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A Foreword from the Editor

Studio Nilima: Collaborative Network for Research and Capacity Building is a collective of lawyers, academics, social scientists and students in Assam, working at the intersections of law, conflict, governance and culture. Studio Nilima brings together thinkers, learners and practitioners to unfold new ways of engaging with contemporary Assam, its people and politics.

Nilima: A Journal of Law and Policy is premised on creating an interdisciplinary forum for scholars of the region to engage and reflect on the contemporary socio-political and economic sphere of Assam. The articles that are presented in this edition raise complex questions, which intersect issues of gender, displacement, environment and development.

The Journal opens with "Struggle for Survival", a photonarrative by Kuntala Roychoudhury and Audrey Williams that presents the challenges of human wildlife conflict in Assam, particularly around the wildlife reserves of Amchang and Kaziranga. Expanding our perception and definitions of conflict, it portrays poignantly the political ecology of human-wildlife conflict. What are the ways in which displacement emerges from the creation of wildlife conservation landscapes? The images make a scathing comment on law and policy as both the mitigator and aggravator of the unfolding human wildlife conflict in the disappearing reserves of Assam.

The second piece by Priyanka Sharma and Akhil Ranjan Dutta titled "Damming the River, Burdening the Valley: Large Dams on the Brahmaputra" unpacks the juggernaut of hydropower development in the Brahmaputra valley. It scrutinizes the incongruity between the Government of India policies and the livelihood security of the indigenous communities. The article illustrates

the various manifestations of conflict that such dam sites trigger, particularly the ecological and environmental impacts, the loss of livelihood, culture and ethnicity of the indigenous communities and the resultant displacement. It challenges us to explore ways in which the rights of the indigenous communities can be safeguarded along with the "development" that the dams assure.

Using the metaphor of "pickled" infrastructure, Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman seeks to understand the dynamics of connectivity and infrastructure development in Northeast and the "agency" of the local community to use, absorb and participate in the decision making processes of such transformation. "Pickled Infrastructure and connectivity: Locating community engagement in Northeast India's infrastructural transformation" foregrounds the vulnerabilities of the local communities trapped between the interplay of the past developmental lag of the region and the current development impetus led by the Government of India. His article is a timely reminder of the additional layers of exclusion and conflict such "development" presents, reinforcing past memories and connecting new narratives of accumulation politics and resource extraction within the larger politics of the nation and its periphery.

Making a sharp departure from the previous contribution, the two concluding articles constitute the study of women's experiences and provokes us to enquire why gendered perspectives on issues are important, if not crucial.

Manorama Sharma pins our attention to the burning issue of the updation of the National Register of Citizen and confronts the masculine construction of the idea of citizenship that the present processes encourage. Drawing on feminist literature on questions of citizenship, the article "Women and the National Register of Citizens in Assam", ruptures the silences in the policy formulation and lays bare particular lived experiences of women in Assam who have been prevented from being recognized as citizens of India, prejudiced for their lack of education and economic vulnerabilities.

The Journal closes with personal narratives of gendered experiences of women in the Holocaust by Abantee Dutta. "Women Surviving the Holocaust" traces the unique coping strategies of women survivors in the concentration camp at Auschwitz. Destabilising our received understanding of "resistance", the article journeys through the experiences of the camp inmates and their ways of survival and presents narratives of their resistance, both personally and

in the company of another. In the unfolding saga of the NRC and the potential humanitarian crisis that looms large before us, the article reminds us of the untapped potential of the human spirit and its resolve to "never again" surrender to the depths of human depravity.

Read collectively, I hope the articles will inspire the readers to reflect and re-examine viewing the events that surround us in isloation and enquire the interlinkages that weave through these seemingly disparate subjects. The contributions of this Journal were subject to lively exchanges and discussions and I am grateful to each of the contributors for their thoughts and efforts in expanding the discourse.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the Heinrich Boll Stiftung, India for granting us permission to re-publish the article titled "Pickled Infrastructure and connectivity: Locating community engagement in Northeast India's infrastructural transformation" by Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman which was first published on their website.

We hope this collection will resonate with our readers and spark new avenues of research.

Mr. Justice (Retd) Brojendra Prasad Katakey

Comments from the Copy Editor

Future generations may look back on 2019 as the turning point for global climate change, the year when humanity was warned of the disastrous consequences of inaction. Whether future generations will be writing from a world that pivoted away from climate change's most dire threats–widespread famine, lethal heat, millions displaced around the world–will indeed depend on the actions that all levels of global society take today to prevent such a future.

However, even in the present, nature-human conflict is already impacting human, animal, and plant life. This latest issue of *Nilima: A Journal of Law and Policy* provides a look at how the fragile intertwining of human development, natural landscapes, and climate are already fueling migration and conflict-and costing lives in the process.

In "A 'Struggle for Survival," Kuntala Roychoudhury and myself present a photonarrative illustrating a burgeoning clash between humans and nature in the wildlife reserves of Assam, where human settlement has robbed local elephant communities of essential food and water resources. The result is suffering and death among elephant communities that are meant to be protected within these wildlife reserves. However, these human-made conflicts impact human lives as well, including among communities that have been forced to migrate to and settle in wildlife reserves due to ecological changes along the banks of the Brahmaputra river.

Not all of these changes are purely climate-related. In "Damming the River, Burdening the Valley," Priyanka Sharma and Akhil Ranjan Dutta present an accounting of the impact of 'mega dam' projects on

communities along the Brahmaputra, particularly those in Assam, which are being displaced by dams under development in upstream Arunachal Pradesh. Dams have already cost riverine communities in Assam their livelihoods–and even occasionally their lives–and flora and fauna have also suffered. These communities, already burdened by the 'mega dam syndrome', are likely to be rendered more vulnerable by these projects.

Serving as a bridge between the two halves of this issue, Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman's article, within "Pickled Infrastructure and Connectivity," takes us on a journey along the roads and, yes, bridges of North East India. His elegant piece paints a picture of the dance between borders, infrastructure, and politics in this region of India.

This issue also addresses the unique experiences and vulnerabilities that women experience in times of conflict and politicised human progress. On the latter front, Manorama Sharma explores the impact that gender-insensitive citizenship registration drives can have on women in Assam in her article, "Women and the National Register of Citizens in Assam". Drawing on the literature around the definition of citizenship, Sharma traces the ways in which Assam's women–particularly those who experience poverty or who have not received education–are prevented from being recognized as citizens by the Indian state, thus disrupting their present and future lives, and in at least a few cases, leading women to suicide.

The issue closes with a paper from Abantee Dutta that draws evidence of gendered experiences of state oppression and violence from a more distant-yet by no means removed-period in history: the Holocaust. Pulling from the literature on coping strategies and 'spiritual resistance', Dutta explores the personal narratives of women survivors of the Holocaust, elucidating the unique ways that women resisted the Nazis' attempts at dehumanisation and annhilation of the communities interned at Auschwitz. The result is a paper that offers a stirring account of the depths to which humans can dive to inflict suffering-and the lengths to which the human spirit can go not just to survive but to resist.

It has been an honor to copyedit and contribute to this issue of *Nilima*. It is my hope, and that of the Studio Nilima team, that these

articles will provide insights not only into ecological and gendered experiences of conflict and suffering, but also into the resilience of the human spirit.

Audrey Williams
July 2019
Northern Virginia,
United States

Contents

A "STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL": THE CLASH BETWEEN ELEPHANTS AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS IN THE WILDLIFE RESERVES OF ASSAM

Kuntala Roychoudhury and Audrey Williams

To think of a wildlife reserve is to think of calm and tranquility. Its hues are the lush green of forests, the deep blue of rippling and rushing water, the rich browns and blacks of earth and foliage. Here, the bright pop of a sudden flower. There, the sleepy gold of sunlight in the late afternoon. Above it all unfolds the kaleidoscope of a sky freed from skyscrapers–blues, greys, pinks, purples, and the brilliance of a thousand stars.

But 12 km from the Guwahati city center, Assam's Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary is not always tranquil; in fact, it is the center of a simmering conflict between humans and nature.

In 2004, three nature reserves were stitched together to create the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary.[1] However, this close to the Brahmaputra river, floods are inescapable, and so too is the devastation that comes with them. Thus, land within the sanctuary has been settled over time by communities displaced in part by these natural calamities. The communities have often been referred to in the local media as "encroachers," a word that obscures both the reasons for their migration to the sanctuary as well as these communities' "sociocultural relationship[s] with nature," according to Bhasker Pegu and Manoranjan Pegu.[2]

It's a bias that has had nasty consequences. On November 27, 2017, the calm of the wildlife sanctuary was engulfed by a chaos that locals called "war-like"[3] when, following a decision by the Guwahati High Court, police arrived to evict the communities from their homes.[4]

Indian police arrive in the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam to evict communities that had settled there. (Photo credit: Kuntala Roychoudhury.)

The scene was reminiscent of war. According to local media accounts, the eviction drive carried out over November 27 and 28 involved 1,500 police personnel and 300 labourers to help with the destruction of the settlements' structures.[5] The community protested and the police responded with violence, leading to the injuring of at least four people. To raze the houses, schools, and places of worship, the police made use of bulldozers– and, unconventionally, elephants.[6]

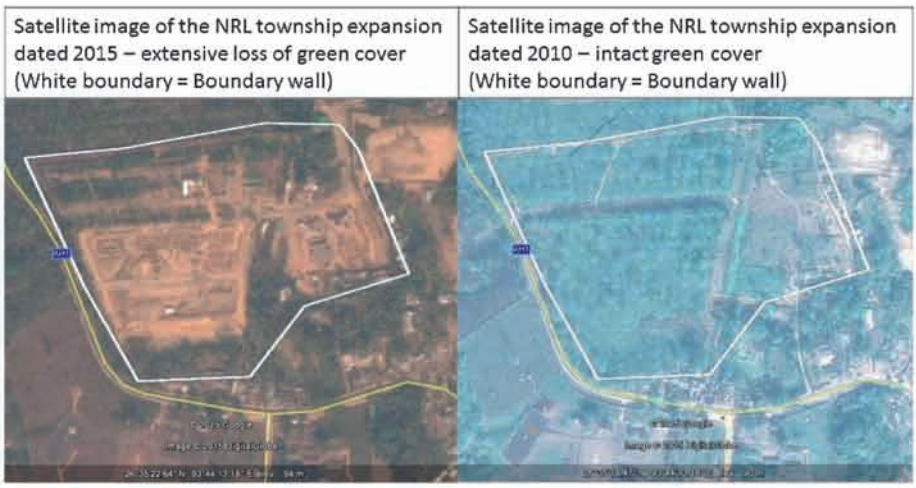
Indian police make use of elephants during a November 2017 eviction of communities that had settled in the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam. (Photo credit: Kuntala Roychoudhury.)

It is the sight of the elephants that perhaps provides the most striking example of the conflict between nature and humankind unfolding at the heart of Assam's wildlife reserves.

Three hours to the northeast of Amchang sits Kaziranga National Park, where human activity and construction has threatened the lives of the local elephant population, as the development of land around the wildlife reserve has disrupted their access to grazing ground.

One project in particular, the expansion of the Numaligarh Refinery Ltd. (NRL) township and golf course, has directly led to elephant deaths. The construction of a 2-km boundary wall was reported to have led to the demise of an elephant that hemorrhaged from trying to break through the wall to access watering holes and grazing ground. Despite being ordered to demolish the wall, at least part of it still remains.[7]

A picture showing part of the Numaligarh boundary wall, which has disrupted the corridors used by elephants in the area, causing confusion and the death of at least one elephant. (Photo source: Northeast Today, August 25, 2016 <http:// www.northeasttoday.in/ngt-asks-nrl-to-pay-compensation-pull-down-boundary-wall/>.)



(Graphic source: Rohit Choudhury.)

In Tezpur, not far from Kaziranga National Park, construction has also claimed elephants' lives. In 2016, a mother elephant died from injuries sustained when she and her calf fell into a pit at a construction site in the district.[8] The calf was relocated to Kaziranga, but was reported to have died in the absence of the care of its mother.[9]

Human activity in and around the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary has also led to animal deaths. At the Narengi Cantonment on the border of the sanctuary, the Indian Army has placed rows of spikes to prevent elephant herds from pilfering supplies stored in the cantonment's depots and kitchens. But the strategy has come at the cost of the lives of at least two of the sanctuary's elephants, which died from septicemia.[10]

Correspondence and meetings in late 2018 and early 2019 between the Army and Guwahati's wilfdlife division, including warnings from the latter sent in December 2018 regarding the potential for elephant deaths, illustrate the continuing tension between human activity and wildlife protection in this region of Assam.[11]

The predicament of the indigenous Mising communities, who are among those who had settled in Amchang, is a prime example of the vicious cycle of this nature-human conflict.

Humans had created concrete embankments on the Brahmaputra to protect from floods. But when the embankments were breached, the sediment mixed with floodwaters. In a process called "sand casting", sand was left behind on farmland, making it hard to cultivate.[12]

Communities affected by this type of disaster–such as some among the Mising–were then forced to migrate in search of land, sometimes arriving in areas that already were or would later become wildlife reserves as claimed by the media. It has been further contested that, under the auspices of conservation and wildlife preservation, these communities were and are being displaced by the government, with little attention paid to the reason why the communities ended up in the reserves in the first place-and even worse, with little done to address the lost livelihoods and housing of the now doubly displaced community. All of these contestations remain to be proven by the stakeholders involved.

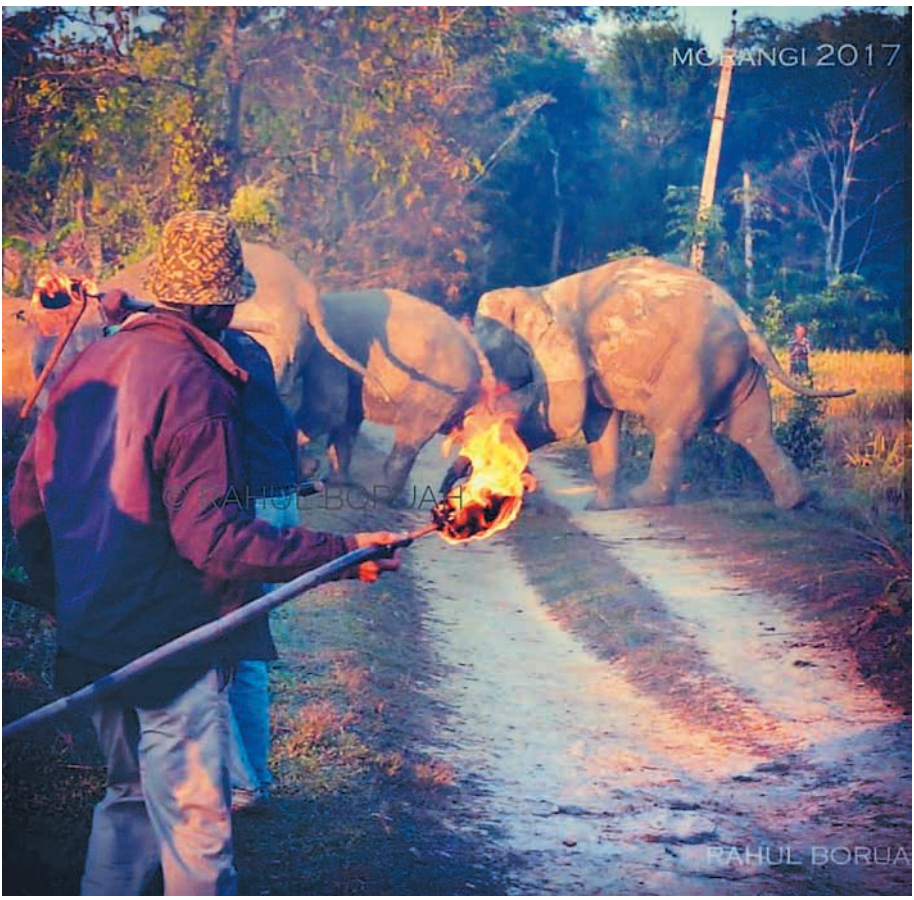
What is the result? In November 2017 in Amchang, nearly 700 families were rendered homeless in the name of conservation following the days of the eviction.[13] Ironically, the Government, in a complete volte-face, petitioned the Gauhati High Court to suspend the eviction process until March 2018, with a prayer to ascertain the number of landless and erosion-affected families and verify any errors in demarcation of the boundary wall of the wildlife reserve. Since then, the affected community has returned and continues to live on ground zero. The silence on the part of the authorities is deafening, as the status quo continues, waiting to explode on another day and another time in the future, creating the treacherous landscape of a unique conservation conflict.

Houses in Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary were demolished as part of a November 2017 eviction drive. (Photo credit: Kuntala Roychoudhury.)

Houses in Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary were demolished as part of a November 2017 eviction drive. (Photo credit: Kuntala Roychudhury.)

The November 2017 eviction drive in Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary involved 1,500 police personnel and led to clashes with the community that was being evicted. (Photo credit: Kuntala Roychoudhury.)

Meanwhile, amidst it all, nature continues to suffer, with flora and fauna alike at the mercy of human progress. For the elephants, this means not only a loss of habitat but also direct terrorization by humans, who, even while trespassing on elephant land, resort to dire tactics to keep the animals away.



Violent encounters between humans and elephants in Morangi Teliya Gaon, Golaghat. (Photo credit: Rahul Borua.)

Most perversely of all, the elephants can even become pawns in the humans' conflicts with each other, as they did on November 27 and 28. Elephants that should have been meandering through the jungle in search of

food and water were instead forced to play a part in the displacement of the community in Amchang. Having already lost their own homes to human development, they were then used by human society to victimize some of its most vulnerable.

For both the elephants and the displaced communities of Amchang, it is a "struggle for survival"[14] in a wildlife sanctuary that is far from the tranquil refuge that it should be.

Endnotes :

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3 Interaction with locals by Kuntala Roychoudhury during the Amchang eviction in November 2017.

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[13] Pisharoty (2017), op. cit.

[14] Pegu & Pegu (2018), op. cit.

DAMMING THE RIVER, BURDENING THE VALLEY: LARGE DAMS ON THE BRAHMAPUTRA

Priyanka Sharma and Akhil Ranjan Dutta

Introduction

On a misty morning by the bank of the Deopani river[1], a discussion with a local resident[2] over a cup of tea on the serenity and tranquillity of the place soon transformed into a critical debate on the dam-building exercise being undertaken by the Indian State in North East India. The resident was asked whether dams generate livelihoods or encroach upon livelihoods. Amidst numerous apprehensions about his future due to the impending danger emanating from the dam-building exercise, he stated candidly:

> [The] Government builds dams…and pays compensation to the project-affected persons…but what is the use?...Monetary compensation is short-lived. The affected people here are tribes who are mostly illiterate and unemployed. Because of their ignorance, they might not spend the money judiciously and can be easily fooled…They will be mostly spending the money on alcohol, gambling, and other forms of luxury. At the end of the day, when the money is exhausted, their situation will be worse than what it was before….no land, no money and the result is that they remain engulfed in the vicious cycle of poverty.

The above narrative relates the impact of the 3,000-megawatt (MW)Dibang Multipurpose River Valley Project (proposed in the Lower Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh) on the livelihoods of the district's indigenous communities. The Dibang project is only one among many other such hydro projects that have been proposed on the Brahmaputra river system as part of the larger schema of converting the entire North Eastern region into a 'power house' for the country. The narrative also reflects the irony that this development entails. Losses due to such projects are expected to be mitigated through one-time monetary compensation. But what is missing from such piecemeal rehabilitation packages is a commitment towards sustainability. The submergence of land, particularly in hilly regions where there is a scarcity of cultivable land, impinges heavily on the livelihoods of the indigenous community, who will slip into poverty, as they lack skills for the other livelihood opportunities thrown open by development projects such as dams. It is a scenario where the livelihoods of some come at the cost of the livelihoods of others. Equity and sustainability seem to thus be compromised. Such instances make us ponder the larger picture of the impact of the 'mega dam syndrome' on the livelihoods of indigenous communities, particularly in downstream areas.

The Brahmaputra and Dams:The Conundrum of Development

Mahabahu Brahmaputra, Mahamilanar Tirtha,
Shatajug Dhari Ahise Prakashi
Samannayar Artha...

Bhupen Hazarika (1980)

(The mighty Brahmaputra, holy site of the great synthesis, has for untold centuries been propagating the message of unity and harmony…) (Dutta, 2001, p. vi).

The majestic Brahmaputra is the lifeline of Assam. It is an international river flowing through three countries.[3] Throughout its journey of 2,906 km from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, the Brahmaputra crosses the territories of China, India, and Bangladesh. The river covers an area of

5,80,000 sq. km, of which 1,94,413 sq. km falls within India. In India, the river flows for 918 km within the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam (Bhagabati et al., 2001, p. 36). The Brahmaputra basin has been identified as having huge potential for hydropower generation, with the Central Electricity Authority identifying as many as 168 large projects capable of generating more than 63,328 MW of hydropower (Vagholikar & Das, 2010, p. 3). Out of the total hydropower potential in the Brahmaputra basin, which stands at 43 per cent of the total assessed hydropower potential of the country, the state of Arunachal Pradesh has the highest share, 50,328 MW, with revised estimates projecting it to be 57,000 MW. The hydropower potential of the other states of North East India includes 680 MW in Assam; 1,784 MW in Manipur; 2,394 MW in Meghalaya; 4,286 MW in Sikkim; 2,196 MW in Mizoram; 1,574 MW in Nagaland; and 15 MW in Tripura (Gogoi, 2011, p. 89-90). The 2,000-MW Lower Subansiri hydroelectric power project, the Demwe project, the Siang project, Teesta VI, Kameng, Lower Kopili, and others have been proposed to transform the energy sector of the country, alongside other benefits like flood control and irrigation. Most of these projects are Run-of-the-River (ROR) hydro projects and are technically projected to be 'environmentally benign'. The push towards hydropower projects is also accompanied by the involvement of private players. For example, the Dorjee Khandu-led government in Arunachal Pradesh had entered into Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) with a number of private developers like Reliance Energy, DS Constructions, Jaypee Associates, etc., for construction of the projects (Deka, 2010, p. 3). On the other hand, huge monetary advances had also been taken from the private developers "at the time of inking the deal, before any public consultations, preparation of Detailed Project Reports and receipt of mandatory clearances"(Vagholikar& Das, 2010, p. 3). Such processes corroborate the State's inclination towards a capitalist and neo-liberal paradigm of development, where the concerns of the environment as well as of the livelihoods of the river-dependent communities take a backseat. In fact, in 2008, the then Union Minister of State for Power, Jairam Ramesh, raised concerns about the 'MoU virus' affecting the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim of North East India. In 2018, however, the Pema Khandu-led

government in Arunachal Pradesh cancelled 15 hydropower projects, and 100 more projects allotted to different private players are in the process of termination under the slogan of 'perform or perish' ("Arunachal Govt", 2018, p. 10).

These projects have been criticised for the perceived adverse effects on the fragile ecology of the seismologically active regions of North East India and their impact on the lives of those displaced. The state of Assam, being located downstream of Arunachal Pradesh, stands at a greater risk of downstream impacts of dams proposed upstream, threatening the lives and livelihoods of many. The Brahmaputra is a braided river system with a multitude of channels cutting across plains and hills, shifting courses and forming *chars*/*chaporis* (silt-laden islands) along its course. The entire region experiences heavy rainfall and lies in the most unstable seismic zone, Zone V. Flood and erosion have been a perennial problem in the Brahmaputra basin where the rock/soil is soft, the slope is very low, and human interference is also greater due to high population density (Kar, 2012, p. 68-69). In such conditions, the construction of dams solely for generating hydropower to fuel the energy sector calls for urgent attention and the need for introspection. There have already been grave concerns in Assam about the downstream impacts of existing hydel projects like the Ranganadi and the Kopili–developed by the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO)–being felt in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Nagaon, and Morigaon. The Kurishu dam in Bhutan has already caused tragic flood situations in districts like Barpeta, Nalbari, Baksa, and Kamrup. Proposed dams in Assam as well as in upstream Arunachal Pradesh can wreak havoc in Assam, with threats of flash floods, the breaching and erosion of embankments, and dam bursts due to seismic activity. Hence, a careful investigation of the dam-building exercise is crucial to understanding the viability of such projects from the perspective of ecological sustainability and livelihood security.

Rivers in Assam are not simply grandeurs of nature; they play an integral part in shaping the history, culture, and lives of the people in the state. As an agrarian state, rivers have a tremendous significance in Assam, for they supply vital nutrients to the soil and the water required for a good harvest. Rivers are worshipped and carry a spiritual and divine

connotation. The noted litterateur Arup Kumar Dutta, drawing a profile of the Brahmaputra river, mentions that "the river and its tributaries find echoes in the culture and ethos of the people, their folk-lore and literature, and in the very rhythm of their lives"(2001, p. xiv). The socio-economic conditions of the people of Assam are entwined with the rivers of the state. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries form a major part of the landscape of the state, facilitating agriculture, trade, and commerce. The vast sheet of alluvial soil deposited in the banks of the rivers provide a vital ground for sustaining agriculture and provide grazing grounds for cattle and livestock. Fishing is an important economic activity for the river-dependent population. The river facilitated the migration of communities into the region, resulting in the formation of a rich cultural synthesis. In fact, the Brahmaputra is undoubtedly the most significant force in shaping the history of Assam; it is an active agent and a silent witness to the making and unmaking of several events in the history of the state. Gunnel Cederlof observed that the waterways were used like highways in this part of India, where the possibilities and limitations of human life and the adjustment of livelihood strategies were deeply integrated with water; where, apart from rice, beans and lentils, fish too needs to be counted as a staple food (2014, p. 8-9). In fact, the Brahmaputra is the embodiment of the cultural ethos of Assam. The anthem of the first university in the region, i.e. the Gauhati University, echoes the civilizational aspirations associated with this river.[4] Hence, any engineering work on the river must take into account such considerations.

Assam's Gain or Loss?

Dams in North East India are being pursued with the intention of hydropower generation as their sole purpose, with only a few being proposed for flood moderation and irrigation. Assam has two hydropower projects in operation: the 275-MW Kopili hydroelectric plant developed by NEEPCO, and the 100-MW Karbi Langpi hydro power project developed by the Assam State Electricity Board (ASEB). The 120-MW Lower Kopili hydroelectric project has been proposed in Boro Longku village of Dima Hasao district,

to be developed by the Assam Power Generation Corporation Limited (APGCL). As per the Central Electricity Authority's 16th Electricity and Power Survey, Assam's electricity demand is as follows:

Table1: Assam's Electricity Demand

Year	2006–07	2011–12	2016–17	2020
Peak load (MW)	991	1423	2034	2573 (approx.)

*Source: Gogoi, 2011, p. 29.

Assam already has three power stations catering to its electricity needs. The APGCL was constituted after the dismantling of the ASEB in December 2004 through the State Power Sector Reforms Programme under the provisions of the Electricity Act, 2003. APGCL has a total installed capacity of 379.7 MW, and peak generation is around 250 MW. It has three running power stations: (i) Namrup Thermal Power Station (NTPS) (1,19.5 MW), Namrup, Dibrugarh; (ii) Lakwa Thermal Power Station (LTPS) (1,57.5 MW), Maibella, Lakwa, Sivsagar; and (iii) Karbi Langpi Hydro Electric Project (KLHEP) (100 MW), Lengry, Amtereng, Boithalangso, Karbi Anglong("Power Sector", 2012).

Apart from its own power generation, Assam is dependent on the share of the Central Sector Generating Stations (CSGSs), viz. the Kathalguri thermal power plant, Kopili hydroelectric plant, Ranganadi hydroelectric power plant, managed and developed by NEEPCO, NHPC etc., with the total import standing at 751 MW (Gogoi, 2011, p. 30). Hence, combining its own generation capacity and its import, the total availability of power for Assam stands at approximately 1,130MW. According to Anurag Goel, former Commissioner and Secretary of the IT and Power Departments of the Government of Assam, APGCL, at the initiative of Government of Assam, has also emphasised the development of thermal power projects based on coal and natural gas available in the region, which will minimise overdependence on hydropower, particularly during periods when there is lean hydro generation. The corporation has also taken steps to revive the 60-MW Chandrapur Thermal Power Station. Further, in place of the earlier 4x60-MW Bongaigaon Thermal Power Station, the National Thermal Power

Corporation (NTPC) is implementing a new 3x250-MW coal-based Thermal Power Station ("Power Sector", 2012). Therefore, the total power generation capacity of the state is slated to be further increased from that of the existing plants.

Assam receives 6 per cent royalty from Kopili Stage-I and another 6 per cent from the Khandong power station (i.e. 15 MW as royalty), while the APGCL can buy 52.43 per cent during peak hours (5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.) and 53.6 per cent during off-peak hours from the Kopili hydroelectric plant. Besides the existing dams, Assam is expected to receive royalty from only two upcoming projects in Arunachal Pradesh: 1.25 per cent, or 25 MW, from the Lower Subansiri project, since it is located on the borderlands between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh; and another 25 MW from the Kameng project. Meanwhile, Assam can buy 208 MW of power from the Lower Subansiri project. The host state, i.e. Arunachal Pradesh, shall receive 12 per cent free electricity as royalty from all the upcoming projects in the state (Gogoi, 2011, p. 131). As such, whatever the power generated from all the hydro projects that are being planned in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam's share shall be restricted to only 50 MW as royalty. For the rest of its requirement, the state must either buy electricity from Arunachal Pradesh or from the rest of India. But the irony of the situation is that, being a downstream state, Assam will have to bear the consequences of any catastrophe that might arise due to dams located upstream in Arunachal Pradesh. The question to ponder upon is thus: if the power demand of the state can be met from the existing power stations, then what is the need for constructing mega dams? Increasing the capacity of the existing ones and maintaining them properly can be effective enough to cater to the electricity demand of the state.

Reiterating the need for the construction of dams on the Brahmaputra, Himanta Biswa Sarma (present Finance Minister of Assam) focused on the issue of the threat posed to India due to the construction of dams in China. He opined that China's plan to divert water from the Brahmaputra through mega dams can leave the Brahmaputra valley under tremendous water stress, threatening the lives and culture of the people. Pointing to the provisions of the Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International Rivers, Sarma

maintained that, as per Article 14 of the Helsinki Rules, each Basin State is entitled within its territory to a reasonable and equitable share in the beneficial uses of the water of the international drainage basin. Beneficial usage, as per Article 5, implies past utilisation of water of the basin, including existing utilisation. Therefore, unless and until Assam utilises the water of the Brahmaputra either by construction of dams or through irrigation, it cannot approach the International Court of Justice in the case of any international water dispute (Sarma, 2010, p. 42-45). The thrust for economic development and the consideration of hydropower as a clean and renewable source of energy have also added to the tilt towards dam building in the states of North East India.

There has been widespread public disenchantment over the issue of dams in North East India, especially in Assam, due to the perception that the indigenous communities of Assam shall be deprived of the benefits and instead face threats to their environment, livelihoods, and culture. Social activist and adviser to Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), Assam, Akhil Gogoi, challenged the notion that dams bring development and prosperity. He mentioned that the number of people affected by the downstream impacts of dams is approximately 47.2 crore across the world, which is around 6-12 times more than the number of people affected upstream. He further stressed the point that Assam is not a party to the MoUs signed in respect to the dams, even though Assam has to bear the brunt of probable disasters caused by dams upstream (Gogoi, 2010, p. 60-61). The debate around dams has mostly surfaced over the issue of floods occurring due to the sudden release of water from reservoirs. The floods caused by the Ranganadi project in 2008, by the Kopili in 2004, and by the Kurishu dam in 2004 have resulted in the loss of lives and property of people in Assam. Being a biodiversity hotspot, there have also been apprehensions about the loss of endangered species and the precious flora and fauna of the state. But most importantly, the issue that needs utmost attention is dam-induced displacement. Walter Fernandes, former Director of the North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC), mentioned that he is deeply concerned about the dam-induced displacement of the people. To him, the government often gives either nothing or very little compensation to the people who lose their livelihoods

forever (A. J. Das, 2012, p. 5). The voices raised against dams have therefore taken centre stage in the development debates of the region.

The concept of livelihood security does not simply mean a steady flow of income; it encompasses the wider context of ensuring a safe and sustainable environment and the preservation of social and cultural identities. The economy, polity, and society are closely interlinked and collectively responsible for ensuring the livelihood security of the communities. Considering these connections, it is important to understand any development programme through the totality of its impact on the economy, polity, and society of a region–dams are no exception. As an engineering project, the construction of dams creates opportunities for employment for many, directly or indirectly, but at the same time more pertinent issues need to be analysed, such as the loss of lives and property due to the submergence of land and displacement of local communities from their ancestral land, as well as downstream impacts like floods.

The Ecological Burden

In 2004, catastrophic floods lashed the districts of Nagaon and Morigaon in Assam. Out of 140 revenue villages of Kampur circle of Nagaon district, 132 were affected by the floods, with an affected area of 135.12 sq. miles, and 1,92,000 people were temporarily displaced. Four people lost their lives in the floods. The cause of the devastation was attributed to the release of excess water from the Kopili dam. It was reported that the water level of the Khandong reservoir rose to 727.70 metres against the full reservoir level of 719.30 metres on July 18, 2004, which led to the catastrophic disaster. People in the Kampur town, which is located downstream of Kopili dam, were given only two hours to vacate the area and move to nearby relief camps (SANDRP, 2013). In 2008, 22 people lost their lives due to floods triggered by the release of water from the Ranganadi dam, which also inundated large parts of the Lakhimpur district in Assam, especially areas in Nauboicha and Bihpuria (two constituencies of Assam Legislative Assembly). Similarly, in 2004, 31 people were killed and 88,807 families were affected by floods caused by the release of water from the Kurishu dam located in Bhutan, which also destroyed 6,415 houses in Barpeta district and 3,304 houses in Baksa district of Assam, apart from submerging 21 km of protected area in

the Manas National Park (Gogoi, 2010, p. 61). The release of excess water from the Doyang dam in Nagaland on July 27, 2018, led to a sudden rise in the water levels of the Dhansiri and Doyang rivers, triggering floods in the Golaghat district of Assam, submerging over 90 villages, affecting a population of over 93,000, and damaging vast areas of paddy fields and houses. Floodwaters also damaged a bridge, which disrupted communication in the district ("Govt Urged", 2018, p. 8). These incidents serve as a reminder of the destruction that dams can cause irrespective of the many benefits they bring to the people. Lives and livelihoods are lost, crops are destroyed, and people are left homeless for weeks and months without proper food, housing, and sanitation facilities. There is the loss of food security, health security, and physical security along with cultural and spiritual security, which are crucial components of livelihood security. A former Chief Minister of Assam, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, made a call attention motion in the Assam Legislative Assembly on November 8, 2010, on the issue of flash floods in the Kopili, holding NEEPCO responsible for the damage caused. The then Water Resource Minister, Prithvi Majhi, assured in his reply that the government would take up the matter of providing prior warning before the release of excess water with the NEEPCO authorities (SANDRP, 2013). Prior warning is generally being used as a mitigation approach by the concerned authorities before the release of excess water from dams. However, prior warning alone cannot be used as an effective solution to a larger problem, and this 'mitigation'-based approach needs a complete overhaul.

Being in a seismic zone, the Brahmaputra valley is prone to earthquakes, which is a cause of concern because of the number of dams proposed and under construction in the region. Besides, Assam is considered as a biodiversity hotspot and home to diverse wildlife species, including the world-famous one-horned rhino, elephants, tigers, wild buffaloes, pygmy hog, golden langur, hoolock gibbon, swamp deer, wild water buffaloes, and Gangetic river dolphins. The state is also home to diverse and rich forest resources. From tropical wet evergreen forests characterised by trees like hollong (Dipterocarpusmacrocarpus), gurjan (D. tubinatus), mekai (Shoreaassamica), nahor (Mesuaferrea), etc., to tropical semi-evergreen forests and tropical moist deciduous forests characterised by sal (Shorearobusta) trees and others, as

well as grasslands, Assam is home to diverse species of flora and fauna. Around 230 species and sub-species of mammals, about 958 species and sub-species of birds (including a large number of migratory birds), and 187 species of reptiles are found in Assam (Choudhury, 2001, p. 68-72). The destruction of such a natural habitat either through submergence or inundation due to development activities like dams is a serious threat to biodiversity conservation. Changes occurring in a riverine system due to the construction of dams would drastically affect the wetland ecosystems, particularly the beels (wetlands) and those whose livelihoods depend on them. Dams cause significant changes in river hydrology, sediment load, and riparian vegetation, leading to the destruction of riverine fisheries. Cultivation and fishing are two major forms of occupation for the people in the valley. People belonging to the economically weak sections of the society directly benefit from fishing not only as a major source of livelihood but also as a major source of their protein requirements. It has been reported that fish having high food value, such as Tor putitora, Ttor (Mahseer or Pithia), Neolissochilushexagonolepis (Boka), Labeodyocheilus (Silghoria), etc.–which prefer the cold water of the upper stretches of a river–would suffer due to the construction of dams (Nath & Roy, 2014, p. 6). In the case of the Lower Subansiri dam, it has been estimated that the water flow in the river in winter will fluctuate on a daily basis from 6 cumecs for around 20 hours (when the water is being stored behind the dam) to 2,560 cumecs for around 4 hours when the water is released for power generation during the peak hours in the evening hours. Thus, the river will be starved for 20 hours and flooded for 4 hours with flows fluctuating between 2 per cent and 600 per cent of normal flows (400 cumecs in winter) daily (Deka, 2010, p. 8). Such fluctuations in the water flow will also take place in the Dibang, Lohit, and Siang rivers, where massive dams are being planned. Flood-induced sand deposition has emerged as another immense cause of concern in the agricultural sector of the state. Dhemaji district, which was once considered as the rice bowl of Assam, has been transformed into a "virtual desert due to sand deposition as a result of flooding from the Himalayan tributaries of the Brahmaputra River"(K. Das, 2012, p. 1). It was reported that "over 11,247 hectares have been rendered unproductive by sand deposition in the district and further,

the net sown area in the district decreased by about 11 per cent (7,689 hectares) and fallow and uncultivated land increased by 35 per cent (8013 hectares) between 1992 and 2004-5" (K. Das, 2012, p. 1). Massive deforestation for development purposes and extraction of boulders from the riverbed in the upstream areas has been held responsible for this phenomenon, among other factors. Local communities have adapted to the natural flow of the river and design their agricultural and other livelihood patterns accordingly. However, dam construction will obstruct such natural harmony achieved over generations upon generations. Low agricultural income will push people, particularly the farmers, towards non-farming activities and other sources of income and livelihood strategies and erode their traditional livelihood practices, bringing a decline in their household income. Such damage isirreversible and irreparable.

Eradication of Social and Cultural Spaces

The environment is not only a physical entity supplying raw materials for human consumption but also an organic system around which communities build their culture, identity, and social and economic practices. One of the major arguments raised regarding dams in Assam is the forced displacement of people from their land and the loss of the 'commons'. The submergence of land–be it agricultural land, forest resources, or pasture land–due to the construction of dams is a major issue having deep social and cultural impacts related directly to the rights and livelihoods of people. The social fabric of Assam reflects profound diversity. The region is home to a large number of ethnic and linguistic groups. A distinctive feature of the society of Assam is the presence of a large number of tribal communities with a complex blend of customs and traditions. However, narratives on tribal and non-tribal society and the economy must be viewed against colonial contact, which has also affected the historiography of North East India. The colonial administrative policies of the separation of the hills and plains areas of the region through policies like the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, which led to the restriction of the movement of people and also property and ownership rights, had a deep impact on the cultural and economic assimilation of the people of the hills and the plains. With the independence

of India, the introduction of specific provisions for the governance of the Tribal Areas of Assam through the Sixth Schedule for safeguarding the religious and social practices, customary laws, and ownership of resources of the tribal communities further intensified the political and cultural divide of the tribal and non-tribal communities, giving rise to a host of issues, like movements for separate 'homelands'. Consideration of these politico-administrative structures of the region is crucial for understanding the benefits and losses accruing from development projects like dams on different categories of people.

Central to almost all tribal communities in Assam is their 'community' structure. Most tribal lands are community-owned, wherein the members of the tribe do not possess individual land ownership, and hence property cannot be registered individually. Resources are owned as Common Property Resources (CPRs). Shifting cultivation is one of the traditional forms of farming practised in the hill areas and plays a crucial role in the livelihood of the people. The implications of losing jhum (shifting cultivation) land due to submergence can be severe, as it could result in the loss of food security and the loss of rights over traditional land. Additionally, settled agriculture may not be a familiar practice. Walter Fernandes and Sanjay Barbora highlighted that the Lower Subansiri dam counted 38 families from two villages and ignored 12 villages that would be submerged by it. These two villages would lose more than 900 hectares of land, but the Indian State does not recognise their jhum cultivation land. Therefore, the compensation package following the 'land for land' formula includes giving one hectare of land per family, bringing the total to 38 hectares, since this is the number of families to be displaced; the land compensation also includes some monetary compensation (2009, p. 3). The Land Acquisition Act, 1894, replaced by the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, enables the state to acquire land for 'public purposes'. These pieces of legislation recognise only individual-owned land, and hence, those dependent on the CPRs are often not counted as displaced.

The absence of a comprehensive land policy together with non-recognition of community land by the individual-based land laws of the Indian State is a serious concern. It facilitates encroachment on tribal land

and the diversion of vast tracts of land for industrial and commercial purposes without proper compensation and rehabilitation. Such instances of the slipping away of land rights from the hands of the indigenous population are likely to perpetuate a situation of impoverishment and also a sense of alienation from traditional land. The Brahmaputra valley is inhabited by many agriculture-based rural communities, with cultivation being the backbone of their livelihood. Many people, especially the poor, depend on the village commons for their sustenance. As such, there is also a large number of people who do not own land but sustain themselves on the land of others by providing services, such as agricultural labourers, daily wage earners, petty merchants, and others. But compensation packages calculate only those displaced by development projects with individual land ownership, excluding all other dependents, who tend to equally lose their livelihood opportunities. In other words, resettlement and rehabilitation packages include only the directly displaced persons and not those who are indirectly displaced. The National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation for Project Affected Families, 2003, gazetted on February 17, 2004, allows for the allocation of a maximum of one hectare of irrigated land and two hectares of unirrigated/ cultivable wasteland to each Project Affected Family owning agricultural land in the affected area and whose entire land has been acquired (Menon, 2009, p. 137). In a region already volatile with ethnic movements, uprooting communities from their traditional lands and settling them in others can also tend to fuel exclusivist tendencies in a heterogeneous society like Assam, marking a departure from social harmony.

Preservation of the cultural, spiritual, religious, and ethnic identity of a region also finds equal space in the contestations against dams. Inherent also is the threat of demographic change of an area. Furthermore, as highlighted by the Expert Committee Recommendations of the Lower Subansiri dam, "floodplain households will face poverty, reduced nutrition status especially for women, children and elderly and forced out-migration" (as cited in Talukdar & Kalita, 2010, p. 21). As in the case of dams in other parts of India like the Sardar Sarovar project or the Hirakud project, the building of dams in Assam or in North East India reeks of the same logic of capitalising on the abundance of water and energy. Submergence and displacement reflect

the threat of eradication of ecological spaces and elimination of cultural and social spaces. The 'politics of erasure' is thus inherent in development policies like dams.

Incongruities in Environment Impact Assessments (EIA)

Under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) have been made compulsory for granting clearances to development projects. EIAs are a key component for granting environmental clearances, and they include the mandatory component of Social Impact Assessments (SIAs). Large dams need to pass through mandatory institutional mechanisms like environmental clearances, forest clearances, and approval from the Standing Committee of the National Board of Wildlife (NBWL) for locations inside or within a 10-km radius of wildlife-protected areas. In the case of North East India, which is rich in biodiversity, the role of EIAs assumes tremendous significance. With the increase in the number of projects earmarked for the infrastructural development of the country, the process for conducting EIAs or granting clearances has come under intense scrutiny. According to Anwaruddin Choudhury, a renowned naturalist, the EIA reports of the proposed hydroelectric power projects in North East India, such as Kameng, Lower Subansiri, Middle Siang, Tipaimukh, and Dibang, fare poorly in the case of wildlife protection (Vagholikar & Das, 2010, p. 5). Glaring miscalculations and incorrect data have been observed in the process. "The EIA for the 1,000 MW Siyom project lists 5 bird species in an area which has over 300 and even in this short list has one which is non-existent; the EIA for the 600 MW Kameng project reclassifies carnivores such as the red panda, pangolins and porcupines as herbivores; the EIA for the 2,000 MW Lower Subansiri lists 55 species of fish in a river which has at least 156…"(Vagholikar & Das, 2010, p. 5). With respect to calculating submergence, displacement, and resettlement and rehabilitation, the EIA reports are also found to be faulty. The EIA report of the Lower Subansiri project does not include the impact of submergence on jhum cycles in the affected zone. The EIA of the Siyom project does not include compensation for the loss of jhum land (Menon, 2009, p. 133-136). Another common practice is the outsourcing of these studies to private companies like

WAPCOS and others. Many of these reports even lack essential components like cumulative impact assessment, biodiversity impact assessment, etc., and in some cases, it has been found that the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) simply asks the developers to give reformulated proposals ("Environment Panel", 2013).

Another trend noticed is the hasty manner of granting clearances to projects. In the aftermath of China announcing its plan to construct three more hydroelectric projects on the Brahmaputra river, the MoEF granted clearance to the 800-MW Tawang II hydropower project in Arunachal Pradesh and the 520-MW Teesta IV hydroelectric power project in Sikkim, the clearances of which had been pending for a long time ("Tawang II", 2013). Most downstream impact studies under EIA are restricted up to 10 km from the project site, which means that there will be little downstream impact on Assam due to the proposed hydro projects in Arunachal Pradesh. However, experience from the Kopili and the Ranganadi projects prove otherwise. It was found that:

> [the]impact of sedimentation was visible almost 100 km downstream of the Ranganadi dam in the form of decrease in fish population affecting the fishing community although downstream impact studies were not undertaken in case of the Ranganadi dam. Impacts were also felt downstream of the dam due to diversion of water from the Ranganadi to the Dikrong river. (Menon, 2009, p. 131-132)

Akhil Gogoi remarks that in most of the proposed dams in Arunachal Pradesh, like the 3,000-MW Dibang project, the 2,700-MW Lower Siang, or the 1,750-MW Demwe project, clearances were obtained without downstream impact studies, which were later carried out only to maintain formality. Furthermore, prior, full, and informed consent of project-affected persons, which is a pre-requisite for any development project, has not been obtained from people in downstream Assam for the upstream projects in Arunachal Pradesh, despite numerous pleas for holding public consultations (Gogoi, 2011, p. 133-135). Such instances indicate that institutional mechanisms like EIAs cannot reflect the absolute nature of the environmental and social impacts of the dams, which are inter-dependent and manifest in multiple ways. The surge

towards hydropower projects in North East India invalidates the perceived threats of such projects in downstream states like Assam, which has little to gain. The social and cultural issues of a diverse region like Assam need to be incorporated into the State's development policies alongside environmental dimensions. Greater privatisation in execution of the processes involved leads to neglect of crucial aspects of ecology and livelihoods. Transparency, accountability, and appropriate development strategies for a politically, socially, culturally, and ecologically sensitive area like Assam require urgent attention.

Conclusion

Dams in Assam and other states of North East India are projected as emblems of development of the region, which is portrayed as a virgin area to be explored and utilised for the betterment of humankind. The river Brahmaputra offers lucrative opportunities in this journey of water, being measured in economic terms through its huge untapped hydropower potential. The initial rationale for dams–flood moderation for a region ravaged by annual floods bringing despair to the peasant economy–was transformed into the model of a future storehouse of hydropower. The representation of rivers as a 'resource' endows upon the State an assumption of a 'regulatory' role to control the river. The 'menaces' of flood and erosion are sought to be 'rectified' and 'remedied' through dams. Massive people's movements against these mega structures have also been launched. Conflict over water is a matter of rights rather than an issue of development alone. Rivers not only connect countries or states but also integrate society. Long-term water resource management needs concerted and coordinated efforts to achieve the goals of flood management, irrigation, hydropower generation, or navigation. Piecemeal interventions focused only on engineered structures like dams, which impinge on the communities' rights to resources as well as create conditions for ecological damage, can lead to the political, economic, and cultural alienation of people doubly dispossessed by displacement, and insufficient resettlement and rehabilitation programmes. An integrated approach keeping in mind the *societal, economic,* and *political* aspects of a highly heterogeneous region like Assam is required, along with a broad-based plan to usher in progress and prosperity combined with elements of sustainability.

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Endnotes :

[1] A river in Roing, Lower Dibang valley district, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

[2] Name not disclosed to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

[3] The river originates in the Tibetan plateau in the Kailash range of the Himalayas, where it is known by the name of Yarlung Tsangpo; flows eastward through China for about 700 miles (1126.541 km approx) and turns northeast and makes the Great Bend; then enters India through Arunachal Pradesh, where it is known as the Siang/Dihang; then enters the plains of Assam, where it takes the name of the Brahmaputra; and flows through Bangladesh with the name of Jamuna, before merging with the Bay of Bengal.

[4] Composed by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, the song reiterates that the university will rekindle the bank of Luit, i.e. Brahmaputra, by dismantling the embankments of darkness.

‘PICKLED’ INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY: LOCATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN NORTHEAST INDIA’S INFRASTRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman

‘Pickled’ Roads and Connectivity. The road between Tezu, in Lohit district and Roing, in Lower Dibang Valley district, of Eastern Arunachal Pradesh. (Photo by Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman.)

'Pickled' infrastructure and connectivity in Northeast India

The distant rumblings of a raging thunderstorm in this far-eastern corner of Arunachal Pradesh, nestled in the Eastern Himalayas, were drawing to a

close by early morning. As we were driving from Tezu, the headquarters of the Lohit district, making our way to Roing, the headquarters of the Lower Dibang Valley district, the ravages of the storm from the earlier night was evident. The wide, freshly minted road through the undulating forests was covered in layers of fallen leaves and broken branches of trees, almost making a beautiful carpet. This was a new road alignment cut through the forests, a harbinger of connectivity between the two district capitals, built under the Trans-Arunachal Highway project, envisioned by planners of the central government in New Delhi to provide internal connectivity in Arunachal Pradesh, various parts of which were for decades connected by an arterial network of roads crisscrossing through Assam.

It was still weeks to go before the monsoon of 2016, and after driving for 40 minutes from Tezu, we had to stop at the yet-unfinished bridge over the Diffo river. While assessing if we could take our vehicle through the temporary arrangement underneath the bridge–a platform thrown together from metal and wood over the main channel of the river–two young men arrived on their car. The water level had risen considerably from the rains last night, and there were now multiple channels of the river, which had to be crossed under the unfinished bridge, apart from the main channel. The men were from Roing, both from the Idu-Mishmi community, travelling back from Tezu after attending a marriage. After a quick assessment of the river water, they decided to return and take the old road through Sadiya in Assam, advising us to follow the same.

It was only about 30 minutes' drive from across the bridge to Roing, but now we had to make a turn, drive back almost all the way to Tezu, take a narrow rickety state public works department (PWD) maintained road through to Sadiya, cross an inter-province border check-gate to enter Assam, drive for about 40 minutes in Assam, and cross another inter-province border check-gate to enter Arunachal Pradesh, and then finally reach Roing after about three hours in total. We caught up again with the two young men at a tea stall on the way, and struck up a conversation. One of them emphatically declared in Hindi, 'Iss raaste ka achhar banake rakh dena chahiye, koi kaamka nahi hai' (we should make pickles of these roads and keep them, they are of no use), clearly underlining his frustration at having to make the long journey

back to Roing. His statement instantly struck me, of how we in the region loved to make pickles out of items we had less use of at present.

The art of making pickles is not new to people of Northeast India, and we make it out of every possible thing we eat. It also rings true of the rush of infrastructure projects we have seen in the region over the past decade. It has definitely at one level created a lot of physical connectivity infrastructure in the form of bridges and roads, which the government has portrayed as its successes, but has not been able to take forward simultaneously the region's social infrastructure priorities/needs. It is in context of the (in)ability of local communities to meaningfully use built physical infrastructure, and their participation in decision-making on such infrastructural development aspects, that 'pickled' infrastructure and connectivity is used as a metaphor. It denotes future or intermittent use of built physical infrastructure and connectivity, hence, is 'pickled'.

'Pickled' infrastructure and connectivity within the Nation-State container

The world that we live in modern times is compartmentalised into states and regions, and territorial borders are the defining characteristics of such compartmentalisation (Newman 2010). Political map-making in the modern nation-state system depict nation-states as confined to fixed drawn lines of territory, to such an extent that they seem to be 'natural' formations (Anderson 1995). Nation-states have been described as a container in terms of territoriality (Taylor 1994), as 'bordered power containers' (Giddens 1985), lending context to territorial border fixities, to the 'nation-state container'. It is within this nation-state container, where the rush of infrastructure development and connectivity projects are being executed by New Delhi in Northeast India. The boxed-in external borders are hard in nature, given the past history of insurgency and ethnic conflict in Northeast India.[1]

After the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the emergence of globalisation and its challenge to territorial sovereignty of nation-states around the world has been the pivot of international relations, cross-border flows and exchanges. Over time, the practice of geopolitics has been closely associated with the territorialisation of political space, building and performing states as

definitive bounded territories, constructing domestic order through different methods of government, constituting the 'international' as the 'inter-state' (Moisio and Paasi 2016). New Delhi initiated its Look/Act East Policy in the early 1990s, deployed it in Northeast India by 2004-05 as a driver of infrastructure development and connectivity projects, with a promise of opening up the region as a springboard to Southeast Asia along the continental route .[2]

The complexity of the layered flavours of 'pickled' infrastructure and connectivity in Northeast India lies within the nation-state container characterised by hard external borders, primarily based on the decades-long and continuing security dilemma of New Delhi over its borderlands. At one level, a lot of built infrastructures are evident within the nation-state container in Northeast India, which is fragmented and piecemeal in nature, without a grand connecting vision or critical mass internally. At another level, the promise of opening up Northeast India through the Look/Act East Policy has not gained meaningful traction on the ground, with selective and controlled opening-up,[3] intermittent grand car rallies, with very little people-

The pace of life in rural Arunachal Pradesh, where local people use such bamboo suspension bridges to connect from their remote villages to the main road. (Photo by Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman.)

to-people connectivity. This lag in opening-up adds to the overall sense of 'pickled' infrastructure and connectivity.

The visibility of built infrastructure such as roads and bridges by the borderland communities of Northeast India makes for their strong imaginations of connectivity, both within and across the borders of the nation-state container. It is not that the borderland communities do not see or understand the future promise of built infrastructure and connectivity; however, they also realise that they live in a long shadow of infrastructure and connectivity to be meaningfully utilised by them, the impacts in their daily life, the sheer futility for the time-being, and hence the sense of 'pickled' infrastructure and connectivity. The potential and long shadow of the infrastructure built and connectivity promised to the borderland communities looms large and somewhat unpredictable in the horizon, wrapped in speculation, 'pickled' in the nation-state container.

Unpacking and scaffolding Northeast India: Making sense of infrastructuring

Moving away from the broad-brushed nature of engagement of India's Look East/Act East Policy with Northeast India, and the accompanying infrastructure development push in the past decade, it is pertinent to examine the role and positioning of states that constitute the region of Northeast India, in the larger development and connectivity discourse. This will enable understanding of the nature, strength and weaknesses of the intra-Northeast social, economic, political and institutional scaffolding that the Look East/ Act East Policy needs to take into account to make infrastructure meaningful, participative and sustainable for communities across the region. New Delhi simply cannot hope to join A and B together with bridges and roads and hope that such built infrastructure will talk to communities automatically, and ensure peace, progress and prosperity in Northeast India.

The core questions that provinces and communities in Northeast India face are related with the reconciliation of different trajectories of socio-economic growth and indicators from past development to minimise the impact of big infrastructural interventions and the conflict that it can create. An example of this is the ecological conflict owing to large hydropower

infrastructure planned for the region, accompanied by weak social and environmental impact assessment standards and practices. Such reconciliation of inequality will require robust social-economic, political and institutional scaffolding, which will prepare communities to be able to meaningfully participate in the gains from any large scale infrastructural development and connectivity that grand visions of Look East/Act East Policy brings to Northeast India. Community participation in the decision-making process, importance accorded to traditional knowledge systems and community institutions, and its capacity building to be able to absorb the benefits of such infrastructure development is the necessary social scaffolding to ensure sustainable development.

Infrastructure development in Northeast India without proper socio-economic, political and institutional scaffolding can lead to creating potential chokepoints, where local communities are unable to participate meaningfully and sustainably, instead of the mandated vision of promoting connectivity. The mandated vision is of connecting Northeast India to Southeast Asia through the continental route and beyond, words such as 'springboard' and 'bridgehead' have been used to describe the connectivity vision for the larger region, however a meaningful opening-up is not yet seen on the ground. The pattern of development through the mindless and rushed sense of infrastructure creation in the region are already having social and environmental concerns and impact in many parts of Northeast India, for instance the Kaladan Multimodal Transport and Transit Project in Mizoram, Trans-Arunachal Highway project in Arunachal Pradesh and Dhola-Sadiya bridge over the Lohit river in Assam. The new trajectories of development in Northeast India can create newer layers of conflicts, as communities try to grapple with them.[4]

We all seem to know what physical road infrastructures are and what they do. They are meant for connecting spaces, ensure mobility, and are seemingly innocuous, but can easily take many trajectories and can indeed have surprising effects and histories. It is important to look at the systemic efforts of governments to stabilise the symbolic logic of infrastructure (Larkin 2008), and analyse the deployment of such infrastructure as modes of control, rule, accumulation politics, resource extraction and even underlining territorial presence within the nation-state container.[5] The manner and method of

infrastructure development and connectivity can bring intended and unintended outcomes for communities in Northeast India, given the contrasting frames through which the symbolic logic of infrastructure is deployed in the region.

Infrastructuring Northeast India through the symbolic logic of national security

The invoking of national security by New Delhi in the infrastructural development discourse in Northeast India makes for the framing of the frontier region as an essentially strategic space in the larger national imagination. Northeast India is seen primarily as a national security and strategic geography, which is in direct contestation with the socio-spatial sacred geography consciousness of communities inhabiting this space. The strategic construction of Northeast India as a national security dominated space versus the social construction of spaces in Northeast India by the communities characterises the clash of logics in the process of infrastructuring Northeast India's frontier spaces. Infrastructure development for national security goals is an attempt towards the coupling of community spaces within Northeast India. This is evidenced

The road to India-Myanmar border, the Stilwell Road. Connectivity aspirations of local communities remain confined well within the nation-state box. (Photo by Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman.)

by the central government's urgency to rush through large infrastructure projects, both roads and hydropower dams, projected as potentially transforming Northeast India's economy, but at the same time have the potential to disrupt the sensitive ecology and social fabric of Northeast India.

Such coupling of community spaces brings forward the coupling of unequal spaces within Northeast India, which makes communities vulnerable to the intended and unintended effects of such linking, especially when such community spaces include common resources such as forests, rivers and sacred ecology. The national security discourse is deployed to push through infrastructural interventions in frontier areas of Northeast India, which includes road projects and hydropower dam projects which are in a military and exploitative scale, and communities fail to grasp fully the implications such grand scales of infrastructural intervention in their relatively smaller and traditionally sustainable spaces. The terms of reference for such scales to be deployed is not based upon a community participative process of decision-making. The environmental and social impact assessments of large infrastructure projects are seen as hurriedly done and without proper social and scientific data being collected; and when local communities raise objections, the national security logic is employed by the government, even branding protestors as anti-national.

The invoking of the national security discourse essentially means that the community is expected to undertake significant risks[6] to their socio-spatial and sacred spaces, forego a process of democratic decision-making on the parameters, terms of reference, equity, sustainability and the scale of infrastructural interventions. This is directly linked to a larger sense of democratic deficit that characterises the space of Northeast India and its communities within the larger national space of India. Northeast India sends a cumulative total of 25 members to the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament of India; the province of Assam alone sends 14 of them. None of the other seven states that comprise Northeast India sends more than two members, and this reflects a sense of democratic deficit for communities in the region. Additionally, the elected representatives are seen as fragmented politically within Northeast India, enabling New Delhi to employ the classic

colonial strategy of divide and rule, affecting consensus on issues related to ecology, livelihood and in regional policy institutions such as the North Eastern Council (NEC).

The social impact assessment and the environmental impact assessment processes in the context of infrastructural interventions in Northeast India are not done in a manner, which regulates the social and environmental costs and risks that these might bring to communities involved. The bypassing of such assessments are done in a two-pronged strategy by the government departments, one by invoking national security, which necessitates the urgency of the infrastructural intervention, and the other urgency being deployed as necessary to fulfil on a fast-track basis the development lag that Northeast India has seen over the decades. This has the effect of pitting one community against the other, one province against the other within Northeast India, and in the process takes forward the symbolic logic of infrastructure through national security, without framing a sustainable engagement policy with the communities. The infrastructure is meant towards coupling of spaces within Northeast India, but the cumulative impact assessment of such coupling is thus bypassed, and not even seen as a necessary condition.

What, where and when of infrastructure and connectivity?

Northeast India has been infrastructure-deficient for many decades following India's Independence, and bureaucrats sitting in New Delhi largely determined the content and nature of infrastructure in the region, and local community consultations were never the norm. It was a frontier region to be administered and there was a sense of trust deficit between New Delhi and local communities. It was the conflict with China in 1962 that forced India to take greater notice of the significance of the Northeast as a critical frontier in its national security calculations. Chinese troops had advanced as far as Tezpur in Assam and India was clearly on the defensive regarding critical infrastructure required for faster troop deployment. After the war was over, India pushed towards building a basic level artery system of roads and military infrastructure on its borders.

At the same time, however, New Delhi was wary of developing a strong infrastructural presence in Arunachal Pradesh and, till the end of the past

decade, followed a deliberate policy of continuing to neglect the development of Arunachal Pradesh and parts of the upper banks of the Brahmaputra in Assam, lest Chinese troops roll down the hills again (Verghese 2012). The roads built immediately after the 1962 war and in subsequent times were only targeted at cosmetic development and geared towards meeting India's troop deployment needs. It was never going to be enough for the genuine development of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, and it was not meant for purposes of cross-border trade. It is evident now in the closed border policy with China, and the defunct Stilwell Road. Even for the targeted troop deployment purpose, India clearly lagged China (Pandit 2009) as the latter made rapid strides in building infrastructure all along its critical border areas, especially in Tibet (Chansoria 2011), in sync with its Western Development Strategy through the 1990s, developing roads and hydropower dams.

The sense of infrastructural scrambling by New Delhi in Northeast India happened around the year 2008, when the Trans-Arunachal Highway project, Kaladan Multi-Modal Trade and Transit project in Mizoram, and Dhola-Sadiya bridge project in Assam were announced/ initiated. Rippa et al (2019) discusses Star and Ruhleder's (1996) concept of the 'when' of infrastructure, which posits that infrastructure is a fundamentally relational concept and emerges for people in practice, connected to their daily activities. The content of infrastructure is important, so is its use by the people in their daily life. The rush of physical infrastructure and connectivity projects in Northeast India without adequate social infrastructure and the capacity for the local people to use them keeps them 'pickled'.

The power of infrastructure to achieve political aims (Larkin 2013), and the multi-temporality, in terms of spectacular profiles and discursive power, that the striking visibility of built and planned infrastructure and connectivity projects implies (Rippa et al. 2019) explain and underline the symbolic logic of infrastructure being pushed by New Delhi in Northeast India. The image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as he walks alone along the Dhola-Sadiya bridge during its inauguration in May 2017, patting the railings of the bridge is the spectacular profile and discursive power of the infrastructure that is leveraged for political aims. However, a compartmentalised view of physical infrastructure and connectivity by New

Delhi, and inability to use local communities as cultural connectors,[7] defeats the symbolism.

The linear and meanders of infrastructure and connectivity

The symbolic logic of infrastructure in Northeast India is not to be seen in an overtly simplistic 'linear' manner of peace progressing to prosperity. It has to essentially 'meander' the social, political, ethnic, economic, cultural, physical and ecological landscape of Northeast India, in order to make meaningful and sustainable connections with and across communities inhabiting this diverse frontier region. The understanding of meandering pathways to peace, progress and prosperity comes from the idea of imitating the natural geographical patterns of the many rivers in the region, which fits in to the traditional worldview and understanding of communities living and moving along meandering rivers from time immemorial. Infrastructure development therefore needs to be organically linked and understood by communities.

The intense scrambling for infrastructure and connectivity projects in Northeast India can be explained by the term 'hyperstructures' (Rippa et al. 2019), which is infrastructure associated with a scale and symbolism that exceeds their economic rationality (ibid). In the context of Northeast India, local communities are unable to use such 'hyperstructures' meaningfully, at present kept 'pickled', accompanied by a sheer incalculability of social and environmental costs and risks of such projects. The symbolic logic of infrastructure pushed by the government in Northeast India in terms of protecting the nation-state container from external threats helps promote a speculative logic of infrastructure,[8] directed at creating newer sites and reinforcing old sites of accumulation politics and resource extraction within the nation-state container.

Therefore, the meandering pathways of peace, reconciliation and development is what I invoke to help understand the dynamics of infrastructure and connectivity in Northeast India, which is not homogeneous in nature but has many overlapping facets of interaction and is largely interdependent. The interconnectedness and the diverse ethnic claims, contestations and development aspirations of communities in Northeast

The vehicles neatly lined up by the Tai-Khamti youth across the road to Chowkham, enforcing the road blockade during the anti-PRC protests, February 2019. (Photo by Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman.)

India, require an understanding of the conflict dynamics, political, social, economic and ecological. A concerted, coherent and connected vision of peace, progress and prosperity for the entire region cannot be achieved in a piecemeal, symbolic and speculative manner. The inability towards addressing inequality and sustainability aspects leads to a sense of infrastructural chaos and futility in developing the region.

As we drive along the same road in February 2019, this time going from Tezu to Roing, the construction of the bridge over the Diffo river is finally complete.[9] However, there are few vehicles on the roads, and long stretches of the road wear a deserted look. As we move towards Chowkham, crossing the newly-constructed Alubari bridge over the Lohit river, a group of local Tai-Khamti youth block the road, on account of their anti-Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC) protests.[10] I ask the protestors if they work in shifts to blockade the road over two long days, they laughingly point out that earlier they had to simply squat in the middle of the narrow road to ensure the blockade, now they also have to line up vehicles across the wide road. As we turn around to take the long old road back through Tezu via Parshuram Kund and Wakro towards Chowkham, the taste of 'pickled' roads linger.

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[4] For more on this, please see Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman, 'Bridges and Roads in Northeast India may drive small tribes away from development', *The Conversation*, 6 June 2017. URL: https://theconversation.com/bridges-and-roads-in-north-east-india-may-drive-small-tribes-away-from-development-78636

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[8] For more on the speculative logic of infrastructure development in the context of Northeast India, please see Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman, 'A Speculative River: Why Communities along Brahmaputra need much more research-backed information', Scroll, 18 October 2018. URL: https://scroll.in/article/894189/a-speculative-river-why-communities-along-brahmaputra-need-much-more-research-backed-information

[9] The bridge of the Diffo river is 426.60 mts long, just under half a kilometre long, and the construction started in March 2011 and completed in December 2018, taking a long 7 years 9 months.

[10] For more on the anti-Permanent Residence Certificate protests in Arunachal Pradesh, please see Arunabh Saikia, 'What is behind the violent protests in Arunachal Pradesh?' *Scroll*, 25 February 2019. URL: https://scroll.in/article/910254/arunachal-pradesh-hit-by-economic-blockade-as-six-minority-groups-demand-permanent-resident-status

WOMEN AND THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF CITIZENS IN ASSAM: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROCESSES INVOLVED, AND A LOST OPPORTUNITY

Manorama Sharma

The process of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for the state of Assam has galvanized the public space in the state, with a plethora of debates centring around myriad issues like the legal processes, the politics surrounding the entire history of the register, and questions of identity, to say the least. The pivotal point in all of this, however, is the question of citizenship– who is or can be a citizen, and who is not or cannot be a citizen? The question of citizenship, however, is not just a matter to be viewed only from the legal perspective in the larger constitutional framework. It is important to begin with the idea that we live in gendered realities; therefore, there are no gender-neutral concepts, which includes the concept of citizenship as well. In the ongoing wider discussions around citizenship, it is more or less accepted that "citizenship is an essentially contested concept, and as such is capable of both garnering and generating a range of meanings, which make it intelligible in specific contexts".[1] As Anupama Roy very lucidly argues, intelligibility has to be understood in the context of the distinct meanings that a concept "convey(s) within a distinct set of historically situated social relations".[2] This is the reason why citizenship is a contested concept, because all of its aspects, beginning from its political ramifications to the kind of society that is ideally desirable and practically achievable, have always been highly debated, which has kept

this very ancient concept alive in the intellectual and scholarly world. It is this contested nature that "underlines the importance of a sustained feminist analysis of the meaning, limitations and potential of the notion of citizenship".[3]

The intellectual debate on citizenship has gone through a very long and torturous process of claims, counter-claims, and agreements and disagreements. It is not the purpose of this paper to go into an in-depth discussion of all of the strains of this debate. What will be attempted is to present very briefly the salient trends of those discussions in order to present a comprehensible interrogation of the emerging feminist scholarship on citizenship. When we raise the question of what we understand by citizenship, one of the most referenced views is that of T. H. Marshall, the British sociologist, who held that citizenship is a "status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed".[4] This status includes civil, political, and social rights and obligations. In this, both the legal rules of the state, which determine the relations between the state and the individual, and the social relations between individuals within the community are involved. The Marshallian approach to citizenship therefore has elements of the two major approaches to citizenship–the classical liberal and the civic republican. The former strain would limit citizenship to "the formal (negative) civil and political rights necessary to protect individual freedom"[5] but would also include some of the Marshallian traditions, like social rights, which are required to promote the idea of freedom. The latter strain views citizens as active participants in political and civic affairs and expects the participation of citizens in paid work or voluntary services. Scholars like Rajiv Bhargava have thus differentiated citizenship into two categories based on the above two approaches. The first category he calls the passive citizens, who receive certain benefits from the state like the right to protection and access to basic necessities and liberties. A passive citizen rarely plays a role in the public sphere and has a private sphere which is granted and protected by the state. The second category is the active citizen, who in addition to receiving rights from the state is also actively involved in making decisions about the distribution of rights, burdens, and obligations, as well as the sharing of collective benefits and burdens. Bhargava holds that active citizens are indispensible for maintaining a lively public space. He goes

on to add that although the entitlements of citizenship are available to all, they are very unevenly distributed.[6] In this context, Kymlicka and Norman, who can be credited with bringing back the relevance of the concept of citizenship through their 1994 article on citizenship, point out that among the dominant views on citizenship in political theory, the core idea rests on the possession of rights.[7] Other scholars have also argued that the consideration of power cannot be kept out of a discussion on citizenship, because rights are, after all, related to resources, and obligations have to be determined in a social context. Expanding on the liberal citizenship approach, scholars have pointed out that this trend views all individuals as having equal status, equal rights, and equal duties, and it does not provide space to address the issue of underlying inequalities in the context of gender, ethnicity, and class/caste.[8] It has to be stated here that in both of the dominant approaches to citizenship, the element of the social context is very clearly present; therefore, inequalities of various types in the social milieu, particularly the gendered nature of that social reality, have to be addressed. As Anupama Roy has shown in her writings on citizenship, "the egalitarian promise of citizenship, in order to envelope every single individual, has to be consummated also in the social domain".[9] It is in this area of social rights that Marshall realised that there was an inevitable, imminent conflict emerging in the capitalist world between the profit motives of the market economy and the demand for the equality of citizens in the social domain. Marshall therefore pointed out these contradictions between capitalism and citizenship. As Roy has discussed, it was John Rawls who addressed these contradictory pulls in A Theory of Justice (1971) and in Political Liberalism (1993). To quote Roy,

> "Generally speaking, Rawls's citizens are free and equal members of a constitutional democracy, each with his/her distinctive conception of good. In order to pursue these goods they need the same primary goods, that is the same basic rights, liberties, and opportunities as well as the...means such as income wealth and some basic self respect".[10]

Rawls therefore holds that in the ideal situation, all of these goods should be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution works in the advantage of the least favoured.

Without going into a detailed critique of Rawls's theoretical dispositions, it will be pertinent here to point out that the critics of liberal citizenship, which include those on the left, feminists, communitarians, and the multiculturalists, have all drawn attention to the contradictions between citizenship and a market-driven society in the age of capitalism. Feminists have particularly critiqued this idea of citizenship as being against the interests of women, because by not giving due importance to the social inequalities of gendered reality, the patriarchal notions that govern societies have been downplayed. Further, the public/private divide that has been a pivot of the theoretical debates on rights and obligations regarding citizenship needs questioning, because this division into two spheres has equated the private with the domestic, and it has been historically accepted that women belong to the second realm. An understanding of these aspects of the concept of citizenship becomes even more relevant when an exercise like the updating of a register of citizens takes place, and there perhaps is a great need for a debate on the various differential dimensions of the concept of citizenship in the context of the changed and changing milieu of the social and legal realities of today. However, we seem to have lost that opportunity to have another look at the concept of citizenship in India, because no visible intellectual exercise took place before the modus operandi of the NRC was decided!

There have been various criticisms of these dominant approaches from diverse ideological and theoretical positions. Our concern here is to focus on the feminist critique, which has sought to question some of the major concerns of the citizenship debate. Gurpreet Mahajan,[11] Anupama Roy, and Ruth Lister, among many other feminist scholars, have posed this critique in the context of the masculine nature of the historical evolution of the concept, the public/private divide on which the concept is largely based, and the new forms of "gradational or hierarchical" features of citizenship. Ruth Lister, for instance, builds her perspective on the basis of two questions that she raises. To quote her:

> [w]hether a concept, originally predicated on the very exclusion of women can be reformulated so as satisfactorily to include (and not simply) append them; and in doing so, whether it can give full recognition to the different and shifting identities which women

> simultaneously hold. In other words, is the very idea of a 'woman-friendly citizenship' contradictory both because citizenship is inherently woman-unfriendly and because the category 'woman' itself represents a false universalism which replicates that of traditional constructions of citizenship?" [12]

Since she has written a whole book on the subject, she has shown through a very detailed discussion of the various dimensions of the theoretical paradigms of citizenship that despite the very 'masculinity' of the idea of citizenship, it is possible to "conceive of a woman-friendly conceptualization of citizenship at both the theoretical and policy levels".[13] In fact, she premises herself on this fundamental idea that a reformulated, woman-friendly perception of citizenship can indeed provide a theoretical formulation to analyse women's subordination and also become a powerful political weapon to fight against it. Arguing for a feminist critique of citizenship from a socio-historical dimension, Anupama Roy has shown that the public/private distinction was necessary for assertion of the liberal approach to citizenship, because the individual had to be established as an autonomous citizen enjoying rights and discharging obligations. Unfortunately, this idea of separate spheres also resulted in the identification of the private with the domestic.[14] Gurpreet Mahajan strengthens this argument by showing that the relegation of women to the private/domestic domain has been one of the main ways to render women subordinate, and since both the public and the private are hegemonised by patriarchy, it is important to recognise that hegemony and challenge it in both the spheres.[15] Other scholars have also argued along similar lines to conclude that the public/private differentiation has been used to mystify the autonomous position of women in society and, thus, present them as politically irrelevant. Picking up the threads of this discourse, R. Grant has taken the debate back to the state of nature theory of Hobbes and Rousseau. Both have presented the state of nature in very masculine terms, in which women did not occupy a space. Hobbes talks of the "aggressive man" and Rousseau of the "man of reason", and the organised society came into being in the process of historical evolution from one to the other. As women were not a part of this process, they were also not a part of the organised society and remained excluded from nature. These presumptions of the social contract

theories later became the foundational planks for the dominant citizenship theories.[16] This argument is carried further by Anupama Roy in her work *Gendered Citizenship: Historical and Conceptual Explorations*. She writes:

> Feminists of all strands... argue that first of all citizenship is gender blind. By focussing on uniform and equal application, it fails to take cognisance of the fact that modern societies are steeped in patriarchal traditions, which make for male domination and privileges...The discursive practices surrounding the notion of citizenship have produced dichotomies where the space of citizenship became increasingly identified with male and public activities...[17]

She goes on to say that the pervasiveness of gender blindness in citizenship theories has led to the construction of a major narrative of the gradual unfolding of and universalisation of rights only by pushing women to the margins and presenting them as anomalies in history. "Thus Marshall's paradigm of the evolution of rights of citizenship could retain its coherence only by citing women as aberrations in the general trend".[18]

The above brief discussion on the general approaches to understanding citizenship and the critiques of such approaches, particularly from the feminist perspectives, has been presented to bring home the point that citizenship is not a static concept; therefore, it needs to be debated again and again in all societies as societal realities change, and accordingly, there must be continuous alignments and re-alignments in the various institutional structures of a society (the legal, the political, the economic, etc.). For instance, the socio-political realities in India in the immediate aftermath of the end to colonial rule, which specified the citizenship discourses in the making of the Constitution, required the framers of the Indian Constitution to adopt certain theoretical and practical positions that could meet the exigencies of the time.[19] At that point in time, in 1947, the approaches to gender issues and the debates thereon were not as much at the centre of social concerns, as we see them emerging from the decades of the 1970s. The idea of citizenship at that point in time was incorporated into the belief that if the Constitution guaranteed rights and obligations irrespective of caste, creed, religion, or sex, social justice would be done to all, as Rawls later had desired of citizenship. The dominant idea of citizenship at that point in time was largely shaped by the liberal approach

and was of the Marshallian paradigmatic order. The inherent gender inequalities in society were not a part of the wider public knowledge, as they gradually came to be. But by the 1970s, there were marked changes in social realities, in intellectual discourses, and also in levels of social consciousness among different sections of people–the youth, farmers and peasants, workers, middle class men and women, and the like. It was at this juncture in 1971 that the Indian government set up a Committee on the Status of Women in India to conduct a comprehensive review of the rights and status of women in India against the backdrop of the Constitutional guarantees, which had been made available for women. This action was actually in response to the constant reminders from the United Nations to the Indian government to prepare a report on the status of women in the country in preparation for the International Women's year gathering scheduled for 1975. Even then, these reminders would perhaps not have borne fruit if the then minister for social welfare, Phulrenu Guha, had not insisted on getting the report prepared. The mandate of the committee was to enquire into the status of women with particular emphasis on areas like education and employment.[20] The report of the committee, which was titled *Towards Equality* and was finally presented in 1974, was a shocking eye-opener for the government and the intellectual and academic communities interested in the gender dimensions of social discrimination, as well as activist groups and all others in general. This report showed that the claims made for equal citizenship had largely been defeated because women (except for a small section of middle class, educated women) had not received the primary goods as spelled out by John Rawls to make a good, decent life for themselves as citizens of the country. Patriarchy still subordinated almost all women, and patriarchal preferences still retained the public/private divides, with women relegated to the domestic/private realms.

In the subsequent decades, it was therefore the need of the hour that a vibrant debate on citizenship among intellectuals, policy makers, lawyers, judges, and the courts should have ensued to take care of this social reality. The gendered reality should have become the pivotal point of citizenship debates, because the reality was not the same as in 1947. Unfortunately, however, this rethinking of citizenship along the lines of gender justice has not become even a whimper, let alone a dominant voice. The loud voices

that have been raised on the citizenship issue today display no intellectual input of theories or paradigms of developing a narrative along the lines of a feminist perspective on this very important phenomenon. If we say today that citizenship is not a static concept and needs to be revisited from time to keep in tune with changing socio-economic and cultural realities, it does not mean that the debate should be on narrow sectarian and political lines. What is required is to try and develop an alternate concept of citizenship that will be particularly women-friendly and thus will also be gender-sensitive, so that the concept does not remain within a heterosexual paradigm.

This now brings us to the question of how all of the above discussions are relevant to this huge exercise that has been undertaken to update the NRC in Assam. This has to be understood from the perspective of how the judiciary and the government have approached the question of determining a citizen. It is perhaps unfortunate that the larger intellectual exercise that was perhaps required prior to the launching of this humongous and all-important task of deciding on who will remain in India as citizens and who will not was neither undertaken nor thought necessary. This actually reveals a poverty of intellectual exercises at various levels of our institutional structures. Had our state been less patriarchal, there would have been serious readings of at least the *Towards Equality* report to raise sensitivity about gender relations at various levels of the state apparatuses. Even the judiciary perhaps needed serious thinking on the citizenship issue from a feminist perspective before launching the NRC-updating process, because then there would have been more serious thinking about what would happen to a large majority of the women if they were asked to prove their citizenship on the basis of certain fixed documents. As we have discussed above, the theories of citizenship have been considered to be gender-blind, and it was through that gender-blind approach that the NRC-updating process was begun.

The consequences of this on the women, who are the most vulnerable amongst the poor and marginalised sections in communities, quickly became apparent. As the process of submitting the forms for the inclusion of names in the NRC began, there were reports in the vernacular press of panic among women. There were at least two cases reported where two women committed suicide because they could not find the necessary link documents, and being

convinced that they would not be considered citizens, they decided to take their own lives rather than being separated from their families and sent to some unknown destination.[21] Among the documentary evidence that the administration spelled out as being acceptable, there was mention of about twelve documents including land papers, citizenship certificates, LIC policies, government-issued licenses, birth certificates, board or university educational certificates, and bank accounts. As Sanjay Barbora commented, "These documents have an aura of middle-class respectability to them. They attest to a person having ownership of property, access to education, jobs and documents that allow her/him to travel at will".[22] This comment more or less reveals the predicament of citizenship for large sections of the marginalised- and more particularly, for women.

When the draft NRC was released, it revealed that more than 40 lakh people who had originally applied did not make it into the Register because of weaknesses in the documentary evidence provided by them. The main sufferers were women and children, and in almost every family, in some areas, there were women whose names had been dropped, while the names of their husbands, sons, and other male members were included. There have been numerous pieces in the print media about such situations based on information picked up by journalists who went out into the field to meet many of the affected.[23] All the narrations presented in these reports point to an important aspect of the attitude of the administration and our policy makers–it reflects a mindset developed through the process of socialization that all males and females go through as they grow up in a society that is hegemonised by patriarchal norms and values, which raise very little consciousness about the nature of gender relations in the society. Therefore, the documents that were required from women showed that those who were trying to ascertain citizenship of a woman had little knowledge about the true status of women in our society. Didn't they even care to check, if nothing else, at least the available official data on the plight of women regarding access to education, to property, and to healthcare facilities, which are the basic rights of a citizen? A large majority of the women living on the margins of society who have been left out of the NRC and who are now running from pillar to post to understand what they need to do to become 'citizens' have perhaps never seen a school, have been

married off at puberty, have never had any access to property, or have never delivered a baby at a hospital. What document will she provide to the patriarchal state that now asks this woman to prove her blood links to the man whose legacy data she has to use to prove that she is a citizen of this country? Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty narrates a very apt and representative case in *The Wire*:

> Shorbhanu, mother of five grown-up children, never went to school, never owned any property, never had a bank account; she was married off before she turned 18. "Everything is with my husband," she said.
>
> That Shorbhanu's identity got entwined with that of her husband of 30 years is not good enough now, at least not to be a part of the final draft NRC.[24]

Her son, Hussain, narrated the following to Pisharoty:

> "Because she never voted in her maiden home, she had no way to prove now that she was her father's daughter. Her father's legacy data is there, but she has no document to establish her linkage to him. There is no school certificate which would have mentioned his name. Her family settled in this char (a sand bar by a river in Assamese) when she was one-and-a-half years old after their char (Majarlega Char) was swallowed by the Brahmaputra. She was married off to my father in this same char. Though her father passed away, everyone in the neighbourhood knew whose daughter she was; trouble began when documentary evidence was sought by the NRC authorities to prove who her father was."[25]

Similar tragic narratives abound in the press in both the vernacular and English. In fact, an advocate of Goalpara who had been helping out with the D-Voters' (Doubtful voter category) cases in the Foreigners Tribunals had said the following to Barooah Pisharoty:

> "I have a hunch that in the rural areas, most of those who will not find their names in the final draft of NRC would be poor illiterate women simply because they have nothing more to furnish except the Gaon Panchayat certificate. From my experience, I would say that if you do a gender study of the

> Tribunal verdicts so far, more women would be found declared foreigners than men only because their documentation was weak."[26]

Interestingly, it was revealed that, in most cases, men had their documents in place, but in the same family, the women either had no documents or, if they had them, they were not properly preserved. This shows that because of patriarchal notions of rights, men considered it important to preserve their rights, but the question of the rights of women came up only with the NRC-updating process. Until then, even in these societies where women are now suffering, the question of their rights and obligations was not considered important, as women belonged to the private sphere, and rights and entitlements were matters of the public domain. One sees a huge contradiction here regarding how the administration (and the Indian state in general) has viewed the question of citizenship. On the one hand, there is the liberal approach to citizenship, which is based on the idea of the rights and entitlements of each individual. On the other hand, women are being viewed through the stereotype of patriarchal norms as belonging to the domestic/private space; therefore, their identity and interests are tied to the man, and they can be citizens only if they can show their link to the father. There are only very rare cases where children are using the legacy data of their mother, and here the problem would be even greater for sons and daughters, because in the general run of things, in the patriarchal administrative structure, the registering of the mother's name in documents is not always strictly adhered to, except in the case of registration of births in recent decades. But how many of our poor rural women have the privilege of having a birth certificate?

It is indeed a sad reflection on the state of affairs in our country that, in the 21st century, a citizenship exercise is being carried out based on an extremely gender-blind concept of citizenship, a concept that has been critiqued in all feminist perspectives of citizenship. It is unfortunate that the NRC-updating exercise was not preceded by a brainstorming exercise among experts, the judiciary and legal minds, and the main stakeholders around the concept of citizenship that the country should now adopt based on the basic premises of the Constitution, while taking concepts like citizenship beyond and ahead of the perceptions of 1947 and 1955 (Citizenship Act). One has

to understand the predicaments of the framers of the Constitution in the aftermath of the Partition. In 1955, as provided in Article 11 of the Constitution, the parliament passed the Citizenship Act, which specified the conditions under which citizenship can be acquired. The framers were however faced with a huge problem after the Partition when the question of returning a large number of abducted women to their families had to be tackled. Here, as Anupama Roy has shown in detail [27], the gendered way of looking at situations was discernible. On December 15, 1949, the Constituent Assembly passed the Abducted Women (Recovery and Restoration) Act, which was in force until 1957. But through the implementation of this Act, the gendered prejudices of the society came to the fore. Roy has discussed how, among other things, differences were made by the implementing authorities between the Hindu and Sikh women and the Muslim women.[28] Therefore, the community to which women belong can make a lot of difference to how citizenship works for women and what it is supposed to mean.

Society has moved ahead quite a bit from 1947 to today, and it is necessary to conceptually rethink issues like citizenship. For instance, in a world where we are moving towards multiculturalism frameworks of communities, it is imperative that we redefine the notion of community in citizenship debates by focusing on citizenship more as a measure of activity and practice than as mere status and formal rights. Under such a view, citizenship has to be understood more in terms of relationships that can promote participation and agency.

So, if it is argued that the concept of citizenship has been gender-blind since 1947, and that it is important to change those notions today, then what is expected of a gendered notion of citizenship? Citizenship from a feminist perspective aims at developing a gendered notion of citizenship that moves much beyond a relationship of status between the state and the individual. It brings within its ambit other social institutions like the family, traditional systems, various civil society organisations, economic institutions, and all other such institutions that affect women's and men's lives. Being a citizen as recognized by the laws of the land definitely allows a woman to make some claims on her own rights, but that does not change her identity, which remains tied to a man by being someone's daughter, wife, or sister.

Therefore, it is not enough to address formal institutions of the state; the informal institutions must also be addressed to ensure that a woman can enjoy her rights and entitlements as a citizen in the private domain as well. The idea of a gendered notion of citizenship means to break the distinction between the public and the private so that the private becomes political. It is not enough to announce that there will be equality of access to resources like infrastructure, livelihoods, and housing for all citizens; what is important is to ensure that every woman is a full citizen of the community through actually enjoying all those entitlements in her own right as an independent individual and not as the appendage of a man. The acceptance of a concept of citizenship in this light will therefore also require the enactment and strict implementation of a large number of gender-friendly laws, like, for instance, inheritance of property and the right to hold it in one's own name. It is therefore imperative to move beyond 1947 as far as citizenship debates are concerned and ensure that a woman is a true citizen, not just one on paper.

If the NRC process had begun with this type of brainstorming exercise, we might not have had a woman-friendly restructuring of society, but there would perhaps have at least been a more gender-sensitive and woman-friendly group of decision makers regarding the NRC who would have understood that women have to be understood at the intersections of class, caste, and ethnicity, and on the wider canvas of patriarchy. There would then have been some realization that "citizenship operates on the principles of inclusions and exclusions. Specifically for women, the membership of a community-even on the basis of the idealized and rarely realized liberal notions of citizenship rooted in individual rights-does not guarantee rights".[29] If a gender-sensitive mindset had been developed before taking decisions on how women will prove their citizenship through documents alone, the tragedy and trauma of the NRC for a large section of the most marginalized women, transgender individuals, and those with different sexual choices would have been much less, and the NRC would have been a less flawed document then what it appears to be moving towards now.

However, as things stand now, the NRC as has been prepared under the directions of the Supreme Court is a time-bound document and has to be completed within the timeframe that was fixed. Therefore, in this document,

no matter how unfair it may have been for the women, there is no chance of trying to bring in any of the latest ongoing women-friendly debates and approaches to citizenship. However, if and when the window is opened by the judiciary for the entertainment of new claims and counter-claims for those who may have issues with their non-inclusion in the NRC, then at least it can be hoped that the decision-making bodies will take time off to rethink citizenship in a more vibrant and gender-friendly manner and evolve some operating procedures that address some of the issues raised in the above discussions. That will of course require very informed and serious debates on the entire concept of citizenship itself. This kind of exercise could be taken up as a short-term measure in the context of Assam alone. However, if there is ever any decision to extend the NRC exercise to the whole country, as is being aired in some political circles, then that exercise should be preceded by integrating threadbare debates among intellectuals, judicial minds, feminist scholars specialising in concepts of citizenship, and those having expertise in integrating concepts, theories, and ideas into practical channels of administrative decisions. Such an exercise could be time consuming but in the long run would perhaps work out an alternative theory of citizenship that would rise above all political, religious, or ethnic mindsets–and most importantly, it might be able to rise above patriarchy. That kind of a perception of citizenship would not remain merely a formal, legal concept, but instead would establish much closer relations to community and also address the gendered reality of all our social structures.

Endnotes :

[1] See: Roy, A. (2016). Citizenship in India. Oxford University Press, p. xvii. The phrase "contested concept" was initially coined by W. B. Gallie in: Essentially contested concepts. (1956, June). *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 56*(1), 167-198.

[2] Roy, op. cit., p. xviii.

[3] Lister, R. (1997). *Citizenship: Feminist perspectives*. New York: New York University Press, p. 3.

[4] Marshall, T. H. (1950). *Citizenship and social class*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 28-29.

[5] Lister, op. cit., p. 15.

[6] Bhargava, R. (2005). Introduction. In R. Bhargava & H. Reifeld (Eds.), *Civil society, public sphere and citizenship* (pp. 13-55). New Delhi: Sage Publications. As cited in: Chari, A. (2009). Gendered citizenship and women's movement. *Economic and Political Weekly, 44*(17), 47-57.

[7] Kymlicka, W., & Norman, W. (1994). Return of the citizen: A survey of recent works on citizenship theory. *Ethics,* 104(2), 352-381. As cited in Chari, op. cit.

[8] For discussions on these aspects, see: Roche, M. (1987). Citizenship, social theory and social change. *Theory and Society*, *16*(3), 363-399; and Faulks, K. (2000). *Citizenship*. London: Routledge, (as cited in Chari, op. cit.).

[9] Roy, A. (2013). *Gendered citizenship*: *Historical and Conceptual Explorations*. Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan, e-edition. (First published: Orient Longman, 2005).

[10] Roy (2013), op. cit.

[11] Mahajan, G. (Ed.). (2003). *The public-private: Issues of democratic citizenship*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

[12] Lister, op. cit., p. 195.

[13] Loc. cit.

[14] Roy, op. cit. *Gendered Citizenship: Historical and Conceptual Explorations* (2005) cited in A. Chari, op. cit.

[15] G. Mahajan, (2003) as cited in Chari, op. cit.

[16] Grant, R. (1991). The sources of gender bias in international relations theory. In R. Grant & K. Newland (Eds.), *Gender and international relations* (pp. 8-26). Bloomington: Indiana University Press. (As discussed by Chari, op. cit.)

[17] Roy (2013), op. cit.

[18] Loc. cit.

[19] Anupama Roy has discussed this issue in great detail in a chapter of her work, *Gendered Citizenship: Historical and Conceptual Explorations* (op. cit.).

[20] For details on this, see: John, M. E. (Ed.). (2008). *Women's studies reader*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

[21] References to such incidents can be found in vernacular dailies like *Amar Asom* and *Asomiya Pratidin* amongst others in the period between 2015-

2017. For further readings on this refer to endnote number 23 below.

[22] Barbora, S. (2019, March 8). The crisis of citizenship in Assam. *The India Forum*. Last updated May 16, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/crisis-citizenship-assam.

[23] These are references to just a few stories that have appeared, but all of them carry the same tale of what women are suffering due to the gender-insensitive deliberations of our policy makers and the courts. See: Singh, B. (2018, August 4). Many married women left out of NRC. *The Economic Times*. Retrieved from https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/many-married-women-left-out-in-nrc/articleshow/65266070.cms; Bhalerao, Y. P. (2018, August 3). NRC Assam draft: Women and girls continue to suffer. *SheThePeople*. Retrieved from https://www.shethepeople.tv/news/nrc-assam-draft-women-girls-continue-struggle; Married before 18, didn't attend school: NRC may put many women at risk. (2018, July 30). *Business Standard News*. Retrieved from https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/married-before-18-didn-t-attend-school-nrc-may-put-many-women-at-risk-118073000091_1.html; and Saikia, A. (2017, November 21). These four women are a testimony to the trials and tribulations of proving citizenship in Assam. *Scroll.in*. Retrieved from https://scroll.in/article/858540/stories-of-these-four-women-are-a-testimony-to-the-trials-and-tribulations-of-citizenship-in-assam.

[24] Pisharoty, S. B. (2018, July 30). NRC final draft: How one document will determine the fate of these married women. *The Wire*. Retrieved from https://thewire.in/politics/nrc-final-draft-how-one-document-will-determine-the-fates-of-these-assamese-women.

[25] Loc. cit.

[26] Loc. cit.

[27] See: Roy, A. (2010). *Mapping citizenship in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

[28] Loc. cit., pp. 42-55.

[29] Mukhopadhya. M. (2007). Gender justice, citizenship and development: An introduction. In M. Mukhopadhya & N. Singh (Eds.), *Gender Justice, Citizenship and Development* (pp. 1-14). New Delhi: Zubaan, IDRC.

EXPRESSIONS OF RESISTANCE: WOMEN SURVIVING THE HOLOCAUST

Abantee Dutta

Introduction

The crucial issue is not what we learn from the Holocaust but what we unlearn from it.

– Lawrence Langer, Using and Abusing the Holocaust (2006)

The legacy of the Holocaust (Shoah) endures on as one of profound loss and survival. The Nazi concentration camps stripped individuals of their identities, their names, their possessions, and even their body hair, reducing them to mere numbers. This degrading process, according to Gurewitsch (1998), was their "initiation into a system where the individual was rendered meaningless, disoriented in time and place and separated from family" (p. 227). Trapped within such a debilitating system of Nazi domination, designed to destroy the self-esteem, trust, and dignity of each of its inmates, it is a common hypothesis among many survivors that survival was luck (Miller, 1996). Viktor Frankl, one of the noted survivors of the Holocaust, however, believes that survivors identified with a "meaning or will to survive" as a means of coping with the trauma of the Holocaust (Frankl, 1984). This assertion made by Viktor Frankl sets the context for this article.

How did women survive the Nazi universe? In her memoir, *Twenty*

months at Auschwitz, Pelagia Lewinska, a survivor of Auschwitz, writes:

> At the outset the living places, the ditches, the mud, the piles of excrement behind the blocks, had appalled me with their horrible filth…And then I saw the light! I saw that it was not a question of disorder or lack of organization but that, on the contrary, a very thoroughly considered conscious idea was in the back of the camp's existence. They had condemned us to die in our own filth, to drown in mud, in our own excrement. They wished to abase us, to destroy our human dignity, to efface every vestige of humanity, to return us to the level of wild animals, to fill us with horror and contempt toward ourselves and our fellows. But from the instant I grasped the motivating principle…it was as if I had been awakened from a dream…I felt under orders to live…And if I did die in Auschwitz, it would be as a human being, I would hold on to my dignity. I was not going to become the contemptible, disgusting brute my enemy wished me to be…And a terrible struggle began which went on day and night. (As cited in Ritter & Roth, 1993, p. 86)

Lewinska's declaration constitutes a profound negation of the physical harshness and horror of the environment she inhabited. It echoes a kind of "spiritual resistance", which is distinct from my received understanding of resistance.[1] It is also something that Holocaust historiography seems to privilege less over armed resistance. My paper grows out of a concern to examine such silences. Lewinska's declaration, as she spoke of her "awakening" and "of holding on to my dignity", implied a deeper, internal struggle–an almost overwhelming, urgent, and compelling need to preserve life in the midst of death. Such a form of resistance–what Frankl terms as the "will to life", as a coping mechanism–forms the basis of my inquiry.[2] In studying a wide range of life-sustaining efforts employed by the women survivors, my inquiry is primarily to decipher their intention and their motivation, and, most significantly, to understand whether the women survivors perceived their own actions as "resistance", even if not articulated as such.

I begin the paper by presenting the methodology of data collection and

the literature from which I seek support. The literature survey is not exhaustive and presents a brief overview of coping strategies, specifically those of survivors of the Holocaust. It identifies strategies such as the will to live, maintenance of dignity, affiliations, and emotional bonding with others, which have been studied and recognized by scholars as having been used by women survivors as a means to cope. For the rest of the paper, I grapple with the notion of resistance and seek to understand how it played out for the women survivors of the Holocaust. How did women maintain dignity, reclaim their selves, and assert their identity in an environment designed to destroy all three? How did they aid and protect themselves and others in their struggle for survival? I locate the study in Auschwitz. By juxtaposing the voices and memories of women survivors and representations of the experiences of survivors in art, I attempt to create a mosaic of instances of resistance, postulating these as coping strategies for the women survivors enduring the Nazi genocidal universe.

Methodology

To inquire into resistance as a coping strategy for women at Auschwitz, I derive the primary data of survivors by utilising the video and audio archives, as well as referring to the autobiographies, letters, and diaries, that are actively collected and produced by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.[3] The museum offers a diverse range of oral history resources through projects and initiatives such as *Behind Every Name a Story, Memory Project, Conversations with Holocaust Survivors*, and *Diaries and Oral History Resources*. The Museum also provides extensive survivor testimonies acquired through other Holocaust oral history projects around the world, such as the Shoah Foundation.[4] I also additionally source material from the Yad Vashem electronic archives[5] and from "Women and the Holocaust: A Cyberspace of Their Own", a website developed by Judy Cohen, a Holocaust survivor.[6]

The interviews and testimonies of women survivors, collated by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Shoah Foundation and the Yad Vashem archives, include over 3,500 interviews. Having identified 33 testimonies that relate specifically to my area of study, I analyse and reflect

on a limited set of 11 survivor accounts. The survivor accounts include the testimonies of Gabriela Truly, Rose Bour, Susan Roth, Hana Bruml, Anna Palarczyk, Helen Tichauer, Susan Cernyak Spatz, Anita Lasker, Alice Jakubovic, Regina Laks Gelb, and Nina Kaleska. For this study, I define a woman survivor of Auschwitz to be anyone who experienced internment between the years of 1942 to 1945, irrespective of their age, home of origin, time of internment, or their marital status.

In addition to the oral testimonies, I also source information from the various diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies of women survivors of Auschwitz. These include the memoirs of Pelagia Lewinska, Charlotte Delbo, Olga Lengyel, Anna Heilman and Rose Meth, Ida Fink, Vera Laska, Sara Nomberg Przytyk, Hannah Sara Rigler, Cesia Brandstatter, Erna Low, Edith Horowitz, and Rachel Silberman.

The primary data is supplemented, wherever possible, with books, scholarly articles, and conference papers to triangulate the material derived from the oral testimonies. I gained insights and made extensive references to the works of major scholars in the area of gender-oriented historiography of the Holocaust, such as Joanne Ringelheim, Myrna Goldenberg, Elizabeth Baer, Dalia Ofer, Lenore J. Weitzman, Judith Taylor Baumel, Brana Gurewitsch, Carol Rittner, John K. Roth, Esther Fuchs, and Anna Pawelczynska, and cross-reference the testimonies of the women survivors, whenever possible. I also refer to the doctoral research and empirical studies of other Holocaust scholars, specifically Joy E. Miller's work on *Coping Strategies and Adaptation Mechanisms Utilized by Female Holocaust Survivors from the Auschwitz Concentration Camp*.

For the analysis of the data, I refer to contemporary feminist theory in Holocaust Studies, which places emphasis on ways in which gender differences are constructed. Pascale R. Bos argues that "most differences in their testimony can and need to be explained by the fact that men and women experience, remember and recount events differently. In other words, men and women experience the same treatment in different ways because of gender, gender plays a role as it inflects the memory of these war experiences…and gender plays a role in how men and women narrate, how they write and speak about their experiences" (Bos, 2005). Bos's provocation enabled me to

structure my inquiry in a manner that allowed for further exploration of women survivor experiences of the Holocaust through their memories of those experiences and how they have been represented in fiction, poetry, and art. I adopted such a framework with the hope to provide a layered and purposeful inquiry in suggesting how "spiritual resistance" manifested in Auschwitz and lent meaning to the lives of women survivors.

The nature of the testimonies was valuable for the research, although they did suffer from certain inherent limitations. The oral testimonies produced by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum were structured in a manner that included pre-war, war, and post-war experiences narrated in chronological order, occasionally punctuated by a set of questions by the interviewer. The possibility of further engagement with survivors was not possible, which inevitably impacted the collection of information for the research.

As I gathered the testimonies, I was also cognizant of the fact that memory is power. Sayner's (2007) warning served as a necessary reminder that "the cultural manifestations of memory, past and present, are enmeshed in institutionalized political practices" (p. 1). It is also true that the power to decide who remembers, what, where, when, and how, and on behalf of whom, has been at the heart of debates pertaining to the Holocaust. Narratives of women and the Holocaust have been embroiled in debates about the gendered relationship of the two. While women scholars and narrators of women's experiences in the Holocaust raise the question of the patriarchal conditions of production and reception of Holocaust literature, others have discounted their efforts and blamed them of subverting the focus of the Holocaust from the Jews as a community at large. The debates around gender concerns are legitimate, necessary, and have been the subject of wide scholarly comments.[7] However, these have not been dealt with and remain beyond the scope of the present study.

One of the challenges I encountered was the limitation on time. The process of data collection, which entailed multiple visits to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to access the testimonies and the rare collection of diaries and letters of inmates of Auschwitz (which had to be acquired through formal requests), was time-consuming, leaving barely enough time for a purposeful analysis. Most significantly (and something that I didn't

account for in my research plan), I was struck by the overwhelming effect of the oral testimonies on me. The intellectual numbness that I experienced as a consequence resulted in several breakdowns of thought and language. The material severely tested my ability to understand and exposed a lack of vocabulary to narrate the experiences without reducing their gravity and terror.

Literature Review

The literature around coping strategies is robust and has been studied by scientists, researchers, psychologists, and sociologists alike.[8] Coping has lent itself to multiple interpretations. Terms like adaptation (Lazarus, 1993; Monat & Lazarus, 1991), coping mechanism, coping strategies, defence mechanisms, coping styles, etc. have been invoked to produce different meanings. Dimsdale (1980) considers coping successful if a person's self esteem is maintained and there exists some continuity between the past and the future. Coping for Monat and Lazarus (1991) defines an individual's attempt to master the demands of life, which include harm, threat, or loss.

Bettelheim (1960), one of the very first psychologists to study the effects of coping on concentration camp survivors, noted coping to include intellectual or social withdrawal such as a muselman effect and/or identification with the aggressor.[9] Dimsdale (1974, 1978, 1980), in his work with the survivors of the Holocaust, classified 10 coping strategies, including focus on the good (looking for small gratifications); survival for some purpose (to bear witness, seek revenge, help others, etc); humor (insulation from reality and mediator of stress); psychological removal (insulating self other from others; muselman, or walking dead); time focusing (thinking about another time or place); the will to live (discovery of a purpose or desire to not surrender to adversity); group affiliation (friendship and assistance from others); surrendering to stress (an anti-coping to stress), etc. Des Pres (1976) concluded that survivors used multiple techniques, which he noted could also involve acts of stealing, acts of resistance, suicide, smuggling, and focusing on day-to-day maintenance of tasks.

The coping strategy identified by Frankl was associated to the identification of meaning or purpose within the suffering. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl shares his philosophy of the coping strategy, which

contends that deriving meaning in life includes suffering and death (Frankl, 1984). Frankl believed that in a concentration camp "it is possible to practice the art of living…although suffering is omnipresent" (p. 64). He held that the Nazis could take everything from a prisoner but could not dictate the inmate's attitude to any situation. In an environment where prisoners were made to make "choiceless choices", the prerogative to not submit or be threatened remained only with the inmates.

Rappaport's (1991) work with the survivors of the Holocaust identifies different forms of gender-specific coping techniques used in the development of "meaning" for survival. His work reveals that women tend to cope by bonding emotionally with others, while men tend to focus on task orientation. Scholars such as Belle (as cited in Monat & Lazarus, 1991), Rosenbaum (1993), Ringelheim (as cited in Ritter & Roth, 1993), Miller (1996), etc., agree on gender-related coping strategies and suggest that "meaning" for women was derived from their relationships with others. Concurring with the approaches of Frankl, Ritter and Roth's seminal work, *Different Voices: Women in the Holocaust*, compiles female survivor narratives that bear witness to their own personal interpretations of "meaning" and choices (Ritter & Roth, 1993). Building and nurturing relationships appear to be powerful elements in a woman's search for meaning. For others, the concern of maintaining dignity was the motivation that held the meaning for survival.

As a general overview of the prevailing literature and for the purposes of this study, the research indicates that Des Pres, Dimsdale, and Frankl suggest the coping strategy of a purpose or a will to live. Leitner and Lewinska contend that maintenance of dignity and resistance were the means of coping. Affiliations and emotional bonding with others were noted in the works of Belle, Des Pres, Rappaport, and Ringelheim.

Resistance: Definitions

Survivor accounts, diaries, and memoirs bear witness to the numerous acts of women that took some form of denial of the Nazi goal to dehumanize and annihilate the human spirit. It appears that each moment that a woman chose to resist the dehumanization, her non-compliance stood as an active show of resistance. Holocaust historiography recognizes such acts as "spiritual

resistance".

Dedicating a chapter in his book, *A History of the Holocaust*, to "resistance", Yehuda Bauer seems to recognize the potential breadth of the term. He includes all possible forms of resistance, however, limits its application merely to armed resistance. This dichotomy gets reinforced in his closing paragraphs, where he critiques his own application, stating:

> The main expression of Jewish resistance could not be armed, could not be violent, There were no arms, the nearby population was largely indifferent or hostile. Without arms, those condemned to death resisted by maintaining morale, by refusing to starve to death, by observing religious and national traditions. Armed resistance is a marginal comment on the Holocaust but it is written in very large letters indeed." (Bauer, 1982, p. 277)
>
> The importance of acts of spiritual resistance is, however, noted elsewhere. The publication of Trunk's *Judenrat* is seminal. Trunk urges for the inclusion of a wide range of life-sustaining efforts of the *Judenrat* in any concept of resistance in the context of the Holocaust (Trunk, 1972). Analogous to this view is the assertion made by Holocaust researcher Saul Esh, who argues that "the general reaction of the Jewish masses …to the Nazi horror" was "what might be called *kiddush ha-hayyim*, the sanctification of life, the overwhelming impulse to preserve life in the midst of death" (Esh, 1962, pp. 106-7).

For Michael Geyer, the term resistance in the context of the Holocaust included "civil courage" that was mobilized for small things, communal assertions, as well as genuine assaults on the structure of the Nazi domination (Geyer, 1992). Meir Dworzecki assessed resistance "in terms of how they held on to their humanity, of their manifestations of solidarity, mutual help, self sacrifice and that whole constellation of manifestations subsumed under the simple headings of 'good deeds'…" (as cited in Marrus, 1995)

Such an understanding of resistance, however, presents a challenge in defining the extent to which efforts of the Jews to outwit the oppressor–to

clothe, to keep warm, to keep up morale, etc.–warrant description as resistance, or rather should be preserved as a distinct action. Roger Gottlieb, in wrestling with the concept, proposes resistance as "acts motivated by the intention to thwart, limit, or end the exercise of power of the oppressor group over the oppressed" (Gottlieb, 1983). For him, intention is critical and involves a political perspective that surpasses the struggle of individuals or particular groups to maintain their existence.

Scholars such as Detlev Peukert further sought to make a distinction between *Nonkonformitat* (non-conformist behavior) and *Widerstand* (resistance) (Peukert, 1991). Resistance, for him, meant an act "intended to make a public impact and pose a challenge to the regime". Similarly, for Klemens von Klemper, resistance means a question of motivation and urges us to dwell on the "existential resistance dimension". To bear witness to the claims of a totalitarian regime, he argues, makes an unqualified resistance commitment. What is of significance in the context of the Holocaust is therefore how the resisters perceive their own actions (Klemens, as cited in Marrus, 1995)–a partisan task requiring a considerable degree of imagination to attempt an understanding through written evidence and other testimonies to decipher such intent and motivation of the Jews. In this regard, the classification provided by Swiss historian Werner Rings is instructive. He defines five kinds of resistance by way of the kinds of commitment the acts hold, namely: (1) symbolic resistance, or I remain what I was; (2) polemic resistance, or I tell the truth; (3) defensive resistance, or I aid and protect; (4) offensive resistance, or I fight to the death; and (5) resistance enchained, or freedom fighters in camps and ghettos (Rings, 1982, p. 280).

Women and Resistance

Survivors often tend to discuss their experiences and survival as luck (Miller, 1996). However, they do make references to relationships, cooperation, and support groups as a factor in survival (Miller, 1996). In the following sections, through an analysis of testimonies and written evidence, I attempt to decipher the intent and motivation of the women survivors in engaging in such acts. The attempt is to understand whether such acts were merely non-conformist behavior on the part of the women survivors or

whether they demonstrate an "unqualified resistance commitment".

To this end, I attempt to re-create the camp conditions of Auschwitz as described in the testimonies of the women survivors. In doing so, I only recount how Auschwitz continues to be remembered, recalled, and represented by the women survivors I encountered. The sections that follow portray how Frankl's "will to life" revealed itself as resistance–a way of being, as the Nazi logic of destruction unfolded for the women at Auschwitz. I specifically draw on Rings's classification of resistance and attempt to create a mosaic of symbolic and defensive resistance, which found unsurpassable expression in the testimonies of women survivors in interviews, memoirs, diaries, and autobiographies, and in art.

Auschwitz

Auschwitz, today, stands as a museum, a memorial, a monument, a cemetery, and a sanctuary (Mickenberg, Granof, & Hayes, 2003). However, for survivors like Hart (1982), Auschwitz continues to represent the nightmare, the hell of death, from which, as another survivor concludes, "none of us was meant to return" (Delbo, 1968). She says:

> You see grass. But I don't see any grass. I see mud, just a sea of mud. And you think it's cold? With your four or five layers of clothing on a bright crisp day like this, you feel the cold? Well, imagine people here or out beyond that fence working when it snowed, when it rained, when it was hot or cold, with one layer of clothing. The same layer and no change of clothing unless you were a skilled organizer. And you couldn't take those stinking rags off or they'd be stolen immediately. (Hart, 1982, p. 163)

She continues:

> I open my eyes, and there's nobody. Open my eyes and see grass. Close my eyes and see mud...The past I see is more real than the tidy pretence they have put in its place. The noises are as loud as they ever were, the screams, the shouts, the curses, the lash of whips and thud of truncheons, the ravening dogs. (Hart, 1982, p. 163)

Auschwitz as a concentration camp was unique in the sense that it functioned both as a site of mass extermination and as a forced labour site. Auschwitz, as the testimonies narrate, was designed with the diabolic intention to annihilate the spirit of the Jews. The diaries, survivor accounts, and memoirs are united in their testimony of the power of the Nazi assault not only on the body but also on the mind and reason. As I began tracing the voice of women survivors, attempting to locate their "will to survive", I discovered the depravity of the concentration camp universe and the extent to which it precluded the potential of defiance. Delbo, in her finest work, *None of Us Will Return*, describes Auschwitz as "the end of the line….desolation", where people arrived expecting "the worst not the unthinkable" (Delbo, 1968; Goldenberg, 1996).

Dehumanisation as a tool of control and source of power at Auschwitz was inflicted on the women to strip them both of their agency and attack them as women (Aksamit, 2012). Daily life within the camps was intended to overwhelm and disempower inmates with its sheer cruelty. The accounts of women survivors unanimously testify that the initiation into the camp was one of the most dehumanizing experience. Prisoners were ordered into shower rooms where they were told to undress, line up to have had the hair

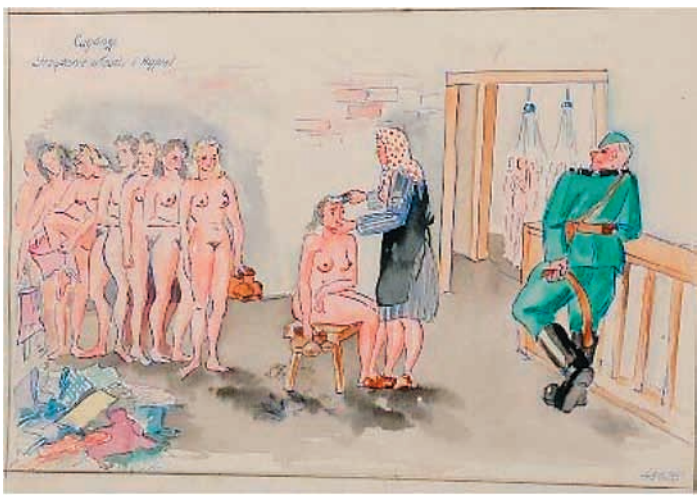

Figure 1. Source: Presiado, M. (2016). A new perspective on Holocaust art: Women's artistic expression of the female Holocaust experience (1939-49). Holocaust Studies, 22(4), 417-446.

shaved from their bodies, and be deloused.

Cecilie Klein, in her memoir, *Sentenced to Live*, describes her arrival in Auschwitz, where she and other women were required to stand on stools. She narrates:

> Five male prisoners appear alongside the stools, scissors in hand…in seconds, the men cut off (the women's) hair, shave their heads, then their intimate parts. The cut hair around the stools were collected by three male prisoners. (Klien, 1992)

Such descriptions of loss of femininity connected to issues of sexual humiliation, a concern that emphasizes the horror, shock, and degradations that women unanimously shared, and which repeatedly surfaces in the memoirs, testimonies, and paintings of women survivors (Presiado, 2016). Jewish women had been socialised by religious teachings to be modest, and so they experienced the process as a sexual assault during which they were shamed and terrified by SS men. It is ironic that women, although stripped of their femininity, continued to be treated as sexual objects by the guards, with their lewd remarks, obscene suggestions, pokes, and pinches during the course of delousing procedures and searches for hidden valuables in oral, rectal and vaginal cavities (Presiado, 2016). Ringelheim describes this emphasis as the following:

> Almost every woman referred to the humiliating feelings and experiences surrounding her entrance to the camp…being nude; being shaved all over- for some being shaved in a sexual stance, straddling two stools; being observed by men, both fellow prisoners and SS guards. Their stories demonstrate shared fears about experiences of sexual vulnerability as women, not only mortal dangers as Jews. (Presiado, 2016; Ringelheim, pp. 743-4).

The "Guide to the Auschwitz Museum" notes that women guards often "excelled in unspeakable cruelty". Such intentional violence is depicted in the works of Judkowski and Jewish artist Regina Lichter Liron. In Judkowski's work, *Ringworm Cured in the Chimney*, (Figure 2), the women are depicted as being forced to bend down while a Nazi commander examines their bodies, as he decides their fate to live or die, and kicks one of the inmates with his boot (Presiado, 2016).

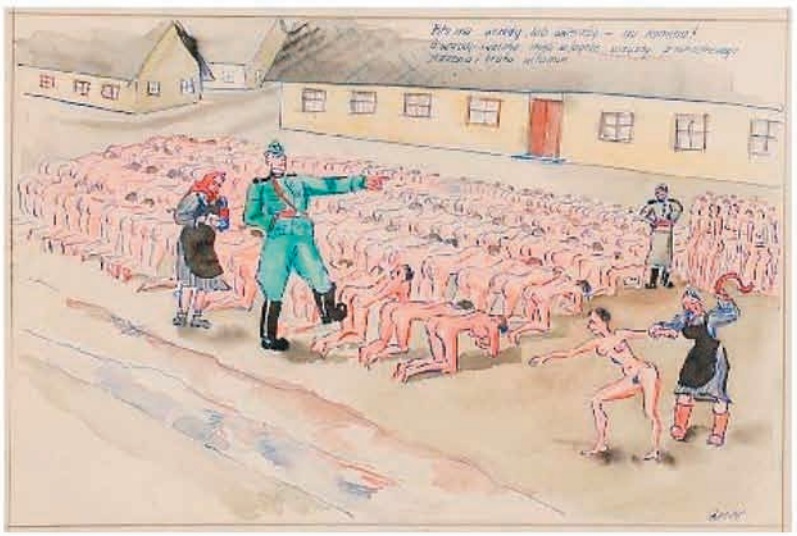

Figure 2. Source: Presiado, M. (2016). A new perspective on Holocaust art: Women's artistic expression of the female Holocaust experience (1939-49). Holocaust Studies, 22(4), 417-446.

Lichter-Liron's work, *Flagellation*, from "The Album 1939 to 1945" (Figure 3), illustrating one of the punishments at Auschwitz, gives an impression of the sadistic pleasure derived by the SS guards while executing such punishments (Presiado, 2016).

Figure 3. Source: Presiado, M. (2016). A new perspective on Holocaust art: Women's artistic expression of the female Holocaust experience (1939-49). Holocaust Studies, 22(4), 417-446.

The SS guards used humiliation, misinformation and extreme isolation to obliterate any sense of agency amongst the inmates. The camp left the inmates bereft of their will to survive.

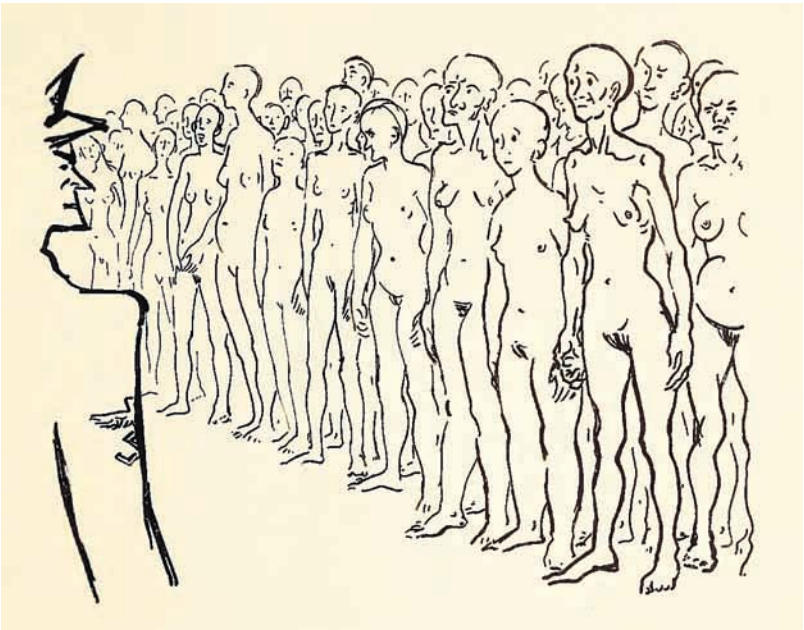

Figure 4. Source: Lukacs, A. (1948). Auschwitz: Women's camp. Budapest. Available from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Charlotte Delbo recalls the following:

> There was one girl of our friends who was a beautiful girl…when her hair was cut off and her cigarettes were taken away, she didn't want to live. So, she became ill and didn't want anything. She changed all her food and the little bit of bread she got for cigarettes. And that was soon the end of her. (As cited in Kamel, 2000)

Referring to such walking dead as "*muselman*," Viro Jurkovic paints the picture of *muselman* as one "…of skin and bones, barely capable of moving, lacking will and strength….this dirty being dressed in rags, often with lice…fallen in or bulging eyes, was a true picture of misery, weakness, hopelessness, and horror." He explained further that the inmates were terrified of *muselman* as they never knew when they themselves would meet the

same fate and become susceptible to the gas chamber or another form of death (as cited in Pawelczynska, 1979).

The question then lingers on as to how women survivors reclaimed their identities, resisted becoming a *muselman*, and countered all such acts of dehumanisation and isolation, strategies designed by the Nazis to systematically alienate and annihilate them.

Symbolic Resistance, or I Remain What I Was

Systemic annihilation of the self and identity were experienced by women differently and manifested in multiple forms. "You hear me speak," Gertrud Kolmar says. "But do you hear me feel?" (As cited in Ritter & Roth, 1993.) There is no photograph of Gertrud Kolmar in any Auschwitz album, nor does the Auschwitz Chronicle identify her, except perhaps as a nameless number. In its own distinctive manner, Gertrud Kolmar's question, "But do you hear me feel?", echoes protest and even resistance. Inflected in varied tones, narrative accounts of many women survivors raise such calls for resistance to maintain a sense of self (Ritter & Roth, 1993).

As a survivor and resistance fighter from France, Charlotte Delbo discloses, "[F]rom the time I arrived in Auschwitz, I was afraid of losing my memory. Losing one's memory is losing oneself…" (as cited in Ritter & Roth, 1993). She goes on to recount the early morning Appel or the roll calls, where she devised ways of keeping her memory active. She would try to recall telephone numbers, subway stations, names of stores on particular streets, etc. (Ritter & Roth, 1993). Such were the acts to reclaim her self and maintain her identity. She deemed her efforts successful only when she managed to recollect "fifty seven" poems, which she would recite to herself as she stood "motionless in the cold", as sometimes summoning a verse or even a word would take her days (as cited in Ritter & Roth, 1993).

Rena Komreich, in her three years and forty-one days at Auschwitz, recounts her reliance on personal experiences and memory as sources to keep her motivations alive and resist the fate of the *muselman* (Fuchs, 1999). Loving remembrances of her mother's affection and care and recollections of her admonitions kept her from becoming numb in the midst of virulent degradation and hatred (Fuchs, 1999). As she observes, memory, for her,

was always a "subversive memory", strengthening her ever "slipping resolve". She says:

> My one great fear in life, my fate, is to survive this thing and return triumphant with my sister to our parents house. My dream cannot be marred by German whips or chains or rules. I will succeed because I have no other choice. Failure does not even occur to me. We may die in the interim- death cannot be avoided here- but even that will not dissuade me from my sole purpose in life: be with Danka, be invisible, be alert, be numb. (As cited in Fuchs, 1999, p. 41)

Poetry, music, and literature also became instruments of reclaiming the self in a universe intended to annihilate traces of the thinking mind. Judith Isaacson recalls in her memoir efforts to recite poetry and hum classical music in a feeble attempt to sustain her identity (Ofer & Weitzman, 1998). Fania Fenelon, author of *In Playing for Time*, narrates how in the special barracks for the members of the women's orchestra at Auschwitz, members who came from different nationalities–Hungarian, German, Polish, French, Jews and non-Jews alike–would recite poetry to each other (Lasker, 1991; Fenelon, 1976). Women survivors narrate instances of reciting verses and songs reminding them of home, and of retelling the plays of Oscar Wilde, Corneille, Racine, and Moliere as a means of temporary escape from the camp universe (Spatz, 2005). Similarly, Fine (1986) asserts that such reliance on literature became a means of mobilising support systems and was part of a collective effort to stay alive. Such testimonies confirm that "vestiges of humanity" persisted in a universe designed to eradicate human dignity and the sense of individual worth. Viktor Frankl affirms the life-sustaining value of such efforts. He observed, "[T]his intensification of inner life helped the prisoner find a refuge from the emptiness, desolation and spiritual poverty of …existence by…escape into the past" (Frankl, 1959, p. 38).

Survivors also recall the destruction of self in the camp life as being stripped of every sign of femininity, being treated as sexual objects, and systemic subjection to an extremely degrading existence (Ringelheim, 1983; Bour, 1982). Within such a context, a means of defiance identified by survivors was to maintain the smallest amount of dignity in personal care.

For some, it was protecting their clothing from disease-infested lice; for others, maintenance of cleanliness to the extent possible; and many others resisted personal soiling (Miller, 1996). For Lewinska, it was as simple as cleaning her boots each night (Ritter & Roth, 1993; Miller, 1996). As she reports, "It was our part in an act of protest which said: We will not let ourselves be broken" (as cited in Ritter & Roth, 1993). Survival "in dignity", as declared by Lewinska, formed the core of their motivation for such defiance. Losing one's dignity, for many survivors, meant losing and becoming a *muselman*. Concurring with meaning derived from the attempt to maintain dignity, Isabelle Leitner writes in her memoir, "My body is nearly dead, but my vision is throbbing with life–even here. I want you to live for the very life that is yours" (as cited in Miller, 1996, p. 48; Ritter & Roth, 1993, p. 68).

Trapped within a system that mocked their efforts to remain human beings and assaulted their self-respect time and again, women survivors also asserted themselves and summoned spiritual fortitude in defiance of the ban against religious expression. Survivors recount their attempts to pray and fast on Yom Kippur (Kremer, 1999). Testimonies also recount efforts of women who smuggled materials from the warehouses and created Sabbath candles, most often hollowing out a potato and inserting a rag as a wick (Kremer, 1999).

In commenting on her identity, Rena Komreich, writes, "[I]t is the identity of shit…a Scheiss Jude, mist bienes" (as cited in Fuchs, 1999, p. 42). In her struggle to recover and regain a coherent and cohesive sense of meaning, identity, and purpose, Rena, with the support of seven other volunteers, narrates the act of transporting fifteen dead bodies from the mounds of bodies piled behind the barracks and, in an act of defiance, digging fifteen graves (Fuchs, 1999). She writes:

> I thrust my shovel into the soil. It's rock hard. We try to dig deep, as we are supposed to, but it is impossible. I get in the hole to dig out the bottom. The soil is so unforgiving that it takes hours to dig the graves, though. Thoughts run through my head while I'm in the hole trying to dig a little deeper, the SS could just shoot us and we'd fall in having dug our own graves. (As cited in Fuchs, 1999, p. 42)

At the end of the physical ordeal, the eight women agree to pray, in silence, over the bodies.

> Let's say a prayer for the women we have buried, I whisper. There is a unanimous nod. Over the mounds of fresh dirt we say a prayer The guards do not notice our stillness, our silence, It is very important to me to give these women who have dies some sacred ground in recognition of their lives. The prayer makes us feel good, and there is not much that does that. (As cited in Fuchs, 1999, p. 43)

Within the numbing, depersonalising, and dehumanising ethos of Auschwitz, Rena's act of burial and prayer was an act of protest to assert her fragile hold on her identity (Fuchs, 1999). The silent prayer uttered over the freshly dug graves was a sacred act, not so much as it was directed to God, but because it was an act of human recognition (Fuchs, 1999). Recognition of the individuality, worth, and dignity of each woman worked simultaneously as a re-assertion of her own (Fuchs, 1999). Such acts of symbolic resistance, sometimes at great risk (Rena), and sometimes not (Charlotte Delbo), communicate a message with clear themes to defy the Nazi's determination to destroy their will and spirit. In their own small ways, whether in maintaining dignity, in asserting their womanhood, or in resurrecting their identity as a woman and a Jew, their acts of resistance reveal their intentions and motivations in keeping their selves alive, despite the insurmountable odds.

Defensive Resistance, or I Aid and Protect

The survivor testimonies and literature on women reveal group solidarity as a coping strategy by the women in the concentration camp universe (Miller, 1996). However, as the testimonies reveal, the individual strength to endure "the unthinkable" arose from a shared need to keep the self and group alive (Kremer, 1999). Such group affiliations symbolize a unique manifestation of defensive resistance defined by Werner Rings. Many women draw on imagery to narrate and understand such experiences with their camp sisters. For instance, Giuliana Tedeschi's attitude towards survival is reflected in her metaphor: "Prison life (in Auschwitz Birkenau) is like a piece of knitting

whose stitches are strong as long as they remain woven together; but if the woolen strand breaks, the invisible stitch that comes undone slips off among the others and is lost" (as cited in Ofer & Weitzman, 1998, p. 337). Testimonies of women recount how masses of Greek Jews perished, because they could not leverage camp support systems, being linguistically isolated and thus incapable of adapting to camp conditions (Pawelczynska, 1979).

Many survivor testimonies that I heard attribute their survival to the generosity of a friend, a "camp sister" or "camp mother", who shared their bread, or helped them withstand the Appel / roll call, or nursed them through chronic illness (Bour, 1984; Roth, 1983; Truly, 1990; Spatz, 2005). Scholars such as Joan Ringelmann and Sybil Milton, who have studied Jewish female societies in camps, recognize the impact of women's creation of surrogate families on their survival (Ringelheim, 1983; Ritter & Roth, 1991). Milton writes of "small groups of women in the same barracks or work crews...bonded together for mutual help" (as cited in Ritter & Roth, 1991, p. 229; Ringelheim, 1983) She cites instances of small families, biological or otherwise, which increased protection for individual internees and created networks to "organize" food, clothing, and beds and to help cope with the camp conditions (Ritter & Roth, 1991). Illustrative is Lengyal's observation that women removed one another's lice, and women tried to keep one another warm during the roll call by leaning against each other or putting an arm around one another (Lengyal, 1995; Kremer, 1999). In another example, Lucie Adelsberger was adopted as a "camp mother" by two teenage girls who tried to provide her with clothes and food whenever they could (Ofer & Weitzman, 1998). As she noted, "[T]here were families like this and everyone...felt responsible for one another, often putting their own lives in jeopardy by denying themselves the very morsel of bread they needed for their own survival" (as cited in Ofer & Weitzman, 1998, p. 337). Survivor memoirs often focus on accounts of "sisterhood" as the sustaining balm of their Holocaust years (Kremer, 1999; Bour, 1984; Truly, 1990).

In Sara Nomberg-Przytyk's memoir, *Auschwitz: True Tales from a Grotesque Land*, we trace the journey of a woman from isolation, depression, and detachment into a community of fellow prisoners who, like her, were politically active communists before the war (as cited in Ofer & Weitzman,

1998, p. 328). In her account, she recounts multiple instances where this group of friends provided her with practical and moral support and gave her a reason to live (as cited in Ofer & Weitzman, 1998, p. 328). After the humiliating process of being shaved, she writes of feeling so dehumanised and depersonalised that she attempted to hang herself. However, it was the promise of friendship that deterred her resolve to kill herself, when a political comrade from the Bialystok ghetto found her and comforted her with bread, warm clothes, and boots that restored her physically (Nomberg-Przytyk, 1985, p. 17). She cites another instance when another comrade, during "selections", snuck her into a safe group (Nomberg-Przytyk, 1985; Ofer & Weitzman, 1998). The memoir in numerous instances recounts the manner in which her political network rescued her from the hard labour Kommandos and selections (Nomberg-Przytyk, 1985). She also recounts creating a surrogate family with the cleaning women when she was assigned to work in the infantry and also talks of the eighteen-year-old "Magda", who became her "camp daughter" throughout her time in Birkenau (Nomberg-Przytyk, 1985; Ofer & Weitzman, 1998).

As it emerges from the testimonies, although political and family affiliations acted as stimuli for these supportive relationships, virtually all women that I studied formed surrogate families, as according to them it was "the best way to survive" (Ofer & Weitzman, 1998). Groups organised according to political, national, and regional affiliations; small biological and surrogate families, and even the commonplace two-person friendship, provided inmates with information, advice, and protection. In the group, the inmate was a fellow comrade, not a nameless number, thereby reinforcing each person's sense of individuality and worth (Spatz, 2005; Bour, 1984; Ofer & Weitzman, 1998). Further, keeping one's memory intact was a way of preserving the past, and different modes of collectively exercising memory were established within the bonds of the newly formed family networks that women set up within the camps. Women's testimonies often fondly recount the sharing of recipes with their "camp sisters" (Gurewitsch, 1998). Such acts of sharing recipes, re- creating recipes, and discussing them seem to be a unique act of spiritual resistance, as it enabled women to bring back memories of home, assuage their constant hunger, and provide their camp-

mates with "food for thought" in the truest sense of the expression (Ofer & Weitzman, 1998; "Spots of Light", Yad Vashem Exhibition). Livia Bitton Jackson, deported from Hungary to Auschwitz at age 13, described how women who worked 12-hour days on heavy construction sites recounted memories of food they used to prepare at home (Kremer, 1999). The recipes brought solace, as noted by a survivor, Susan Cernyak Spatz, and "mitigated the despair of the everyday life" (Spatz, 2005; Kremer, 1999). Trude recalls having written recipes at Auschwitz and narrates, "I'd pretend to visit someone as her guest and she'd pretend to serve me coffee and cake. She would share a recipe and I'd write it down. We did it to overcome the sense of hunger" ("Spots of Light", Yad Vashem Exhibition). They wrote such recipes on paper, which they stole from the warehouses or workplace, risking their lives in the event of being discovered of having damaged German property ("Spots of Light", Yad Vashem Exhibition).

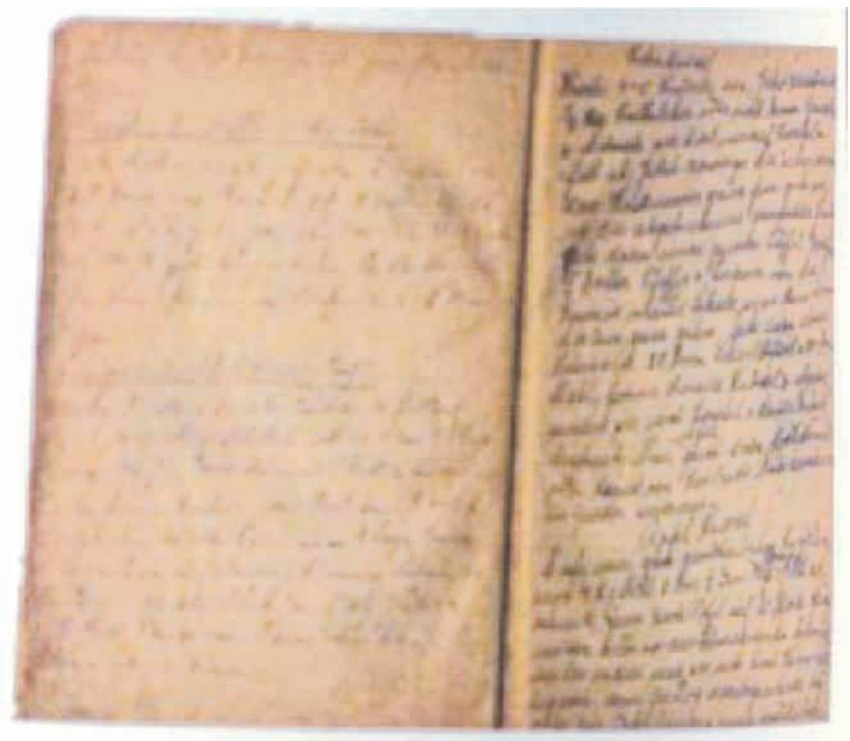

Figure 5. Recipe entry (Source: "Spots of Light", 2018, Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre)

Mirroring the reports in the memoirs and the survivor accounts, female bonding and cooperation are crucial themes of survival in fiction by Holocaust writers, such as Piercy, Schaeffer, and Karmel (Kremer, 1999). In their novels, despite every effort by oppressors to dehumanise them and set them against one another, women, suffering from gnawing hunger, share food; women, weary from the day's excruciating labour, pick another's lice and sustain one another through long, painful roll calls; ailing women nurse one another through typhus and other contagious diseases; women share memories and recipes and remember literary passages and religious observances to bolster morale and determination in their battle for survival (Kremer, 1999, p. 19). Ilona Karmel, drawing from her own life experiences, recounts, "[O]ne needed to love someone because you couldn't love yourself. If you could love someone, you could come back to yourself…one had to have an image of a person to save oneself from seeing everyone like so much eating, defecating flesh" (as cited in Kremer, 1999, p. 20).

The Story of Katya Singer

One of the most significant discoveries of my research was the less known story of Katya Singer, an assimilated Czech Jew, who served as a *Rapportschreiberin*, or the chief operating officer, for the SS in Auschwitz. Her position as the *Rapportschreiberin* and a "collaborator" with the apparatus of terror meant that she enjoyed a relatively sheltered life and elite existence within the camp, with her own room, maid, and wardrobe, while others survived sub-human and degradable conditions, dehumanised by a system of terror (Bour, 1982; Spatz, 2011). However, survivor testimonies acknowledge and recognize her efforts to aid and protect fellow inmates and credit her for saving the lives of countless women in the camp (Bour 1982; Jakovic, 2002; Palarczyk & Tichauer, 1996). Survivors narrate instances of how she rescued inmates from the rigours of "outside details" by finding "inside jobs" for them–and, more significantly, by falsifying the numbers of the living and the dead so that the SS did not realize that fewer Jews than they thought were being gassed (Bour, 1982; Spatz, 2011). Survivors recount the enormous risk she undertook by putting her own life at risk every time she saved the lives of others through manipulating and juggling the numbers

(Bour 1982; Jakovic, 2002; Palarczyk & Tichauer, 1996). In a rare interview of hers to another survivor, Susan Cernyak Spatz, she recounts:

> No numbers were repeated [in Auschwitz-Birkenau]. The numbers were registered running consecutively in the big camp book. When a prisoner died, the number and name were crossed out. We made individual columns for everything in a new book: columns for the sick, the dead, the individual blocks, the number of people in each block, well, sick, on detachment, Stabsgebäude, agriculture, factories…
>
> …With that kind of organization in the Lagerbuch, we saved many women's lives. Zippy wrote down numbers that were dead. When there was a selection and they told me the list of numbers, I inserted "dead numbers" instead of live numbers that I wanted to save. If there were five hundred supposed to go to the gas, only a hundred actually went. The rest were "dead numbers"…
>
> …The Nazis wanted only the control list; they did not count the people on the truck. No one ever found out how we had done this. Only one of those we saved ever sought me out after the war. She was in one of the first transports, a woman who now lives in Illinois and was in Prague just to see me. She said she was twice on the list to the gas, and my intervention saved her. She recognized me immediately. I did not recognize her because I just dealt with numbers, the living and the dead, but she said that I had saved her life. (Spatz, 2011)

These facts were also confirmed by the testimonies of Rose Bour, Alice Jakovic, Anna Palarczyk, and Helen Tichauer (inmates of Birkenau) and also in the unpublished manuscript, "Method within the Madness", of Helen "Zippy" Tichauer (Spatz, 2011; Bour 1982; Jakovic, 2002; Shatzky, 2012; Palarczyk & Tichauer, 1996). For demonstrating such acts of defensive resistance, she was deported to Stutthof in 1944 after being "denounced " for helping inmates survive (Spatz, 2011; Bour, 1982).

Conclusion

Such survivor accounts, memoirs, and diaries reveal the varied faces of Jewish resistance. Some scholars may argue that the reframing of resistance to include symbolic and defensive resistance, specifically as a coping mechanism, is of little use or consequence to the larger discourse on social movement theory.[10] However, to return to the words of Lawrence Langer, "[t]he crucial issue is not what we learn from the Holocaust but what we unlearn from it".

What I have unlearnt while researching this paper is that the main expression of resistance, most specifically in the context of the Holocaust, does not merely allude to an armed violence. As observed by Yehuda Bauer, even without arms, those who were condemned to die resisted by maintaining their morale. Whether it be a simple act of recalling telephone numbers, remembering subway stations to keep one's memory alive, cleaning one's boots in a futile effort to maintain dignity, or an act of burial and prayer for the departed, each act boldly represented an act of resistance–an active denial of the Nazi goal to dehumanise and annihilate the body, mind, and spirit. The creation of bonds of mothers, sisters, and friends should not be read merely as a simple act of coping but instead as a profound attempt to defy a degenerate system of terror and hatred by keeping trust and friendship intact. In mobilising networks of support and giving each other a "neighbor", the intention to thwart the world of hatred perpetuated by the camp conditions is obvious and symbolises a genuine assault on the structure of Nazi domination.

From the narratives of resistance as expressed by the women survivors, I gathered that the Auschwitz motto of resistance, as also noted by Pawelcynska (1979), in its simplest form was "Let's not give in" (p. 127). It meant surviving and adapting to conditions as they were, and valuing individual existence as well as that of others in the same situation. Through their testimonies and their memoirs, these narratives celebrate the meaning of the women survivors and their will to overcome insurmountable odds. They all felt the need to do something, however small, to resist the Nazi evil. Whether it was luck, as most survivors believe, they all demonstrate an unqualified resistance commitment, whether by maintaining a sense of humanity in a dehumanising

environment, engaging with their fellow camp mothers and sisters, or participating in forbidden acts–all to defeat the Nazi goal to destroy and annihilate their humanity. Although they all realised that none of their acts increased their chances of survival, such gestures of "resistance" enabled them to reinforce their identity, giving them a community and a "will to live"!

While thinking of resistance in the context of the Holocaust, scholarly texts continue to ignore such aspects of non-violent resistance that survivors experienced, remember, and represent in their testimonies. In this paper, given the paucity of time and information, I have only taken a cursory look at Auschwitz as a site where survivors demonstrated the strength of their humanity and dignity through spiritual resistance. Needless to say, spiritual forms of resistance–such as forming underground organisations to impart education, organising literary evenings and concerts, printing and distributing newspapers, and creating secret libraries–have also found expression in the ghettos and other concentration camps, although they remain to be fully documented. It is worth considering that while spiritual resistance may not have saved many lives or thwarted the Nazi apparatus, it did instill a psychological refuge and acted as a coping strategy for the self and the community, where one's identity and dignity as a person, a woman, or a Jew could not be jeopardised by the Nazi barbarism and brutality. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum echoes of Elie Wiesel's messages to the audiences, one of which states, "The museum is not an answer. It is a question." My question remains: Do we now feel Gertrude Kolmer's resistance and hear her protest?

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Endnotes :

[1] For an overview on "spiritual resistance", please see: Rudavsky, J. (1997). To live with hope, to die with dignity. Jason Aronson, Inc. Also see: Glass, J. M. (2004), Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. Retrieved from file:/

//Users/apple/Desktop/9780230500136_6.pdf. Also see: Spiritual resistance during the Holocaust. (n.d.). *Yad Vashem*. Retrieved from https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/spiritual-resistance.html

[2] Rudavsky develops such a form of resistance in invoking the concept of "kiddush ha-hayyim", or the "sanctification of life" from Jewish theology. In this paper, I however chose to use the term in a more universal sense and not limit it to Judaism. For the purposes of this paper, spiritual resistance is used in a broad sense to define all such acts of defiance used by women to not succumb to the Nazi goal to annihilate the human spirit.

[3] Please refer to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's website, available at https://www.ushmm.org/.

[4] Please refer to the USC Shoah Foundation website, available at https://sfi.usc.edu/.

[5] Please refer to the Yad Vashem website, available at https://www.yadvashem.org/.

[6] Please refer to the website available at http://www.theverylongview.com / WATH/.

[7] See: Goldenberg, M., & Shapiro, H. A. (2013). *Different horrors, same hell: Gender and the Holocaust*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. The works of Ofer & Weitzman (1998) and Ringelheim (1990) are also instructive. For the counter perspective, please see: Langer, L. (2006). *Using and abusing the Holocaust*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

[8] For a comprehensive overview of coping strategies, please see: Miller (1996).

[9] Muselman is a term of unknown and debatable origin but widely used to denote "emaciated walking corpses". Milton refers to them as those prisoners who were physically and psychologically worn out, those who surrendered their will to live.

[10] For an overview of social movement theory and collective action, please see: Lee, D. W. (2017). Resistance dynamics and social movement theory: Conditions, mechanism, and effects. *Journal of Strategic Security, 10*(4), 42-63.

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About Studio Nilima

Studio Nilima is a not for profit research collective based in Guwahati. It seeks to be at the forefront of engaging and initiating dialogues on the contemporary public policy concerns of the northeast of India. It brings together lawmakers, thinkers, learners, policy makers, academicians, and practitioners from across the arts to unfold new ways of learning, thinking, research and practice.