immaterial' whether Ward's 'vigil' recognizes NSCN or not.⁹⁶ Of course, these debates concerning the relationship between self-determination, recognition, and archival control are redolent of public conversations around the repatriation of Indigenous cultural heritage. What makes this case distinct, however, is that the materials in question are neither cultural objects held in a foreign museum or archive, nor were they directly appropriated by a colonial power.

Ward's positionality vis-à-vis relations of coloniality is instead more ambiguous. The fourth way in which the archive shapes Naga claims-making is by mediating the relationship between Naga nationalists and their international supporters. Writing about the activities of Naga leaders in London in the 1960s, Lydia Walker describes the 'mutual, yet unequal relations of dependence' which existed between Naga nationalist claimants and their Western advocates. Whilst advocacy offered claimants a form of 'pre-independence recognition', advocates typically assumed the right to speak on behalf of those communities for which they were advocating, while advocates' aims were often in tension with those for whom they spoke. By 'speaking for nationalists' instead of 'providing opportunities for nationalists to speak for themselves',

⁸⁸ Mbembe, 'Power', pp. 22–23.

⁸⁹ Shepard, 'Sovereignty', p. 874.

⁹⁰ OHI, 22 August 2022.

⁹¹ OHI, 21 August 2022.

⁹² OHI, 20 August 2022.

⁹³ Milligan, 'Publicité', pp. 21–22.

⁹⁴ Shepard, 'Sovereignty'.

⁹⁵ Shepard, 'Sovereignty'.

⁹⁶ David Ward "distorting the facts" – NSCN (IM)', *The Morung Express*, 26 June 2007. Also see: 'Naga Vigil on Naga National Archives', *The Morung Express*, 24 October 2015.

advocates thus often 'undermine[d] the causes they sought to empower', participating 'in imperial modes of power at the same time that they fought against them'.⁹⁷ Whilst Walker considers how these tensions impeded the Naga peace process in the 1960s, Ward's possession of Phizo's papers further points both toward the continued ambivalent role of non-Naga international advocates in furthering Naga self-determination, and how archival collections represent a strategic resource, through which Western advocates continue to maintain undue influence over nationalist claimants.

It is notable that Ward's public pronouncements concerning Phizo's papers invariably coincide with significant moments in Naga political life, allowing the NVHRG founder a means of intervening in Naga politics from afar. As the late Naga historian Kaka D. Iralu wrote in a public letter to Ward following the latter's refusal to return the papers to any 'Western Nagas':

'Are you- Mr David Ward thinking yourself to be the father of the Naga nation that you alone have the right to decide to give the Naga national documents only to your Eastern Naga sons? Is there such a thing in the scientific disciplines of genetics or anthropology where a Caucasian father can beget some Mongolian offspring and decide which of his Mongolian sons would be bequeathed the Mongolian history of the Nagas? Mr. David Ward, who are you thinking yourself to be? Do you think you are still some mighty former Colonial Master whose writ should still be obeyed by your subjects in the now modern Asia of the 21st century? ... Do not add salt to our already broken lives that have suffered for over half a century, reaping the treachery your forefathers inflicted upon our fathers and grand fathers'.⁹⁸

In leveraging Phizo's archives for personal political gain, Ward's actions thus represent a continuation of British colonial violence against the Nagas. Perhaps for Ward, Phizo's papers are made *even* more significant by the fact that he lacks any other clear link to the Naga cause. One cannot know. What is clear is that Phizo's archive has become a space both of ambitious national claims-making, but also of mundane personal identity politics.

In sum, by providing a generative lens for tracing broader Naga international histories, this case illustrates how archival – and specifically, missing archival – collections undergird efforts to imagine and realise alternative Naga geopolitical projects.⁹⁹ More broadly, missing archives are revealing of how the 'archive-as-institution' has political resonance – as a site of political contestation, creativity, and claims-making – even whilst the archive's content remains unknown. For Ward and for those seeking repatriation of Phizo's papers, the (missing) archive is a ground for worldmaking: a 'material' and 'imaginary' basis for realising competing Naga geopolitical futures.¹⁰⁰ This case is thus revealing of the remarkable strategic potential of archives in themselves for non-state actors, over and above the material they contain. Whilst Phizo's 'missing' archive is defined by its conspicuous inaccessibility, however, the collections of the next case study are characterised instead by their abundance.

Rehearsing Naga national futures: the Naga Archives and Research Centre (NARC)

The second example concerns an alternative Naga archiving project, presented here in contrast to Phizo's 'missing' papers. Whilst Phizo's archive speaks to the political potency of Naga collections for both Naga and non-Naga transnational activists, the NARC constitutes a 'bottom-up' archiving project, one which reveals the worldmaking potential of archives-as-institutions in fostering nationalist subjectivities and imaginaries amongst local Naga communities. Moreover, whereas the disappearance of Phizo's collection represents a denial of Naga self-determination, the NARC speaks to the enrolment of archival practices in the making of Naga anticipated futures.

Located in a peri-urban village south of Dimapur, NARC visitors arrive at a two-story family home before being greeted and quickly swept upstairs by the Reverend Dr Vetsotsü Kepfozü Nuh, the Naga Baptist minister, author, and archivist. Here are over 40,000 files documenting over eight decades of Naga history. Now in his nineties, Nuh began collecting documents concerning the Naga independence struggle in the 1950s after joining the NNC as a chaplain.¹⁰¹ As fighting between Indian and Naga forces escalated, he felt a need to preserve the material ephemera which sustained the Naga nationalist movement. These included memoranda, speeches, meeting minutes and – reflecting the movement's Baptist orientation – prophecies delivered by national or religious leaders regarding the Nagas' geopolitical future. During the most intensive period of violence, Nuh stored the documents in empty oil cans and buried them underground. When the cans began to rust, Nuh built several bamboo boxes, which he hid across the many caves which litter the Naga Hills.¹⁰² Archiving has been, for most of Nuh's life, a dangerous hobby: Nuh described to me how throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the possession of NNC materials would invariably lead to arrest, or even death, at the hands of Indian military forces.¹⁰³

Undeterred, Nuh persevered in his efforts to conserve the Nagas' nationalist past. Today, the wooden boxes have been replaced with metal filing cabinets; the caves by a series of spacious rooms in the upstairs of Nuh's home. There is no catalogue documenting Nuh's collection – instead, cabinets are labelled with peeling green stickers describing each drawer's contents (Fig. 1). As the collection's sole archivist, Nuh remains the arbiter of how the collection is organised and of those moments in Naga history to be preserved. The drawers move chronologically according to perceived turning points in Naga history, beginning with materials pertaining to 'Ancient Nagas', 'British India', the 'Naga National Council' and 'Arm [ed] Conflict Between India and Naga'. More recent materials document efforts to facilitate Naga national integration, alongside the 'Formation' and subsequent 'Division' of the NSCN. Finally, reflecting the entanglements between Christianity, print, and Naga nationalism (and Nuh's pre-eminence as a respected leader within the Baptist church), are drawers documenting Naga peace conferences held in Atlanta and Chiang-Mai, facilitated by Baptist leaders.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Walker, 'Decolonisation', p. 231, 263–264.

⁹⁸ Kaka D. Iralu, 'A Naga Response to Naga Vigil's Ultimatum', *The Morung Express*, 27 October 2015.

⁹⁹ Other nationalist leaders' materials have also been recently published, including Ahu Sakhrie, *The Vision of T. Sakhrie for a Naga Nation* (Kohima: Author, 2006); Abraham Lotha, *Wounded Tiger: The Papers of Khodao Yanthan* (Dimapur: Heritage Publishing House, 2017); and Zapuvisie Lhousa, *Strange Country: My Experience in Naga Nationalism* (Kohima: Author, 2015).

¹⁰⁰ Mbembe, 'Power', p. 21–22.

¹⁰¹ This discussion draws on conversations with Nuh during a NARC visit in August 2022.

¹⁰² Also see 'From wooden boxes to steel drawers to digital folders', *The Morung Express*, 28 July 2019.

¹⁰³ Nuh was briefly incarcerated as a 'political prisoner' in Imphal Central Jail for his involvement with the nationalist movement. V. K. Nuh, *My Native Country* (Guwahati and Delhi: Spectrum, 2002).

¹⁰⁴ Nuh was previously General Secretary of the Council of Naga Baptist Churches. See Arkotong Longkumer, 'The Alter-Politics of Rev. Nuh', in *Life and Works of V.K. Nuh* (Dimapur: Heritage Publishers, 2017).



Fig. 1. The NARC's steel filing cabinets (Photo: Author's own, 2022).

The tumultuous nature of the Nagas' postcolonial history emerges as much through the materiality of Nuh's collection as through its content. The fragile condition of early nationalist papers reflects the archive's mobile past and ongoing preservation difficulties. Upon opening any one of the NARC's twenty-five drawers, archive users are confronted with layers of paper dust, whilst the vulnerability of the materials to further damage compels the researcher to choose between using a fan in Dimapur's summer heat, or to sacrifice comfort to protect the documents from further damage. Historic risks associated with possessing nationalist material and the subsequent destruction of documents means that the archive is also notably partial, while many files have been replaced by facsimiles or typed copies. Adding to the intrigue regarding the contents of Phizo's missing archive, Nuh described how he was given copies of many of the NARC's oldest documents by Phizo himself prior to the NNC leader's death. For as long as Phizo's collection is inaccessible, these remain some of the closest things researchers and activists have to the originals.

Nevertheless, the NARC remains the largest repository of Naga nationalist history. To understand its significance to the realisation of diverse Naga political projects, it is instructive to compare Nuh's collection with the Nagaland State Archives (NSA) in Kohima. Whilst the NARC tells a rich history of the nationalist movement, visitors to the state archives would be forgiven for leaving unaware of the historic intensity of the Naga self-determination struggle.¹⁰⁵ Despite its large catalogue, that collection contains few materials pertaining to the nationalist movement. Such material is instead confined largely to police intelligence materials, including detailed profiles of NNC leaders, compiled in an effort to suppress the Naga resistance activities. This is perhaps unsurprising. Archival collections – particularly in postcolonial contexts – have long been mobilised to naturalise particular political and territorial configurations, while moves to centralise state records have often led to a silencing of regional histories.¹⁰⁶ Instead, the documents held at NSA are principally concerned with the formation and subsequent administration of Nagaland State in the years since its founding in 1963. There is, for instance, little material concerning Nagas living outside of these territorial bounds. Where records exist from prior to this date – for instance those pertaining to the colonial administration of the Naga Hills – these are invariably facsimiles of

originals held in state archives in Delhi, Assam, West Bengal, and Meghalaya which are inaccessible to many Nagas.

By contrast, Nuh's collection – which has been open by appointment to the public since 2015 – works against what he sees as the active erasure of Naga nationalist history by the Indian government and represents a self-conscious attempt to construct a Naga national past from the margins. Seeking to aid both participants in and scholars of the nationalist movement, in 2002 Nuh published *The Naga Chronicle*. This 637-page volume contains over 200 materials from the NARC's collection and claims to 'chronic[e] the historical process of the making of Naga Nationality'.¹⁰⁷ The volume's twenty-one sections largely mirror the labels used to classify the drawers which comprise Nuh's physical collection. For Nuh, this reconstruction of Naga history was a necessary element of sustaining the movement into the future. As he told a press conference in 2003: 'the truth [of the Nagas] cannot be crushed or trampled for ever'. As an 'embodiment of [Naga] culture', Nuh sees *The Chronicle* and the NARC as a means to preserve the 'pains that were and still are, love, hope and glorious dreams for the Nagas'.¹⁰⁸

The Chronicle and NARC speak to the widespread phenomenon within the nationalist movement discussed in section three, whereby the collation and publication of official memorandums, pamphlets, and speeches is consistently used to demonstrate the historical legitimacy of Naga claims to nationhood and self-determination. Open any nationalist publication – including *The Chronicle* – and invariably one is confronted with a narration of Naga history according to its documentary evidence.¹⁰⁹ This whistle-stop tour of the Nagas' past begins with the 'Memorandum to the Simon Commission', followed by the 'Nine-Points Agreement' (signed by the NNC and the Governor of Assam in 1947), the 'Declaration of Naga Independence' (issued to the UN by the NNC in the same year), the 'Naga Plebiscite Speech' (given by Phizo in 1951), the 'Yezhabo' (constitution) of an independent Nagaland (authored by the Federal Government of Nagaland in 1956) and the 'Shillong Accord' (signed between the NNC and India in 1971, but now widely disclaimed by many Nagas).

The significance of this history-via-documents in sustaining Naga nationalism is twofold. On the one hand, the NARC further speaks to the importance of English language print media to the fashioning of the Nagas' twentieth-century international political subjectivity.¹¹⁰ Naga nationalism has long been shaped by its internationalist dimensions. It is via engagement with putatively international actors and audiences, including the UN and Christian internationalist networks, that Naga actors have legitimated their claims to nationhood, self-determination, and Indigeneity.¹¹¹ Thus, unlike many postcolonial national archives, which erase the transnational circuits of production contained within their collections to naturalise the relationship between archive and nation, the international character of the NARC collection's is on full display.¹¹² Indeed, the NARC's walls are lined with photographs depicting Naga leaders on diplomatic and military missions in addition to draws documenting Naga international advocacy. The NARC is also home to more personal correspondence between Nuh and global supporters of the Naga struggle. An example of what Longkumer

¹⁰⁷ 'Preface' in *The Naga Chronicle*, ed. by V. K. Nuh and Wetsshokhrolo Lasuh (New Delhi: Regency Publications, 2016) [no pagination].

¹⁰⁸ 'New book to help historians researching Naga roots', *Times of India*, 30 March 2003.

¹⁰⁹ For instance: NNC, *The Naga National Rights and Movement* (Kohima: NNC, 1993).

¹¹⁰ Longkumer, 'Kingdom's'.

¹¹¹ Manby, 'Geographies of Naga (Inter)nationalism'.

¹¹² On the erasure of transnational connections within national archives, see Bal-lantyne, 'Peal'.

¹⁰⁵ These reflections draw from visits to the NSA in August 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Sahadeo, 'Without'.

describes as 'intimate archives', these letters speak to how, far from being confined to formal diplomatic spaces, Naga internationalism has also been articulated through more quotidian – but no less politically significant – moments of 'common sociality' between the Nagas and their international supporters.¹¹³

On the other hand, by preserving evidence of the numerous unrealised political projects which have defined the Indo-Naga conflict, the NARC speaks to the centrality of such documents in informing contemporary Naga national and international imaginaries. Nuh's collection contains, *inter alia*, visions of Naga society based on Naga ownership of land and resources authored by Phizo which inform contemporary imaginaries of a self-sufficient Naga society; the writings of former NNC Secretary T. Sakhrie (1923–1956), whose philosophy of non-violence has recently been invoked in aid of contemporary inter-tribal reconciliation; reports of the NNC's 1953 'Goodwill Mission to Assam', an event which has been followed by further Naga 'goodwill missions' to build peaceful relations between the Nagas and their regional neighbours; and a letter from the British Foreign Office to Naga nationalist leaders in the 1990s, which, while refusing to express any view on the Nagas' position, was presented to me by one interviewee as tacit evidence of HMG's recognition of the Naga claim.¹¹⁴ Other files include materials commemorating the Naga plebiscite, NSCN manifestos, numerous Indo-Naga peace initiatives, and theological mediations on Naga geopolitics.¹¹⁵

NARC files have informed submissions to the UN, international peace summits, and negotiations between Nagas and India.¹¹⁶ In recent years, Naga civil society bodies have argued that the Nagas' first documentary claim to self-determination – the Memorandum to the Simon Commission (1929) – anticipates and demonstrates the Nagas' eligibility to the right to collective Indigenous self-determination as enshrined in the UNDRIP. The same document has also been mobilised locally to imagine Naga futures 'without borders'.¹¹⁷ The struggle over the politics of alternative futures, argues Ali Razza, is also a struggle over memory.¹¹⁸ The NARC thus constitutes an attempt to preserve the memory of these unrealised futures not as evidence of the failure of Naga nationalism, but as

proof of the Nagas' ongoing success in scripting and sustaining their identity before both British and Indian coloniality.

By ordering, curating, and displaying documentary fragments of the Nagas' past, Nuh is thus involved in constructing a 'useable history' for the Nagas.¹¹⁹ As Mbembe argues, 'through archived documents, we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled ... to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end'.¹²⁰ The NARC and *The Chronicle* both begin with (secondary) materials pertaining to 'Ancient Naga' history, and, in doing so, narrate a timeless conception of the Nagas' past, one which commences in pre-history and – presumably – ends with collective Naga political emancipation. This teleological view of history is apparent from Nuh's own public statements – that the archive works to preserve and assert the 'truth' of the Nagas and their 'dreams' for the future.¹²¹ The NARC's worldmaking potential is thus located in its ability to refashion the relationship between past Naga political projects and present struggles.

There is thus an obvious congruence between the NARC and the construction of national repositories the world over, whereby practices of archival 'collation, classification, and cataloguing' serve to make 'powerful ideological statements about the kind of visions of the nation and its past that [archive] users should produce'.¹²² As political institutions, archives undergird claims to legitimate authority. In mirroring these efforts, the NARC harnesses the archive's power as an 'instituting imaginary'.¹²³ However, rather than reproducing the political contexts of its creation, Nuh's collection imagines an alternative Naga geopolitical settlement, one which, by asserting the inviolability of Naga nationhood, demonstrates the legitimacy of Naga self-determination claims. In this way, the NARC is less a neutral repository of Naga history, as it is a 'historical agent', a means of intervening in the past, present, and future of Naga politics.¹²⁴

Indeed, once a satisfactory agreement between the Nagas and the Government of India is reached – as he believes it will be – Nuh intends to donate his collection to the NSA, providing an institutional foundation for a long-term Naga political settlement. The NARC is thus an archive-in-waiting, a prefigurative means of rehearsing Naga collective political futures. Importantly, reflecting what McConnell describes as the 'ambiguous temporality of rehearsal' in which 'modes of future orientated temporalities' are articulated 'when a final performance is anticipated by not inevitable', Nuh did not circumscribe the outcomes of the Indo-Naga negotiations according to pre-conceived Naga political imaginaries – for instance, of Naga sovereign independence or based upon statehood within India.¹²⁵ Instead, the NARC anticipates the realisation of Naga national unity according to a vision of self-determination where the Nagas' shared future remains open.

This 'rehearsal' of Naga national futures is enabled by the NARC's architectural and symbolic space.¹²⁶ Upon entry, visitors are

¹¹³ Longkumer, 'Futures,' p. 110.

¹¹⁴ Phizo's imaginaries of Naga society are detailed in A.Z. Phizo (1951), Naga Voluntary Plebiscite Speech, 16 May 1951, NARC [Note, NARC documents do not have a catalogue number]; A.Z. Phizo, 'Nagaland: A Strange Country in Asia, 1946', in *Golden Jubilee Naga Independence 1947–1997 Souvenir*, ed. by NNC (2000), NARC. On Phizo's contemporary significance to Naga communities see: L. Kaiso, 'On the 21st Death Anniversary of A Z Phizo', *The Morung Express*, 30-April-2011; Zapuvisie Lhousa, 'A Z Phizo and our Free Nagas', *The Morung Express*, 25-January-2011. Sakhrie's writings are detailed in T. Sakhrie, 'Memorandum of the Case of the Naga people for self-determination and an appeal to H.M.G and the Government of India', 20-February 1947, NARC. On Sakhrie's contemporary significance to Naga communities see: Kepelhusie Terhūja and Atsolie Liegise, 'Clarification on T Sakhrie', *The Morung Express*, 2 September 2020. Details of the NNC's 'Goodwill Mission' are recorded in NNC (1996) 'Naga Goodwill Mission to Assam: Report, 1953', NARC. On further Naga goodwill mission see Charles Chaise, 'Nagas and Neighbours', *The Morung Express*, 31 August 2010. Naga correspondence with the FCO is detailed in Letter from F. L. Gristock, FCO to Rev. Merhupfu Kent, NNC 29 December 1995, NARC. This letter was also shown to me by a Naga interviewee and NNC member on 21 August 2022.

¹¹⁵ 'Speech by Mr Zhopra Vero, President, Regional Council, 16 May 1999', NARC; NSCN (1980), 'Free Nagaland Manifesto', NARC; Concerned Senior Citizens' Forum (2006), 'The Nagas Among the Nascent Nations', NARC; Michael Scott (1955), 'Bearings on the Future of Nagaland', NARC; W. Shapwon Keimi (2000), 'God's Hand upon Nagas and Nagaland', NARC.

¹¹⁶ For instance, on behalf of the NARC, Nuh prepared a submission to R.N. Ravi, the then interlocutor in the Indo-Naga Peace talks containing significant Naga documents from the period 1929–2017, NARC (2017), 'Naga Freedom Struggle: Political Document 1929–2017', NARC.

¹¹⁷ Loong, Manby, and McConnell, 'Self-determination', pp. 11–13.

¹¹⁸ Ali Razza, *Revolutionary Pasts: Communist Internationalism in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 254.

¹¹⁹ Also see Paul Griffin, 'Making useable pasts: Collaboration, labour and activism in the archive', *Area* (2018) 50 501–508.

¹²⁰ Mbembe, 'Power', p. 20.

¹²¹ 'New book', *Times of India*.

¹²² Ballantyne, 'Peal', p. 103.

¹²³ Mbembe, 'Power', p. 22.

¹²⁴ Anjali Arondekar, Ann Cvetkovich, Christina B. Hanhardt, Regina Kunzel, Tavia Nyong'o, Juana María Rodríguez, Susan Stryker, Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, Zeb Tortorici, 'Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion', *Radical History Review* 122 (2015) 211–231 (p. 214).

¹²⁵ Fiona McConnell in David Featherstone, *Rehearsing the state: the political practices of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile*. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 19 (2017) 142–148.

¹²⁶ Fiona McConnell, *Rehearsing*.



Fig. 2. A wall of the NARC lined with photographs of Naga nationalist leaders (Photo: Author's own, 2022).



Fig. 4. International flags in the NARC reading room (Photos: Author's own, 2022).



Fig. 3. The NARC reading room (Photo: Author's own, 2022).

greeted by wall-to-wall portraits of Naga political leaders (Fig. 2), hung alongside photographs of pivotal moments in Naga history and material ephemera of the nationalist movement, including stamps and maps. Hanging above the NARC's filing cabinets are quotes from Phizo, Gandhi, David Ben Gurion, and the Old Testament, all directly endorsing the Naga claim or affirming the rights of all peoples and nations to a homeland. Next door, the NARC's spacious reading room is decked out with international flags, most prominently amongst them, the blue and rainbow Naga nationalist standard (Figs. 3 and 4). By enabling 'particular discursive fields and investing some arguments with particular legitimacy', this display conditions the visions of Naga nationhood that archive users should produce – namely that the NARC provides ample evidence of the Naga self-determination claim.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Ballantyne, 'Peal', p. 103.

The notion of rehearsal also speaks, however, to how performance and improvised and everyday practices also undergird the NARC's production of imaginative geographies of Naga nationhood.¹²⁸ Here, the multiscalarity of archives-as-worldmaking-institutions is evident: the 'big space' geopolitical imaginaries advanced through Nuh's collection are reproduced not only through the NARC's layout, but via the embodied experience of archive visitors. Before accessing the NARC's collections, archive users – who, according to its guestbook are predominantly Naga, Indian, and international researchers studying Naga history – are given a building tour, where Nuh narrates the Nagas' turbulent history and provides a potted biography of the Naga politicians whose pictures adorn the walls. Such encounters not only provide a way of 'making sense' of the NARC's materials, but also offer space for Nuh to foster a national subjectivity amongst Naga researchers and advocate for Naga self-determination to international visitors.¹²⁹ Part archive, part museum, and part diplomatic mission, the NARC thus constitutes an archival 'contact zone'.¹³⁰ More than a zone of convergence between past and present, however, Nuh's collection provides a space where Naga futures – both past and present – are materialised.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how archival practices underpin Naga claims to self-determination and political legitimacy. I have interrogated how conceptualising 'archives-as-institutions' offers an instructive lens for understanding how non-state actors mobilise archives as legitimacy-claiming instruments.

The cases above thus focus attention on four aspects of this 'institutional' power of archives for non-state communities. First, echoing Mbembe, both cases speak to how the status and political potency of 'the archive' for non-state communities is both material and imaginary.¹³¹ As to the former, both archives are seen to offer 'proof' of the validity of Naga internationalist imaginaries. While the NARC's abundance evidences the accumulated nature of the

¹²⁸ Alex Jeffrey, *The Improvised State: Sovereignty, Performance and Agency in Dayton Bosnia* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

¹²⁹ Ashmore, Craggs, and Neate, 'Working-with', p. 89.

¹³⁰ Sahadeo, 'Without', p. 54.

¹³¹ Mbembe, 'Power', p. 20-21.

Nagas' 'unique history', it is the material fact of Phizo's archive that sustains Naga claims – despite the unknowability of its contents. As to the latter, Phizo's archive is implicated in how political legitimacy and international recognition are imagined and constituted in the Naga case. For Ward, stewardship of the documents offers the possibility to legitimate the NSCN–K's claim to authority by scripting an implied relationship between the organisation's leadership and the father of Naga nationalism. For contemporary Naga activists, this purported act of international recognition merely represents the latest denial of Naga self-determination by non-Nagas. Conversely Nuh's collection reveals how political actors have imagined Naga national futures at critical junctures in history, while the NARC's micro-geography produces imaginative geographies of Naga nationhood according to a coherent progression of Naga history.

Second, both cases speak to how, in addition to shaping the relationship between present and past political struggles, the archive is a site of aspiration, futurity and worldmaking for non-state actors. The NARC anticipates Naga collective futures whereby Nuh's collection is elevated to the status of a recognised national archive upon the resolution of the Indo-Naga negotiations. Similarly, while Ward's public statements imply a belief that Phizo's collection will undergird a NSCN–K-led Naga future, early NVHRG proposals understood 'The Naga Library' as akin to a Naga national archive-in-exile, to be repatriated following Naga inter-factional reconciliation as the basis of a Naga collective future. Even in their absence, Phizo's papers continue are a site of speculation for Naga national imaginaries, and a ground for figuring alternative Naga political futures.

Third, while the 'instituting imaginary' of the national archive relies on an organising logic that obscures transnational histories and circuits of documentary production, both putatively 'national' Naga collections are foci of internationalist activity. On the one hand, the NARC reproduces imaginative geographies of Naga nationhood which partly derive their legitimacy from the Nagas' long-standing engagement with internationalist networks. On the other hand, Phizo's collection has 'become' international, both literally – through the circuitous journey it has taken since leaving Phizo's home – and discursively – through the international tensions over its stewardship since the Phizo's death. Juxtaposing these cases foregrounds how 'archives-as-institutions' represent strategic resources for Naga internationalist claimants, but also for those seeking to foreclose the outcome of Naga self-determination. Archival production thus offers a lens to understand the entangled and asymmetrical power relations that enable and constrain expressions of *internationalism* by non-state communities.

Finally, this discussion points to how documentary sources continue to condition those stories which can be told concerning the Nagas' collective past and future. Of course, archival materials are not the only sources undergirding Naga identity formation and claims making: orality is also central to the production of Naga history while socio-cultural practices and embodied performances inform claims to land and resources in a context where indigeneity is invisibilised by the Indian state.¹³² Nonetheless, many Naga political and civil society actors remain gripped by 'archive fever' whereby 'the logics and practices of "the archive"' – 'interpretation, classification, identity, evidence, and – authenticity' – condition the "rules of credibility" for Naga political and historical discourse.¹³³ As a source of legitimacy for Naga political claims, the archive's institutional power is thus located in its ability to imbue particular documentary collections with the political and epistemic authority to produce history, but also in its imagined and material status as a paradigmatic state institution. Naga actors and their supporters harness the relationship between the archive and the state to gain the legitimacy necessary to intervene in the inter-state system and claim self-determination, even while largely eschewing aspirations toward statehood.¹³⁴ Thus, if legitimacy is to be understood as a 'mode of statecraft' rather than an 'achieved status', then the cases above point toward the centrality of archival practices to how non-state communities engage carve out space as recognised geopolitical actors and demonstrate the validity of various geopolitical projects to multi-scalar audiences.¹³⁵

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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¹³² Iralu and Kikon, 'Pedagogies'.

¹³³ On 'archive fever', see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). On the 'logics and practices' of the archive, see Craig Robertson, 'Mechanisms of Exclusion: Historicizing the Archive and the Passport', in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fiction and the Writing of History*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) pp. 68–86 (p. 70). On the 'rules of credibility' for historical discourse see Trouillot, *Silencing*, p. 52. Also see Yarimar Bonilla, 'THE PAST IS MADE BY WALKING: Labor Activism and Historical Production in Postcolonial Guadeloupe', *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (2011) 313–319 p. 323.

¹³⁴ On how non-state actors practice 'statecraft' while nevertheless eschewing aspirations towards statehood see Fiona McConnell, Terri Moreau, and Jason Dittmer, 'Mimicking state diplomacy: The legitimizing strategies of unofficial diplomacies', *Geoforum* 43 (2012) 804–814.

¹³⁵ McConnell, *Rehearsing*, p. 114