

Peace without Peace: Metaphor without a Method in the 'State of Exception' Called 'North-East India'

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This paper aims at discussing the political techniques of production of peace and conflict in the geopolitical space of North East India. In doing so, the paper explores the methods employed in securing such peace, the truth of which often turns out to be a direct anti-thesis to peace. Apart from the usual experience of suppression, psychological warfare and biopower of the hegemonic structures like State and Market/Capital, mobilization of the symbolic order of popular and public discourses seemingly are parts of a method to achieve what is 'defined' as peace. Method here could be distinguished from means: method is an employment of a scheme of action not just to achieve definite ends, but it is a totality of dispositions that determine the agency. Means only are the supplementary ways that implement the agency. Further there are definitive divergences between method and means. The divergence lies in choosing those means that give rise to conflicting ends. Method, on its part, aims at guiding the means-ends relationship, but often it is subverted by developments that lead to disjointed conception of 'politics' that remains immanent in any act-counteract kind of mechanism.¹ The limit of method

lies in this possibility of an originary effacement of method in the very act of knowing the method. That method of peace cannot privilege knowing over acting and that acting can't be privileged over the affect of the act leads us to formulate the very idea of peace in the sense of "work" as Heidegger would employ it. Worlding the bad subjects of violence and conflict with the performative always defers peace, but that is only a metaphysical deferment. What I would rather speak of is how peace enters by force by an originary effacement of force within the metaphysics of violence. Distinctively, peace works through conserving and annulling the opposition between war and peace, between terror and confidence, sometimes on the borderline: sometimes on the uncriticized conceptuality, sometimes by putting a strain on the boundaries, and working toward deconstruction in a setting-to-work mode. This means peace as an end is always deferred, it is peace without the concept of peace, a peace that is always and ever a yet to be, an ontological drift, the roadmap of which is cut off in the world to come.

Given this historicized rendering of the very working of the concept of peace, what we can at best do for the Northeast is neither a pathological diagnosis of what went wrong nor a discreet attempt of recovery, as both these moves would entail a sense of deciding, which actually suspends the performance of peace to its opposite 'that is' quietism or violence. Hence, how peace should be achieved depends on how it is worked out. While it is being worked out, it remains in a state of suspension and when it is believed to have been achieved, it is asserted thinking that it has been achieved. In other words, peace does not admit an exception to itself, whichever conditions facilitate it are twisted once and for all with only one end of achievability or success. Solicitation of peace presupposes its success; therefore, what is ruled out is the *failure* of peace. Can violence fail the peace? The answer to this question comes with a performative force, as violence cannot negate peace, as peace is unnegateable, therefore it assumes infallibility.² This meaning of peace cannot be objectified in assertions of peace and it remains superassertible even in the case of absence of peace. One can hazard saying that peace exists as a qualia that cannot be relativized in the concrete, nor can it be made abstract by operations of politico-moral decisions, as peace

would defer itself from such matters of dimension. Peace involves rather an equivocation that provokes a return to the normal or a recovery from the sickness of flesh.³

Peace as Transitional and 'Reverse Gratitude'

The situation in contemporary Northeast India does not allow a new clamour for peace moving away from the dominant paradigm of building block theory — rather it constructs pre-emptive moves in a terrain of struggle and neutrality. As a method, the assumption of guilt versus responsibility propels this move in projections — Asian corridor or a liberated NER. Both undermine the efforts of gaining strength from each other's predicaments. What some theoreticians such as Rawls or Kant envisaged in terms of 'lasting peace' or 'perpetual peace' is based on the idea of a morally justifiable peace enforcing means. In concrete epistemic terms, it can be understood as a second order appraisal of evidences such as self and other perceptions, injustices and responses. Without such second order appraisal, it is not possible to make peace in a situation of conflict that hinges necessarily on some form or other revision of belief. Most of the times there is an epistemic warrant of action that surpasses the predicaments of morality in believing and justifying those acts. Emerging alternatives like a Grand Asian Integration of Northeast India or a liberated Northeast are both epistemically warranted without much moral justifications. Discussions on global integration of the region in terms of ADB-WB funded vision is much on the horizon that articulates a neoliberal peace regime that conflates settlement with reconciliation⁴ and aims to foster a 'transitional politics' that looks upto post-conflict reconstruction of polis and a new order. The argument shifts the premises of an inductive reasoning (that of from conflict to peace) to a deductive settlement of a new order based on an external-global post-conflict benefit of settlement. The immediate pragmatic behind such neoliberal overstepping of historicity of conflict lies in an easy bargainable redistribution of goodies that follow a given scheme of settlement. Instead of a second order epistemic appraisal of possibilities of meeting that arise from scenes of dyads of conflict, it emphasizes a pragmatic notion of community that 'pieces together' differentially structured ethnic and cultural groups. This further implements a project of

turning bases of social and political imagination into a real lived community in terms of territorialization such that it mimics an experiential reality in order to claim for preferred territorial-temporal-spatial re-imagining of a reconciled non-conflictual self-definition.⁵ Peace acts as an apriori objective correlative of procedural reconciliation without reframing the questions of deprivation, discrimination and injustice. This is a negotiated and politically organized violence free domain of 'instituted peace' that rules the marginalized and the deviant and thereby brings them back in the mainstream, a mainstreaming without a mainstream. The Post-Bodo accord elections in 2004 and the recent support of the Cong(I) Government by Mohilary faction of Bodo legislators are instances of such 'instituted peace' guided by post-conflict benefits. Post Mizo accord mainstreaming of M.N.F in Mizoram is also represented in not being able to accommodate Hmars and Brus within that 'mainstreaming'. It is rather a play of the memory and the imagination over the real that ultimately sustains the lived moments of struggle and not institutional mechanisms of settlement through accords.⁶ Such a method of sustenance of political struggles in the symbolic realm re-institutes logic of exclusion of others or refashions it in terms of consensus or agreement. From a strategic enactment of peace treaties, such a demand of consensus becomes an easy instrument to achieve a hegemonic power over others. Bodos demand such a consensus from Non-Bodos in Bodoland area, which is no exception, just as dominant nationalities like Assamese or Manipuris demand it from constituents whom they accept to be Assamese or Manipuri. Responsibility here becomes a reverse payment of gratitude to a supposedly host community by remaining quiet about one's own aspirations as well as by giving consent to what the dominant proposes for the sake of unity or integrity of a territory or area. This is a method of peace based on reverse gratitude that satisfies the confessional constructionism of identity by the dominant. Even the talk of deprivation assumes a form of dominance that is confessional and that reduces the other to a subsumable entity. Although most of the times the symbolic realization of such consensus is not supported by cultural systems, it looks for external means of gratification. Peace is achieved through such external gratifications and most often by sacrificing the aspirations of others. But ideologically the whole process is posited in a reverse way: as if to live in

peace one needs to follow the commands of the dominant. It is ironical that those who demand such allegiance to peace to gratify their confessional identities often have to abandon their own planks and stand open to such reverse payment of gratitude to others. The question is, can peace be bought by gratitude or by gratification? Such complex issues of identity get intertwined with political, institutional and cultural peace. But it could be interpreted as how communities in Northeast methodically construct their experience in the configuration of meaning and institutional mechanism that shapes their reality constituting activities. As a method of peace such activities are meant to do away with binaries of conflict, but such binaries remain implicit in the inflexible structures of domination amidst the gestures of friendship and cessation of hostility. Peace as a successful goal confirms the cultural stereotypes by reinvoking subjective preferences over some than others. Thereby peace produces subjectivities that are tied to each other by way of an exchange of positionalities and not remaining above board in an absolute sense. Rather there is a narrative re-structuring of peace as a state of peace with others on the condition that others agree with the agenda of one's own side. This is a reduction of a multiple and potentially diverse terrain of peacemaking to a moral party of the two, a cautious response to risks of disagreement and difference.

Does Reductionism Work?

Insights into the lives of those who claim peace for themselves and for others often give rise to much simpler methods of peace than the way institutions work it out. Conflict looked upon as created out of 'collective fear and needs' based on rational calculation of power and interests⁷ need to be necessarily institutional. But at a much simpler level, conflicts developed out of 'objective and ideological differences', the escalation of which result from subjective factors such as mistrust, misperception or exaggerated threat⁸ could be taken to a resolution by way of controlling such subjective factors. What reductionism does is to turn the situation of difference and subjective ambivalences into a direct and reciprocal closure of evaluation of one's acts by the other without leaving a space for understanding how the other evaluates those acts of one. In lieu of sharing the perception of the other about oneself,

conflicts move to the level of finding a spot of blame in the other. It can be argued that such an environment of conflict occurs between groups that are proximate and groups that are goaded by each other in a space of relationality but without mutual and reciprocal recognition of each other's perceptions. Put in Nietzschean terms it could be interpreted as the 'triumph of the weak as weak' without succumbing to a master discourse of power and law. In Nietzsche's inimitable words,

For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering, more exactly, an agent; still more specifically a guilty agent who is susceptible to suffering — in short, some living thing upon which he can on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy (...), This constitutes the actual physiological cause of resentment, vengefulness, and the like: a desire to deaden pain by means of affect (...) secret pain that is becoming unendurable, and to drive it out of consciousness at least for the moment, for that one requires an affect, as savage an affect as possible, and in order to excite that, any pretext at all.⁹

Ressentiment in this context of conflict is a triple function: it produces an affect that overcomes the wound of existence, it produces a culpable enemy outside one's own and it produces a site of redemption that produces a reverse place of infliction of the same wound from which the sufferer suffers. William Connolly conceives such a method of production of a site of redemption as 'anesthetic' *pace* Nietzsche.¹⁰ Such a site paradoxically helps negotiation with the other in which the spot of blame can be transformed into a site of redemption. Most of the ethnic mobilizations in Northeast region, of course, cannot go up to the historical consequence of turning the blame spot into a balm, rather it perpetuates the resentment without redemption.

State of Exception

North-East India as a stranger to the Nation-State of India has been what Agamben has famously called 'perpetual state of exception'. Colonial modernity created localized spaces of exclusion in the form of 'excluded area', 'partially excluded area' and 'inner

line area'. The Post-colonial Indian state has merged this colonial space of exclusion with the project of inclusion of its internal other as a part of a pathology of the dominant centre that simultaneously constituted conditions of suspension of sovereignty as well as conditioned the interminable biopolitical presence of the Indian State in an alien and hostile territory like Northeast. Any reasoned analysis of everyday resistance to such overpowering presence of biopower of the State is abandoned in favour of paradigmatic offensives by the armed forces and the police by subjecting the laws of liberty to the discretionary rules of governmentality. The Indian State here enacts courts that are no court, laws that are no laws and a process that is no process. Further, the Indian State gets itself embroiled into a proxy war by declaring the Northeast as a disturbed area whose population is supposed to be 'disloyal'.¹¹ The Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 applied to Manipur, Nagaland and parts of Assam brings out this suspension of an usual exchange between the Northeast and the rest of India, against which there was a strong mass movement in Manipur in 2004.

The self-image of various communities of the Northeast is overdetermined by this biopolitics of the Postcolonial State, within which the agency of self-description undergoes a transformation. Like Negri and Hardt's multitude, their sense of belonging is threatened by the very Postcolonial and Neoliberal constitution of fuzzy identities, but they do not resist these shifts in their ways of affiliation and filiation. The homeland claims of various generic identities such as Nagas, Assamese and Mizos follow a pattern of inversion of the core-periphery relation by constituting an other in Indian identity. *But this inversion gets internally subverted as their own internal others play a politics of resistance to the hegemony of the dominant.* The rise of several nationalist movements among smaller ethnic communities like Hmars, Bodos, Garos, Koch-Rajbangshis, Komrem, Zeliangrong present resistance to everyday traces of colonizing power relations on a formal Postcolonial plane. The overlapping and criss-crossing between nationalist and ethnic aspirations defer the formation of a fixed identity at the same topological plane as the postcolonial State. Frameworks of explanations undergo a complete *aufhebung* in this process of deferring to an other context of identity politics that articulates itself against an outside. One can think of this outside only by

way of considering categories of self-description as pronominal that inscribes a sense of difference without alterity. I name such identities as 'potential'¹² (pace Agamben) nations-from-below.

The idea of potentiality as elucidated by Agamben hinges on the conflict between law and life, which never allows a full expression of 'force without significance' in a state of exception. If we affirm that a morally indifferent law must be upheld in order to stave off an unbearable moral of responsibility, can we be certain that the law has any force apart from any religiosity? Agamben precisely contrasts this inevitability of an overpowering law in the lifeworld by exposing potentiality's preference for 'potentiality not to' and thereby producing subjects within a metaphysical aporia. Agamben claims that it is here that metaphysical aporia shows its political nature. As Jacques Rancière explains, "The traditional question "For what reasons do human beings gather into political communities?" is always already a response, and one that causes the disappearance of the object it claims to explain or to ground — i.e. the form of a political par-taking that then disappears in the play of elements or atoms of sociability."¹³ Rancière stands in the same shoe as Agamben in facing this aporia between 'to be' and 'not to be', as subject proper to politics disappears in the non-relation between par-taking and potentiality. The state of exception in the case of Northeast India is the form of life that has become Agambian 'Form of Law' that calls for an ethical immoralism. As Rancière explains,

Politics is a specific rupture in the logic of arche. It does not simply presuppose the rupture of the 'normal' distribution of positions between the one who exercises power and the one subject to it. It also requires a rupture in the idea that there are dispositions 'proper' to such classifications.¹⁴

This context of Northeast represents a field of multiple counterhegemonic fronts of struggle as the so called rebel groups struggle against the perceived other, be it foreigners or the Indian State. This itself is a questioning of the pre-disposition or the arche through which the subject proper to politics takes part in contraries and forms a community that practices a responsible ethical immoralism. This is also a struggle to make them heard from the labyrinth of alienation and isolation. Both sides turn the other into

a faceless entity as the self and the other do not have an immediate connection, rather they occupy poles of a divided spectrum without any derivation of the one from the other. This blurs the very distinction between violence and right as the other always is objectified as an enemy and not as a friend. The face of the other enacts the rites of passage from citizen to non-citizen, law to non-law. The disused right of the other returns to the self as it converts them as the entitlement of the self, an inversion of the ethics of the face.

A dialogue with the other in the sense of co-sharing needs a complement of materiality of the sensible in its everydayness. Does the state of exception and the suspension of sovereignty of the multitude allow this re-configuration of the sphere of the sensible in the context of NE-India? The self-suppressing politics of homogeneity and misrecognition of the sensory produce an other as a subject in relation to politics. First of all such an other needs to be recuperated in acts of justice and then re-placed back into a locale that is politically intelligible.

Reconstructing the Domain of the Sensible

An alternative understanding of Insurgency in NE India contrary to descriptions such as 'secessionists' or 'extremists', can be from the point of view of non-representation in terms of rights and in terms of ethnic, national and cultural identities. While claims of Rights such as right to employment, education and livelihood constitute civic and political rights; it signifies a broad democratic configuration of forces beyond cultural affiliations. Non-representation in any aspect of such civic and political right, therefore, requires an extra dimension of a politics of affiliation. One could clearly demarcate these differences between kinds of Rights and its associated claims in two distinct camps of contemporary insurgent movements of NEI. The left liberal ideologies speak the language of Universal Rights and uphold the claims of those who are denied of these Rights. Left liberal politics calls for struggle against hegemony and dominance that requires a broad based democratic mobilization. The other camp, constituted by non-left, right and often conservative and neoliberal elements propagates the idea of group Rights against Universal Rights and champions the cause of ethnic and cultural formations in a context of contest

