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## **The fictional quality of sovereignty**

“Why not wrench the definition of politics, why not let them [politicians] be corrupt and we be the political? Why let them get away with the idea of being political?”

(Women who are active in the peace processes in Kashmir, Nagaland-Manipur and Sri Lanka while discussing the question why women hesitate to regard themselves as political.)

Sovereignty was once a fiction, a story written in the times of civil war in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in central Europe with the aim to provide a convincing concept for order and security, a solution to the questions of how the political can be organized.

When highlighting here the fictional quality of sovereignty I refer foremost to R.B.J.

Walker. He wrote: “Sovereignty might well be classified among the mythical beasts.”

(Walker 1996:17) Accordingly he describes sovereignty as an illusion, a social convention, an arbitrary solution to the question of order and security. A solution “that both expresses and constitutes the greatest powers of human creativity and violence.” (Walker 1996:18) Thomas Hobbes was the main story writer of what is “mistaken for a naturally given and everpresent thing.” (Walker 1996:16)

In the first part of the paper I demonstrate how Hobbes constituted not only the nominalist solution for a political space by defining a certain understanding of „nature“ and of „man“ from where he deduced all further answers to the „security dilemma“. Hobbes constituted at the same time a specific knowledge system as the only universal valid system and thereby protected his solution for order as unquestionable and a rationalist conclusion deduced from the observed facts. Karena Shaw’s work beside of R.B.J. Walker is most important for the grounding of this part of my paper.

The critique of the dominance and violence of the universalist western knowledge system in general and its connection to the concept of sovereignty in particular is following. Feminist and decolonial/subaltern studies perspectives are resumed. In particular I describe the concept of Worldism by Lily Ling and Anna Agathangelou as a possible alternative following from these critiques.

In the last, but more extensive part I introduce a case study on interventions by the women’s organizations into the Indo-Naga conflict (Northeast India). I try to demonstrate how knowledge of the views and struggles of the marginalized and especially of indigenous peoples’ struggles opens up the search for new/more possibilities of the political. This is not

to be understood as an adaptation to processes of capitalist globalization but as a questioning of the very foundations of what is generally understood as “the political” and as “legitimate authority”. These notions are usually deeply grounded in the sovereignty thinking with its need for inclusions and exclusions. The Naga women’s practices lay beyond these ideas and were extremely effective for the implementation and maintenance of the peace process. This part relies strongly on the work of Rita Manchanda, Dolly Kikon, Paula Banerjee and on interviews with representatives from the Naga women’s organizations: Khesheli Chishi, Yomah Konyak, Yangerla Ao beside others.

To decolonize the dominant epistemology with western universality claims as transported e.g. with the sovereignty discourse is not an easy task. The difficulties of changing our scholarly practices and to value the knowledge of (the world majority of) the marginalized are briefly described and according questions are thrown up at the end of this paper.

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It is an intention of this work to disturb taken-for-granted certainties and thereby not to simply replace an old concept by a new one. I want to motivate to venture on uncertainties and to assume the connected insecurities as something positive. Concepts are here understood as a struggle for objectification, as attempts to hide the permanent process of doing. (Holloway 2002) The acting subjects are extricated from the process to re-/produce concepts/ institutions as e.g. money, state, sovereignty. When the agents/we are thought as permanently constituting all concepts, when the producers of knowledge and the „objective facts“ of reality are reconnected again, then we understand the contingency and creative potential behind the concepts. The flexibility and richness of possibilities e.g. how political space, order, security could be constituted might cause undesired but positive disequilibrium. It invites for political debates at places where depolitization stabilizes relations of exclusion and violence as natural.

Conflict reconciliation is still dominated by a fixed concept of sovereignty, a demarcation of inclusion and exclusion and the reinstallation of a monopoly of force. “The state-community struggle (...) is bound to produce results in favour of either the state or the community (...). The prospects of peace according to this discourse are decided in a game that is admittedly of zero-sum character.” (Banerjee/ Das 2001: 4) Conflict resolution is not a matter of debate according to the local situation, agents and conditions but e.g. the norm for it at the UN is defined as reestablishment of the monopoly of force of the state. (Heupel 2006) Sovereignty understood as the precondition for political life is taken as natural or at least indispensable.

On the same ground argues Michael Walzer with reference to so called “failed states” that there is no other option of solution after the emergence of “the war of all against all” than military intervention with the aim to reestablish the state power and the rule of law. (Walzer 2005) The same argument is enforced with the UN R2P-concept “Responsibility to Protect” from 2005.

This means there is the answer ready for the desired endcondition of conflict resolution and military intervention for the establishing of order: enforcement of law by the state authority, (internal) sovereignty with the monopoly of power. Even though (external) sovereignty is violated in a first step in the case of an outside intervention this does not at all question this principle of order in general. In the contrary: It is the leading goal and self-evident. Sovereignty as the precondition for order as defined by Hobbes in the 16<sup>th</sup> century is unquestioned.

#### Hobbes' Leviathan

Hobbes did not invent modern sovereignty instead he saw the possibility of its emergence and he thereupon provided a logic and a justification for sovereignty. (Shaw 2004: 19) He is till today widely accepted as one of the fathers of political sciences because especially his writing „The Leviathan“ stands for the grounding of the assumed only possible framing of the political space: state sovereignty, the implementation of an ultimative authority in a demarcated territory occupied by a homogenous community. Walker stresses that sovereignty was an answer to the question of the possibility of political life under specific historical and local conditions from which only the answer aspect remains and the question aspect completely disappeared. (Walker 1993) It is this answer aspect that was reproduced and essentialized in political theories.

Many textbooks of political sciences or international relations start with the security dilemma as it was written by Hobbes. It is usually not presented as part of the production of the modern form of the political (versus anarchy and tendency to conflict in the system of states) but as a description of the general grounding conditions.

In fact the discipline and practice of International Relations has produced itself by the exclusion of other options of the political. Other forms of social organizing were not acknowledged as sovereign but the doctrin of “terra nullius” authorized colonialism and imperialism. Dominant actors of international relations as e.g. the United States, Canada and

Australia were established on this basis. The displacement of indigenous peoples enabled the exploitation of their resources and thereby the erection of European-American hegemony in the international system. The exclusion of indigenous communities, their histories and struggles against colonization are constitutive for International Relations – till today.

[I]ndigenous political movements lie outside of the sphere of interest of international relations; they inhabit the realm of domestic politics or anthropology. This position is enabled by the discipline's self-definition, in turn grounded in the acceptance and naturalisation of sovereignty as establishing the preconditions for thinking about international relations. (Shaw 2002b: 61)

The debate on sovereignty of the last one or two decades does not ask the deep grounding questions that Hobbes worked through. Ideas of divided sovereignty, interdependence or new terms e.g. "sovereignty-free collectivities (non-state actors) [who] compete with sovereignty-bound (state) actors" (Mills 1998: 36) or "partially and multiply sovereign organizations" (ibid: 52) are mere an adaptation of the concept to the processes of globalization resulting in the concepts conservation. We find a more complex consideration of sovereignty today but the ontological and epistemological foundations are not touched. But how could Hobbes' story become so convincing and how did he give sovereignty the status of a permanently lasting concept, as the only solution for the possibility of the political? Why are the questions behind the concept forgotten and not considered relevant to be asked again?

Hobbes created an architecture for sovereignty that set definitions of what „man“ is like and of „nature“ and started his story for the justification of sovereignty with these. In the first ten chapters of the Leviathan he built this ontological grounding and created a modern subject. This modern subject is not able to live peacefully with other subjects in the absence of an overarching authority. "Fear, for Hobbes, is „natural“. It inheres in the individual (,the passions“) as well the environment (,State of Nature“) before the establishment of law and order by the state (,Leviathan“)." (Agathangelou/Ling 2006: 3) References to Hobbes' Leviathan usually start at chapter 11 where the security dilemma is described. But at this point of the story the hard work was already accomplished: a nominalist basis that pretends the security dilemma of "war of all men against all men" is an objective fact. (Shaw 2004) Hobbes described – better produced – men (humans) as having all similar needs and desires which in the space of equality that they live in lead to aggression and mugging, to chaos and murder. The inability to secure the given needs and desires is causing constant conflict. Because of the resulting misery and because in addition man is described/produced as able of

logical thinking we submit to a common authority, we produce sovereignty. This is presented as the only solution for (the produced) “man” to guarantee stability and pursue the desires. Because he presented his description “Of Man” (title of the first section of the Leviathan) as the observed facts he made his production of the modern subject look natural and not political. But it means that the many other possibilities of individual and collective life in the world are excluded. (Shaw 2004)

Hobbes himself was aware of the contingent character of his solution. But living in the times of civil war that were accompanied by violence, chaos and insecurities and therefore driven by his crucial aim to assure stability and order Hobbes wanted to protect his solution against dispute and uncertainty. For that reason Hobbes combined his solution for political life with a certain idea of the knowledge system that was universalized.

For Hobbes, the production of knowledge was a crucial part of the production and maintenance of sovereignty, and thus order. The very form and model of knowledge production effected and reinforced sovereignty. (Shaw 2004: 16)

From today's perspective the difficulty of this manoeuvre to stabilize the principle of state sovereignty might not be obvious but “[t]hough it continues to inform our familiar world of common sense and political realism, it was once bizarre and radical, even nonsense.” (Walker 1991: 450) Hobbes was the one of the modern political thinkers who devoted most “systematic attention to the puzzle of sovereignty” (Walker 1996:18). This thinking became overly familiar not only to our understanding of what politics is about but moreover to our understanding of valid knowledge.

Importantly, this entwined problem has to be understood not only or primarily in the immediate way that knowledge has political effects, but in relation to the role that knowledge has played in the very conditions of possibility of what we have understood to be ‘politics’; in the closures through which this understanding has been effected, and in the possibilities – and dangers – that arise when these closures are disrupted. (Shaw 2004: 19-20)

Hobbes developed a system for knowledge production that rests on exclusions and depoliticizations. The ontology must be accepted as the common basis, as the description of “observed”, objective facts, and thereon everything can be logically deduced within a set of conditions. This Hobbes called conditional knowledge. He took specific European experiences for defining the facts and thereby not only excluded the many other cosmologies and ways of living that exist in the world, in addition he excluded the ontological foundation that he produced from political consideration or negotiation and thereby depoliticises the

foundation of a common ontology that leads to the solution of sovereignty. "Sovereignty itself – the establishment of a common ontology – is not political for Hobbes. It is, rather, the precondition for the political. Whatever violences it may involve, sovereignty must be rendered natural and necessary rather than contingent." (Shaw 2004: 10) To be sure people condescend to a sovereign authority he combined it with a "scientific" authority. Resulting from the wish of all people to live in security and order they/we transfer authority to "science". "Sovereignty exists inasmuch as things make sense, as there is a basis upon which disputes can be arbitrated (science, objectivity)." (ibid: 12) Knowledge and sovereignty are interwoven. Hobbes produced a shared system of meaning for both.

### Transmodernity

Even so developed from a very particular local condition and experience in Europe from the perspective of a person interested in securing property and certain social hierarchies the resulting ideas of the modern political subject and state sovereignty were universalized and thereupon affected global practises. "The history of colonialism shows beyond doubt that sovereignty, for individuals and states, was a beautiful but ultimately violent myth." (Agathangelou/Ling 2005: 835) Sovereignty backed by a Eurocentric epistemology enabled colonialism and not only measures but also enforces development goals for so called developing countries or "failed states" till today because the rest of the world has to apply to the Western defined norms. The violence of these practises is grounded in the violence of the exclusion of other forms of knowing, of living, of organizing social and political communities. "The European paradigm of rational knowledge was not only elaborated in the context of, but as part of, a power structure that involved the European colonial domination over the rest of the world." (Quijano 2007: 174)

The need for a decolonization of the Western knowledge system is articulated today and according alternative theories arise. The critique of the Western epistemological dominance and its concealed violence developed within the struggles of the colonized and from postcolonial experiences of the marginalized. Scholars of postcolonial studies like Walter D. Mignolo and Enrique Dussel stress that we cannot locate modernity in the West and coloniality in the former colonies of "the South" but "modernity and coloniality are the two sides of the modern world system" (Mignolo 2000: 54) and "there is no modernity without coloniality" (ibid: 43). The term "transmodernity" is used to focus on the interactions and mutual constitution of the modern subjectivity and colonialism.

When reflecting on sovereignty or better on future possibilities of the political it is mandatory to listen to these postcolonial or decolonial scholars and other marginalized voices. We can also say that it is impossible not to reflect on sovereignty – with its global imprinting - when we debate on a different world future. Our worldviews and sovereignty are overly interwoven.

[T]o pretend that we can think of the future on grounds that somehow evade assumptions about sovereignty is to assume that we can somehow stand outside the cultural assumptions of Western modernity that give us our most basic understanding of what it means to be inside or outside a way of thinking or a way of life. (Walker 2002: 6)

Feminist theory and feminist activism offers an additional source of radical critique to the rational modern epistemology. Women's movements resisted to the violent exclusions of this solution to the problem of order as did/do other social movements e.g. the poor, slaves, ethnic minorities, children , the mad, the colonized. (Shaw 2004: 14) The definition of the space of the political was challenged. Feminist struggles stressed that not the inclusion of women and "women's issues" alone could be the aim but the transformation of the gendered character of the space itself; the constituting concepts and practises needed to be reshaped. The depolitization of the exclusion of the "non-rational", "non-sovereign", "immature" subjects was taken into the center of a politics of epistemology. Experiences of feminist practises can contribute valuable experiences to a decolonization process of epistemology:

Not only does the analysis of gender reveal much about how differences can be constituted and function as axes of power, but an analysis of feminist activism is now crucial to understand how institutional politics function at a variety of sites. (...) Perhaps the key insight of feminism (...) is that political institutions and practices – as constituted through discourses of sovereignty – are enabled by, dependent upon, and reproductive of axes of difference that constitute political authority, and that to contest that authority without challenging the constitution of axes of difference functions as only a very partial remedy. (Shaw 2002a: 242)

## Worldism

Anna Agathangelou and Lily Ling developed a new concept called Worldism. They integrate postcolonial and feminist critique of the epistemological and ontological foundations of theories of International Relations. The concept starts from the understanding that there cannot be one single theory that explains world politics. Instead Worldism tries to bring together multiple ontologies and epistemologies that people live with. Agathangelou and

Ling do not intend to integrate these to a new totality, but they developed a concept to analyse the interrelatedness and exchanges of the various ways of thinking, being and doing in the world. They intend dialogical analyses instead of the monological ones that we are familiar with. Worldism is based on some principles or “epistemological commitments” (Agathangelou/ Ling 2005: 4):

- **Trans-subjectivity:** One cannot operate in isolation from the other. Agents are interacting in institutionalized social structures of struggle with resulting abstract configurations (e.g. notions of the self), materiality (e.g. body) and social relations of production (e.g. capitalism). “[M]ultiple selves and others co-produce our world within a context of global asymmetries.” (Agathangelou/ Ling 2005: 2)
- **Agency:** The process of creating, building, and articulating selves in reverberations with others.
- **Critical syncretic engagement:** Interstitial compromises compelled by conflict and contestation across multiple worlds/ alternative understandings.
- **Accountability:** Grounded in the Self’s inescapability from the Other. “Worldism holds accountable (...) and asks: ‘What are we thinking/doing/being, at whose cost, and why?’ We are moved to interrogate the meaning and purpose of power.” (Agathangelou/ Ling 2004: 44)

Whereas Orientalism identified a particular social construction of Western Self vis-à-vis its Oriental Other and postcolonial IR further theorized about their structural and cultural intimacies, Worldism aims to understand and transform the unequal social relations of colonial capitalist-patriarchy as it is manifested not just in ‘the West’ or ‘the world economy’ but in multiple worlds, economies, and subjectivities. Girded by Marxist historical materialism, Worldism takes us beyond a ‘post’ derivation to come into its own. (Agathangelou/ Ling 2004: 34)

How does scholarly work look different if based on Worldism?

- Multiple sources of knowledge and their worlds are recognized and accepted.
- Open-ended questions are posed, not answers/ declarative statements.
- The scholar is embedded or implicated and not neutral and distant.
- Knowledge production is a dialogical process in a context of asymmetries and power relations. “How can we understand each other, especially our relationally produced, differentially experienced positions, locations, interests, and privileges?” (Agathangelou/Ling 2004: 42)

- „Worldism takes seriously Other worlds by engaging with their crises and contradictions, not to convert or conquer them into another version of the Self.” (Agathangelou/Ling 2004: 42)
- “Worldism does not simply talk about including Others but directly integrates non-Western epistemologies and ontologies into theory-building and political activism. (...) When the Other voices itself, neither Self nor Other, theory-building nor practical politics, can remain the same.” (ibid: 45)
- „Worldism ‚vivifies‘ the perspectives, interests, and actions of those who are usually marginalized, exploited, or exiled by the House of IR.” (ibid: 45)

If we try to apply this concept to a practical research process as I did in 2006 with a fieldwork on the Indo-Naga peace process (Northeast India) many difficulties arise but more important, ideas and practices become visible that question other approaches to peace and conflict research and that lay beyond the generalized and naturalized notion of the political.

Here it should be sufficient to highlight only some of the features that make the Naga (indigenous) women’s activism different in their notion of the political. It is to make curious for more knowledge from the margins. For an urge for knowledge of the hitherto excluded cosmologies, practices, ideas in itself, in a dialog in partnership, with exchange and learning and not to integrate, paternalize or „develop“. The process to gain understanding in this dialog trans-cultures and trans-experiences-of-conflict is loaded with difficulties. It is necessary to attempt to leave the familiar explanations for political acting behind and open the mind to understand some more of the different practices. A guiding hint for this search I found at Karena Shaw when she asks: "What if, according to sovereignty discourse, the 'nonpolitics' of what happens prior to relations of governance (...) is really where the action is these days?" (Shaw 2002a: 231) This does not mean that there is an authentic wisdom from the indigenous to find or some concepts from a thinking completely outside of the sovereignty discourse or non-influenced by it.

#### The Naga women's authority

The fieldwork that I conducted focused on the Naga women’s organizations and therewith left behind a more typical framework of analysis comprising the armed protagonists and the main political actors with institutional background or officially acknowledged positions, maybe accompanied by some view on (war) economies. The Naga women's engagement lays outside of the recognized field of the political: Non of them is elected into any assembly of

the central Indian government nor of Nagaland (federal) state. Neither they are represented in the traditional indigenous organizing structures of village councils and Naga Hoho. After the UN Security Council resolution 1325 of October 2000 “on women, peace and security” (S/RES/1325) a number of publications followed of studies that intended to integrate women’s peace activism into conflict resolution procedures. Beside others the United Nations Development Fund for Women demanded the integration of women from social movements into the existing political structures and the formal bodies of conflict settlement. (Report of the Secretary-General on women, peace and security of 16 October 2002, S/2002/1154) Also studies on the Naga women’s peace activism aimed towards the integration of the Naga women into existing structures as documented in a report of a forum on “Women’s Interventions for Peace in Northeast”:

[W]hile the informal role of women as initiators of peace was recognized their role in formal peace process was still to become a reality. (...) The panel agreed that women in Northeast should deliberate over this dichotomy and try to exert their agency to create a space for themselves within the formal structures of political decision-making. (Banerjee/ Das 2001: 38)

This integration of the women into the existing forms of the political was not the orientation of my research for the above stated reasons. Instead the explicit goal was to understand the different form of doing politics and to create an influential authority for interventions into the conflict and for the peace process. The constitution of authority for the organizing of individual and social needs, for security and survival and for the transformation of the violent conditions by negotiating the ceasefire and the maintenance, popularization and democratization of the attained peace process was effectively resolved by the Naga women. What kind of authority is this that seems to answer the same questions that Hobbes had to deal with but that does not meet with existing forms grounded in sovereignty?

The Naga Mothers Association (NMA) unites women from all Naga tribes and most tribal women's organizations of Nagaland state. (The Naga Women's Union Manipur is the equivalent for the women of the Naga tribes residing in Manipur (federal) state.) Rita Manchanda summaries the Naga women's organization's peace activism as follows:

- Negotiating with state and non state armed actors to protect their communities.
- Mobilizing for peace and reconciliation between warring factions of the Naga underground groups.
- Sustaining the ceasefire and peace process and therefor bridging inter community divides.
- Mobilizing mass support and democratizing the peace process. (Manchanda 2004)

The power of the Naga women to have a transformative impact on (problems of) the Naga society is as stated above neither constituted and legitimated by the state system of political representation nor by the traditional system of Naga political organizing. The women's way of intervention developed independently from the given (limited) space for civil societal organizing and independently from the influential armed underground groups with the power of their weapons, each of the last deeply bounded within their respective (tribal) part of the Naga society.

Both, the institutions of the Indian state and the armed underground groups of Naga national struggle, are relying on the frame of the sovereignty discourse. They share a common language/ system of meaning grounded in the principle of sovereignty that enables the diplomatic talks for a peace agreement that are continued over several years now. But how did/does the Naga Mothers Association constitute and legitimate an authority for their societal interventions?

In the traditional society, women were not allowed to address or stand before the village crowd." (Zehol/ Zehol 1998) "[A]s our practices were, traditional practices, women were the backbone behind the men. But they never came out in the village platform and sit in the council. That was not our practice. (Yangerla Ao, member of the Ao Women Organization, interview 15<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2006)

Starting off from a position where women were not allowed to talk in public meetings or only to transmit important messages their authority grew to a point that today important decisions of Naga societal life and of conflict management are almost impossible to finalize without the embracement of the women's organizations.

The women's peace campaign 'Shed No More Blood' was started in 1994. The women were accepted by all fractions of underground groups (which fight each other in violent clashes), by the police and military forces and finally by the Government of India when they negotiated the ceasefire (in place since 1997).

We started moving around, meeting with different people, both the undergrounds and overgrounds, different factions. And we also went and met the security forces. (...) just because we are women it doesn't mean we should just keep quite and see our children die in front of our eyes. For no fault of theirs. (...) And with this ceasefire we were able to go to eastern Nagaland and met our NSCN (K) chairman. That's in Burma. It took us six days to head for by walking. Then we were also able to go to Bangkok with our leaders who were there. And back home we were also able to meet our NSCN leaders, telling them, everybody what we want. And also telling them not to kill each other. Because our goal and our vision in same. (...) so

we should not kill each other. That was clearly of our message to them. (Khesheli Z. Chishi, president NMA, interview 12<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2006)

Many interventions for peace were joint actions with other Naga social organizations e.g. the Naga Hoho (the apex body of representatives from all Naga tribes and clans; an all male structure), the Naga Students Federation, the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights and the churches. But "no intervention, from the local to the highest level, is felt adequate or complete without the women also being present as a part of representative decision making of the Naga peoples." (Manchanda 2004: 53) The NMA and the tribal women's organizations never forwarded the demand for political integration. In the contrary, they consider the demanding of participation an aggressive behaviour that they reject and also estimate of little chance for bringing success. Instead they transformed the women's position with actions that are deeply rooted in their cultural role and everyday life experiences.

Answering to the question if they are political a Naga activist said: "No! We are just mothers, we are just women doing what we normally do." (quoted at Manchanda/Sijapati/Gang 2002: 27) The women developed a pragmatic, effective way to rely on the traditional women's role and the high authority of the mother and simultaneously transformed cultural practices. E.g. the Angami Naga tribe customary laws were changed in favour of inheritance rights for girls, women earn degrees in higher education and enter all professional areas including technical fields or the police, women are acting in the public and intervene into existing societal conflicts.

The acknowledgement of the women's influence happened through activities that are usually labeled social work. The women recognized the consequences of the several decades enduring violent conflict with all its destructive effects in the Naga society. The first step was only a small stretch of the usual role in the villages. In the absence of male family members and under constant attacks and repression by the Indian military they organized the survival of the families and village community including orphans and the elderly. In a next step they had to leave the village space to investigate about family members or neighbours who were carried away from the villages after raids. The women negotiated with the administration, the military, at prisons etc. Nevertheless, the first campaigns that were influential were not on the issues of repression. In the 80ies when most tribal women's organizations were founded they took up the issue of alcoholism, addiction to heroin and the spread of HIV/Aids that mostly effected the youth. The women analysed the war conditions behind these problems, especially as there was no solution visible, a bad school system, high unemployment and therefore no perspective for the young people. Notwithstanding they

organized to build a professional help system and awareness on HIV; in addition they lobbied to make alcohol less available by demanding and reaching a ban of liquor for Nagaland.

[W]ho is infected with HIV/Aids, they were literally outcast by the society, even by the family members. And because they were not taken care, they were not in love and concerned, they became more frustrated and that is how then again it started spreading. So we felt, we need to have a place where these Aids persons can be taken care. (Khesheli Chishi, interview 12<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2006)

The NMA were the first who started a drug rehabilitation center in Nagaland, they established anonymous HIV testing and services for Aids patients including a hospice. Through these and other social (work) campaigns the Naga Mothers were more and more respected. "The NMA took up health issues, social issues of de-addiction, etc., while addressing political problems. Their social functions added to their legitimacy which they used for political purposes." (Banerjee 2001: 173) I do not agree with this interpretation that clearly divides between the 'social issues' and the 'political problems' and that comes from a Indian scholar who also suggested the integration of the Naga women activists into formal politics as I quoted above. But it shows how the Naga women built legitimacy for interventions in fields that are not considered as the traditional women's space of acting.

When the number of unidentified bodies who were left in the streets after violent clashes between the factions of underground groups increased the women gained an additional responsibility – somewhere between 'social work' and 'peace mediation'. Not knowing who they were, each dead person was buried with dignity in the traditional form covered with a Naga shawl.

Although there was no ceasefire and it was a bit difficult to move around also yet we didn't give up. Because when lots of killings took place and when unidentified bodies were found, even police started contacting the Mothers. Shouldn't be the work of the law enforcement agencies but they started contacting us. When the bodies were kept at the police station for two, three days unidentified, they will call us. (Khesheli Chishi, interview 12<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2006)

These practices changed the general behaviour, because the families did not hesitate any further to identify the bodies and to take them home. The claim of the dead bodies ceased to be threatening. The meaning had changed: Where a family positioned itself on a side of the conflict before, now the understanding was that the dead should be respected as humans.

The value of human life/ humanity was brought back in to the conflict. The motto of the Naga Mothers Association 'human integrity' stresses the connections between all humans. "[I]nspired by the motto 'human integrity' which held that every life was sacred (...) in 1994, the Mothers decided to set aside a Day of Mourning in memory of all killed due to the political conflict, Nagas and non Nagas." (Manchanda 2004: 44-45) The 'Mourning Day' saw a turnout of 3000 Mothers from different tribes.

The NMA did not consider the start of their peace campaign 'Shed No More Blood' in 1994 as a turn from 'social issues' to 'political engagement'. It was a continuous practice based in the most demanding needs of the people and the daily experiences. "NMA's perspective sees a continuum of insecurity – as experienced in the home, society and across the conflict lines, i.e. social, cultural, economic and political insecurity. NMA's mandate is to fulfill their role as 'Mothers' to heal and make society whole and healthy again." (Manchanda 2004: 14) The women focus on the entanglements of the various aspects, on the reciprocal effects. All their actions are bounded to the everyday situations and not separated into 'politics', 'economics', 'social' etc. Also the line between legal and illegal actions is judged anew according to the needs of the people for health, better living conditions and peace. The Konyak tribe women destroyed confessed liquor bottles to ensure these are not brought back to the market and consumption even though the police told them they have no right to do so. Delegates from the NMA illegally crossed the border to Burma/ Myanmar to meet the leader of one of the main fractions of the underground groups, the NSCN - K. When an other underground leader (from the rival NSCN - IM) was arrested in Bangkok with a false passport while travelling as representative to a peace talk with the Government of India, the NMA demanded his release and organized a camp at Bangkok because the maintenance of the ceasefire and the continuation of the talks were most essential for the community and the lifes of the people in the region.

### The Naga Phulreki

There is a female peace maker/mediator role in the Naga tradition that helps to justify the Mothers conflict interventions today even though I could not find that they anyhow directly refer to this historical function. In the various Naga languages this role is called Phulreki, Demi, Pukhareila or other names. Till the recent history the headhunting between hostile villages had a ritual meaning in Naga life. But certain women had the authority to intervene in deadly clashes when the shed of blood increased too much. They could save lifes by

walking to the enemy village to negotiate peace and compromises. "The pukhareila could not be harmed as a rule." "As pukhareilas (neutral ladies) she had the right of her own to intervene in war." (Horam, M. quoted at Zehol 1998:23)

The role of such women was to carry the slain head to the enemy's village. At the same time the Demi played an important role in trying to negotiate the peace terms with the two warring villages. It is said that peace between the two warring villages depended a lot on the Demis. (...) She was the only one to break the ice for peace talk (...) (Vitso 2003: 77)

Similar today, the women have a unique authority to criticise the excesses of the warring factions of the underground groups. When the 'Shed No More Blood' campaign was launched it was due to the growing crisis and to the responsibility the Naga Mothers felt to prevent Nagas from killing Naga brothers. "It was through the tribal affiliations of Mothers that the NMA Peace Team was able to gain access to the various factions and 'pacify' them, talk through their grievances and begin the process of reconciliation." (Manchanda 2004: 26)

#### Kitchen politics/ motherhood politics

A term that is used for the Naga Mothers form of interventions is 'kitchen politics'. The women invite the members of the underground groups (UGs) of their tribe to their home and in the kitchen, the heart of the Naga home where an open fire is burning in the center and everybody sits around the fireplace, in an atmosphere of care and nurture they talk frankly and criticise actions that violate human rights or will lead to a loss of support of the peoples. "Post ceasefire Kitchen politics was stretched to facilitate a dialogue between top leaders. NMA took great pride in serving food at these gatherings. Food was an important cultural signifier of comfort, reassurance and security." (Manchanda 2004: 39) The mothers are considered as neutral and therefore "as mothers they have access, they can get appointments and speak to all." (Achumbemo Kikon, former president Naga Student Federation, quoted at Manchanda 2004: 65) The women frame their activities in the language of family connections. "We are Mothers and we work as Mothers. Our advantage (with the UGs) is that we approach them as Mothers and therefore we are trusted by all sides." (Neidonuo Angami, former president NMA, quoted at Manchanda 2004: 43) "Neidonuo Angami is said to have jumped out of a car in the midst of a tense situation imploring 'before you kill your brother, listen to your mother.'" (Manchanda 2004: 43) They talk about their responsibility for 'all children' who need care and nurturing and who should have a chance to experience peace. The women recognize that within the traditional, patriarchal definition of their role

lies a potential to become important actors. (Banerjee 2001: 169) It is within this role that the young have to listen to the advise and also respect scolding of mothers.

In Mokokchung, women of authority like Dr. Yangerla Ao did not hesitate to chastise them [UGs] (like a mother!) when violence and terror paralysed the town, closing down schools and businesses. (...) It was the women who dared to expose human rights violations by UGs and got the Underground government/ leadership to take action. (Manchanda 2004: 39)

## Conclusion

The Naga Mothers Association is the only women's group in South Asia who has participated in a ceasefire negotiation: they mediated between the Government of India and the main underground group and facilitated the agreement. Nevertheless they do not call themselves political, they are excluded from established forms of the political and they do not demand to be integrated. It is within a thinking imprinted by sovereignty that their way of acting, transforming society, building security and changing the gender role is de-valued and de-politicized.

Feminist theory demanded not only to integrate 'women's issues' but to transform the notion of the political. "The privat is political" was an important slogan of feminist movements in the 70ies and also other distinctions e.g. between economy and politics, theory and practice were challenged. But Karena Shaw sees a recapture of feminist debates into a reproduction of political theory that is framed by the fundamentals of sovereignty.

By producing the particular frame for politics that legitimates a particular set of activities (that concerned with practices of governance) as properly political, and others as merely philosophical (...) the architecture of sovereignty acts to constrain feminist political possibilities. (Shaw 2002a: 238-239)

Practices from the marginalized and from indigenous movements in particular reveal not only the hierarchical and violent global power relations but also potential other meanings, preconditions and forms of the political. It is extremely destructive – and it actually is on ongoing practice - if these other forms to establish legitimate authority for social change are pressed into a concept of the political that was established under very different, European historical conditions and in connection with a certain power structure. Even though legitimated by the theories and epistemology that are still considered 'scientific' or the mainstream this integration means a continuation of colonial and patriarchal production of knowledge and of according political practices with all its violence. The protectorate in

Afghanistan is only one of many examples of the current colonial, patriarchal and violent politics in the name of the establishment of (the Western form of) order grounded on the principle of sovereignty.

The change of scholarly practices is difficult. If we consider knowledge production as a dialogical process, understand ourselves as researchers entwined in the power relations, and take into account the context of asymmetries we are acting in, how can we acknowledge the marginalized experiences, other forms of being and thinking that are usually excluded? How can a research process become a project of partnership with full advantages for everybody and not only for the (Western) researcher who earns credits for his publication, often written in an other language than the one spoken by the contributors from the subaltern position? And even with best intentions and a research design that was from the first stage on developed in mutual agreement with e.g. the indigenous social group who brings their knowledge in, including the development of the research question, still the difficulty of transcultural understanding remains. If we talk/ do research on the background of different cosmologies and ontologies we are very likely to interpret the heard within categories and meanings that we are familiar with and thereby are not able to fully understand what was said and meant. Actually, these dialogs must probably be understood as a process at the borders, where intersubjective exchanges create new forms. Walter D. Mignolo (2000) stresses the advantage of taking seriously these processes at borders between cultures. He developed the concepts of “border gnosis”, “border thinking” and “translanguaging” that allow going beyond hegemonic notions of hybridity and *mestizaje*. (Zugman 2005: 341) "His concept of “border gnosis” enables us to see how language and meanings can be transformed through intercultural interaction." (ibid: 341)

Border gnosis acknowledges that contemporary indigenous peoples engage with ways of knowing that do not rely on Western epistemologies while having been forced to engage with Western discourses and practices for more than 500 years. In acknowledging this social reality, border gnosis has implications for the study and practice of politics. (ibid: 326)

Border gnosis, a theory of knowledge production between cultures, argues that intercultural interaction can lead to innovative political ideas and practices. Mignolo sees a decolonization of knowledge taking place in globalization. He refers to the concept of *transculturation* that describes the two-way process of intercultural exchange between colonizers and colonized instead of the usual understanding of a one-way process of *acculturation* as an appropriation of the dominant Western culture by the subaltern subjects. (Zugman 2005)

Worldism, border gnosis, translanguaging - these newer concepts for theorizing world politics that build on postcolonial and feminist radical critiques of Eurocentric, colonial and patriarchal ontology, epistemology and methods are very rewarding if we understand scholarly practices as intertwined with power relations and work to transform asymmetries and relations of subordination. Sovereignty is a specific idea for establishing political space and order – built on exclusions, violence and the depoliticization of its preconditions and the stabilizing (Western) epistemology. To open the thinking for other possibilities of the political we at first need to understand the fictional quality of sovereignty. Other fictions are possible and to find. The questions behind the solution of sovereignty should be asked again and be debated – the preconditions for political order are not fixed or 'natural' but need political debates.

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