



Tans-Border Mizo Networks: Old And New

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Abstract: This scholarly article investigates the enduring nature and evolution of transnational networks among the Zo (Chin–Mizo–Kuki) ethnic groups dispersed across India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. By contextualizing contemporary mobilizations within an extensive historical framework, it posits that notwithstanding the stringent international borders established through colonial and post-colonial delineations, Zo ethnic cohesion has persisted through complex social, cultural, spiritual, and institutional networks. Utilizing a diverse array of archival documents, historical narratives, media resources, and field-based testimonies, the article elucidates how colonial strategies—from the Pemberton Line to the boundary settlements of the partition era—disrupted Zo ancestral lands and redefined a historically cohesive community into citizens of disparate nation-states.

The investigation underscores two principal modalities through which transnational connections are maintained. Firstly, institutional networks—comprising churches, student organizations, civil society entities, and pan-ethnic platforms such as the Zo Reunification Organization (ZORO)—facilitate the mediation of collective memory, political imagination, and ethnic solidarity across national boundaries. Secondly, personal and cultural media, encompassing novellas, musical compositions, song lyrics, and oral histories, serve as emotive conduits that preserve shared narratives and a sense of belonging beyond the confines of state boundaries. By emphasizing these “non-state” forms of connectivity, the article interrogates state-centric perceptions of borders and illustrates how borderland communities actively reinterpret and negotiate the realities of division. It concludes that while transnational Zo networks continue to transform—occasionally engendering tensions and contradictions—they remain pivotal in upholding ethnic identity and social cohesion within a fragmented political context.

Keywords: Trans-border ethnic networks, Zo (Chin–Mizo–Kuki) identity, Colonial boundary-making, Borderland solidarity, Cultural and spiritual networks, Zo Reunification Organization (ZORO).

Introduction

On 29 January 2017, the Chief Minister of Mizoram – Lal Thanhawla - in a public function, called for the ‘unity of Zo descendants’ living in the contiguous parts of India, Myanmar¹ and Bangladesh, would, one day reunite under a single administrative unit. He emphasized on the cultural and emotional integration of all Zo²

¹ Myanmar and Burma will be used interchangeably.

² Mizo, Kuki and Chin tribes are the ethnic groups of Zo. Their culture, tradition, nomenclature of material items and linguistic affinity are similar. For details see Bianca Son (2013), “The Making of the Zo: The Chin of Burma and the Lushai and Kuki of India through Colonial and Local Narratives 1826–1917 and 1947–1988”, Doctoral dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, Pp.1-25.

ethnic groups, which would help in the 'reunification process'. He was addressing a function to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the Chin-Lushai Conference. It was held at the Mizoram-Assam border town, known as Kolasib. Zo descendants from Mizoram, Assam, Manipur, Myanmar and Bangladesh participated the function, which was organized by Zo Reunification Organization (ZORO). The main aim of ZORO is to – a) unify all the Zo descendants, and, b) to live under a single administrative unit. The organization basically aims for the reunification of the Zo descendants living in India, Myanmar and Bangladesh, which is against the Constitutional dictums of the three countries.

The function was also held to commemorate the Chin-Lushai Conference, held 125 years ago at Fort William in Kolkata on January 29, 1892. ZORO leaders, on the function emphasized that the Fort William Conference was 'the first and only effort' made by the British to unify the Mizo, Kuki and Chin into a single administrative unit. The Fort William Conference, 1892 was held, after British India realized that the ethnic groups living in Chittagong hill tract, Chin hill and Assam was one ethnic unit. Sangkawia, the leader of ZORO on the function, mentioned that British gave freedom to India, Bangladesh (East Pakistan) and Burma without reuniting the 'Zo' ethnic groups and left them in the three countries against their will. The function held at the border town, also discussed on The Chin hill Regulation Act of 1896. The regulation mentioned that Chins includes (a) Lushais, (b) Kukis, (c) Burman domiciled in the Chin hill, and (d) any person who had adopted the customs and language of the Chins and are habitually resident in the Chin hill.³ The Regulation and the Fort William Chin-Lushai conference are considered, still, by the organization to unite all the Zo descendants in the Chin hill, Lushai hill, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Arakan hill tracts into one administrative unit.

Since 1901, Zo descendants were divided under different administrative units under British Assam and British Burma, which was against the ethos of Fort William Conference, 1892 and Chin hill Regulation Act of 1896.⁴ Alexander Mackenzie - the Chief Commissioner of Burma - was the main British official who successfully opposed the move against the unification of Zo descendants into one administrative unit. He was of the favor that Bengal should make over the Chittagong hill tract and Tipperah hill to Assam, and that a Commissionership should be formed under Assam embracing the hill tracts of North and South Lushai hill, Cachar and Sylhet.⁵

The article's purpose is to reconsider mainstream texts and recollect information on kinship ties, spiritual links, arts, music, literary sources and narratives on maintaining networks of Zo descendants, especially between the Mizo communities divided by the Indo-Myanmar border. The article shows that borderland networks in the Chin-Mizo societies are maintained through two mediums - a) at the institutional (associations, organizations, churches, press, etc....) and, b) through the personal ethos (music, lyrics and novels). The paper shows that networks and memories are reinforced through both mediums - institutional and personal levels - to maintain Mizo solidarity across the borderland. Such networks are beyond the larger meanings of demarcated border and political aspects of border. Further, the chapter also wanted to show that in understanding border, borderland communities and borderland networks – there is a need to consider sources such as - Novellas, songs, music, poetry, civil society organizations and religious institutions. These mediums evolved over time, and transform themselves over time and redefine the very relationship into a newer form. Such transformations may have desirable and undesirable outcomes, which are to an extent problematic and different from the previous ties.

First, the article shows the earlier forms of networks between Mizoram and Chin hill, which was spiritual in nature. The story of Gospel Mail is the case in point. Second, it revisits the divided opinion between the leaders

³ www.shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/jspui/.../13_appendix.pdf, (Accessed on 26 January 2016).

⁴ Mizoram State Archive, Sl. No 1043, CB-57.

⁵ Alexander Mackenzie (1995, Reprint), *The Northeast Frontier of India*, 1995, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, Pp.290-293.

and administrators on whether to join Burma or India, during the eve of Indian Independence. It also reflects on the colonial history of border making, which ultimately divided them into different subjects, citizens and habitats of Bangladesh, Burma and India. The article also analyzes the factors for the inception of pan Mizo organization known as – Zo Reunification Organization (ZORO). The organization openly advocates for the formation of Greater Mizoram by uniting all the Mizo habitats into one administration. Since, 1988 and on varying episodes, the organization had held various conferences within India, with participants of Zo ethnic representatives from Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The later part of the chapter reveals the voices, concerns and imaginations depicted in the plots and character of Mizo Novellas, lyrics and music on both sides of the borderland. Last section of the chapter is an attempt to capture the newer forms of networks and agencies, which are mostly non-personal, rather institutional in form and content, which navigates to maintain community Mizo community networks across the borderland.

Multi-Layer (ed) Relationships between Chin and Mizo

Historical facts revealed that Mizo community's networks extend beyond geographical markers – border fences and demarcated borderlines. Such networks exist due to the indelible link of cultural ties, spiritual fulfillment, and movement of people across border due to existence of kin and families living at both sides of the borderland. Multi-layer networks and relationships exist at both side of the border between Myanmar and Mizoram. The existing forms of networks are multilayered in nature. It brings out, the meanings of ties and solidarity. The exiting networks and relationships also evolved with the passage of time. Political situations also shaped the nature of network and relationships. Whatever the political situation is, a common ground exist, which is the unending attempt to unite and maintain solidarity, even if, they are divided by the border.

The nomenclature of 'Chin' and 'Mizo' were constructed by the British authorities and later by the native elite. It is commonly accepted by scholars that the umbrella term for the Chin, Mizo as well as other groups in this region is labeled as Zo (see Son 2013).⁶ In the Chin hill Regulations of 1896, it mentioned that "Chins" includes (a) Lushais, (b) Kukis, (c) Burman (Burmese) domiciled in the Chin hill; and (d) any person who had adopted the customs and language of the Chins and are habitually resident in the Chin hill.⁷

One main finding during fieldwork at the borderlands of Mizoram and Myanmar is that Mizo societies felt that the imposition of border to them is a clear example of a 'divider' dividing the ethnic brethren. The elders labeled the imposition of border - first, as an imposition of a fraught history, and, second as a part of the postcolonial displacement occurred in South Asia. They also felt that the principle of riverine, natural stream, mountain crest, trench and foothill as the international border benchmark was a clear exemplar of a divider, not a unifier. They felt that border divides and did not bring any histories of satisfaction.

The Mizoram-Myanmar border, which is known today, earlier, it was an imaginary line on the map. It came into existence since the drawing of Pemberton line during 1834.⁸ By 1901, it was reinforced as a boundary for administrative divisions between Assam and the Burma. By 1901, the boundary was reinforced with laws by the agreement between Chief Commissioner of Assam and Chief Secretary of Burma. By 1937, the boundary was set as the benchmark of border and administrative division. The 1937 event of the separation of British Burma Administration from India, the 1947 Independence and the Indo-Myanmar agreement on official border delimitation of 10th March 1967 have not changed anything on the lines and dots of the political map of India and Myanmar, since the drawing of the Pemberton line. The border exists in paper as lines separating the two

⁶ Bianca Son (2013), "The Making of the Zo: The Chin of Burma and the Lushai and Kuki of India through Colonial and Local Narratives 1826-1917 and 1947-1988", Doctoral dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, p.25.

⁷ The Chin hill Regulation (Regulation IV) passed on August 13, 1896, authorized the Superintendent or Deputy Commissioner (of the Lushai hill) to order an undesirable outsider to leave the area and to tax the residents, permanent or temporary, clans and villages. On October 9, 1911, the Regulation was extended to the North Cachar hill, the Garo hill, the Khasi and Jaintya hill (excluding the Shillong municipal and cantonment area where only the provision for taxation would apply), the Naga hill and Mikir hill.

⁸ I Lam Kham Piang (2016), "Ethnic Mobilization for Decolonization: Colonial Legacy (The Case of the Zo People)" in Yu-Wen Chen and Chih-Yu Shih (Eds.), *Borderland Politics in Northern India*, New Delhi: Routledge, p.75.

sovereign countries. To the divided community, Indo-Myanmar boundary is also an artificial line, which is superimposed on the socio-cultural landscape of the borderland.⁹ As a result, the boundary line cuts across houses and villages thus dividing and forcing the ethnic brethren to reside as citizens of different countries. During fieldwork, the divided ethnic brethren mentioned that the imposition of border has not done any favor to their history.

During 1948-50, Lushai hill District Council (LHDC) reported that four hundred and thirty one Mizo households from Mizoram migrated to Tahan in Myanmar.¹⁰ LHDC also reported that they migrated to Tahan, for seeking better livelihood and as students to receive higher education at the townships of Mandalay, Kalemmyo and Rangoon.¹¹ LHDC also reported that during 1947-48, one hundred and sixty five Mizos joined the Burmese army.

Earlier, Mautam (Famine) played a significant role in cross border movements of families across the Mizoram-Myanmar borderlands. Alexander MacKenzie¹² in his text 'The Northeast Frontier of India' (1995, Reprint, pp.363-366) mentioned that the famines of 1892 played a significant role in the history of migrations across the borders. Mackenzie also mentioned that numerous Mizo villages existed at the Chin hill of Burma. At that time, cross-border movement was not strict as, of the present. Famines occurred due to the flowering of bamboos in the wild forest of the erstwhile Lushai hill. The infamous post-colonial Lushai famine (Mautam) of 1959 resulted to the emergence of Mizo insurgency that disturbed the state for two decades, 1966-1986.

There are few references to large-scale famines at the turn of the century and another massive famine, which occurred in 1959 (Nag 2001, pp. 24–30).¹³ During colonial era – the three massive famines occurred in erstwhile Lushai hill (present Mizoram), which caused mass migrations and dislocated many families in both sides of the borderlands. Three such famines were found in the historical records (Gougin 1984, pp. 95–96).¹⁴ Records from the Mizoram archive also mentioned that the region had suffered famines - during 1862, 1892 and again in 1911, after the region witnessed bamboo flowering. In each case, the records suggested that the flowering of bamboo leads to a dramatic increase in the local rat population, destruction of crops and subsequently to famine.

The outcome of 1959 famine was the Mizo insurgency under Pu Laldenga, which are written in the mainstream texts. In such mainstream texts, there is an absence of discussion on cross-border family migrations and Mizo networks across the borderlands due to the 1959 famine. During fieldwork, many Mizo elders commented that during 1966-1986, i.e during the time of Rambuai (Mizo Insurgency) and during famines of 1959-60, many Mizo families migrated to Chin hill at Burma to seek better livelihood and decent living.

At the moment, Chin from Myanmar crosses the border into Mizoram for a day or more, to trade and return to their villages after trading their goods. Likewise, Mizo trade their goods to the Chin hill. They trade all kinds of goods from legal to illegal items. On many occasions, few were caught with contraband items within Mizoram. The Chin, who crossed the border to trade smuggled goods and contraband items rely on associates and friends living in Mizoram. Many a times, they also skipped checking from the border guards due to the porous and unfenced border.

⁹Pushpita Das (2013), *India-Myanmar Border Problems: Fencing Not The Only Solution*, www.idsa.in, IDSA Commentary, (Accessed on 3 November 2016).

¹⁰ The present day Mizoram was known as LHDC – an autonomous district of Assam – during 1947- 1972. It became a Union Territory on 1972 and finally achieved statehood on 1987.

¹¹ Mizoram State Archive, Sl. No 1031, CB-85.

¹² Alexander MacKenzie (1995, Reprint), *The Northeast Frontier of India*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, Pp.363-366.

¹³ Sajal Nag (2001), "Tribals, Rats, Famine, State and the Nation", *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, No. 12, Pp. 24-30.

¹⁴ Thangkhanpao Gougin (1984), *History of the Zomi*, Manipur: Zomi Press.

After the 1962 military coup in Burma, General Ne Win government instituted the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). The new regime ensured that every citizen should have a decent standard of living with special emphasis on basic sustenance. In order to achieve this end, the BSPP argued that all capitalist endeavors had to be nationalized. In such manner, Burma's resources were appropriated across the nation for the purpose of self-reliance. The promises of the BSPP, however, were not realized. The ethnic minorities, especially, suffered under Ne Win's regime. The Chin began relying on previous relationships and economic opportunities across the border in Mizoram. This results to the outflow of migrants, seasonal labors migrating looking for an informal job at Mizoram.

The above facts confirmed that during the past, cross border movement was mainly from the Mizoram to the Chin hill. At present, the trend on cross border movement is the opposite of the earlier trend, which was from Mizoram towards Chin hill. Such scenario is mainly due to the infrastructure, economic and political situation at Myanmar. Written accounts have mentioned that Chins exodus to Mizoram began since 1962.¹⁵ They crossed the border in order to survive and to earn a better livelihood with their ethnic brethren living at Mizoram. It must be noted that there are no real or significant linguistic differences between the Chin and Mizo. They are part of the Zo ethnic unit that has been dispersed and living in the borderlands of Bangladesh, Myanmar and India since 1947. They speak a part of the mutually similar Tibetan-Burmese language with similar cultural practices.

During 1946, one of the greatest missionary outreach known as The Gospel Mail began between the Mizo villages across the borders. It began due to the effort of Pu Robuanga. During 1946, Pu Robuanga, who was born in Ruantlang village near the Champhai town of Mizoram, spread the message of Gospel among the Mizo villages in Burma after crossing the Triaui River.¹⁶ The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram also played a major role in the missionary outreach. The Gospel Mail began with a story of three Christian boys in a village called Lianhna, at the Chin hill of Burma. During 1946, the three boys got hold of a copy of a translated Bible. They roam at the edges of the village and recite Biblical hymns. Yet, both the villagers and the parents did not accept their zeal for Christianity. The villagers and their parents obstructed them from becoming an evangelized Christian. But the three boys somehow never back down, maintained their Christian faith and fellowship in Christ (Zaihmingthanga 2016).¹⁷ As their village was a non-Christian village, they had no place for worship, and they often prayed at the outskirts of their village. Their only prized possession was a translation of The New Testament; rather badly torn.

One of the boys died due to illness. The dying boy wished his two friends and parents to die as a Christian. He wished from his sickbed, to perform a simple but a moving Christian burial. After the burial, few of the villagers felt the spirit of Christianity and they converted to Christianity. The newly converts of the Lianhna village desired to know more of Christian faith, hymns and verses. Whenever Mizo visitors or traders visited their village, they pleaded them to share information on Christian faith.

Pu Robuanga heard the news that Mizo villagers across the border are eagerly waiting for Christian preachers and translated Mizo Bible. He began his mission for preaching and distributing translated Bible for them. He began his mission to seek God's guidance to preach the Gospel and started his mission during October 1945. At that time, he visited Lianhna village at Myanmar. He introduced few Christian songs to the villagers and began preaching with the few newly converts. He toured the Mizo villages at the borderland of Burma and

¹⁵ Rita Manchanda and Tapan Bose (1997), *States, Citizens and Outsiders: The Uprooted peoples of South Asia*, Kathmandu: South Asia Forum for Human Rights, p.7.

¹⁶ Triaui River as the benchmark of the border between India and Burma is one of the classic cases of how riverine and mountain crest became a border.

¹⁷ Rev. Dr. Zaihmingthanga (2016), *The History of Christianity in Mizoram*, Aizawl: Lenghawn press, Pp.24-33.

returned to Mizoram with a burden to share the need of evangelization in the villages beyond the Triau River.¹⁸ He met Church elders at Champhai and informed them the need of translated Bible, hymns and a preacher for the villagers across the border. He felt - the sense of sentiments and needs of their ethnic brethren would be considered and acknowledged by the Church leaders.

On November 1945, Pu Robuanga travelled to Aizawl, which is a distance of two hundred kilometers away. He travelled by foot, because there was no proper road for motor vehicles at that time. He wanted to buy the translated portions of the Mizo Bible and Mizo hymn for them.¹⁹ When he reached Aizawl, there were no Bible and hymn on stock at the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram Mission Bookroom (at present known as SYNOD Book Room). He met Miss Katie Hughes (Welsh Missionary) and other Church leaders and informed the spiritual need of their people beyond the border. After few days, Pu Robuanga returned back to the border with some used translated Bible and hymn. He revisited the borderland villages and distributed, whatever he received as gifts from Aizawl.

By the early part of 1946, Pu Robuanga got the message that New Testament is translated into Mizo language, and is available at Aizawl. He again, made his mission to meet Reverend JM Lloyd, the SYNOD. The Welsh missionary gave him fifty copies of Mizo New Testament, which has to be repaid after being sold across the border. He had to carry up and down the hill and trudges for a distance of over 200kms. He was determined to deliver the word of God to the Mizo villages on the other side of Triau River.

On February 1946, the assembly of the Presbyterian Church was held at Aizawl. The Young Lushai Association (YLA) (at present YMA – Young Mizo Association) organized a public meeting on the evening of February 25, 1946 at Mizo High-school (Lalsangliani 1998).²⁰ The main theme for the assembly was to propagate the Mizo language. During the meeting, Pastor Chhawnvunga of Champhai, who had earlier heard and knew the efforts of Pu Robuanga, suggested that the best way to promote Mizo language would be to distribute the available books, songs, poetries, short stories to the villages at the other side of the border. The participants at the meeting and YMA members agreed to a consensus, that they will collect gifts and donated books from the households of Mizoram. They campaigned from door to door to collect books, hymns and translated Bible and brought all the donated books to the SYNOD. From here, Pu Robuanga could collect them and could later distribute across the border. Volunteers and YMA members passed the message of collected books through the village network, from one adjacent village to another village and so on. Later, Pu Robuanga got the message that volunteers had collected four boxes of books for him to distribute across the border.

By June 1946, the volunteers of Gospel Mail decided to deliver the collected items at the doorstep of Pu Robuanga. Because, they had heard the deteriorating health of the founder of Gospel Mail, which made him unable to walk the five days of two hundred kilometers walk to Aizawl. The volunteers decided that the only way to send the boxes was through the voluntary passing from villages – through YMA members - one after another. Messages were sent to all the villages in advance (CYMA 1985).²¹

On June 20, 1946, the boxes were taken into the Mission Veng Church in Aizawl for a dedication service. Later, the volunteers lifted and tied the boxes up in a bamboo pole, one by one to be passed on from shoulder to shoulder across villages in Mizoram leading all the way to the Chin hill. One group of volunteers travelled towards north and another group travelled towards south; they decided to meet at Ruantlang, Champhai at the Indian side. The boxes were taken from one village to another village. YMA volunteers took them to the village Churches. Villagers poured in gifts – more used books, the Bible, hymn, etc. By the time, the consignment

¹⁸ Riverine and mountain crest basically formed the demarcated border between Mizoram and Myanmar. Triau is the name of the river that flows between the borderlines of Mizoram and Chin hill of Myanmar. The course of the river is the officially demarcated border between Mizoram and Myanmar.

¹⁹ The first Bible fully translated into Mizo came was published in 1959.

²⁰ R Lalsangliani (1998), *Life and Works of Rev. Chhuahkhama*, Aizawl: Self Published.

²¹ CYMA *Golden Jubilee 1935-1985* (1986), Aizawl: CYMA Press.

reached Champhai, there were a total of sixteen boxes. Not only did people donate their clothes, books, etc; they also donated pounds of rice, vegetables and chickens for the celebration of the Gospel Mail and the volunteers, who made it possible. The boxes were taken out for distribution beyond the Triaui River on September 28, 1946.

The second round of Gospel Mail occurred during 1947 (Vanlallawma 1999).²² The appeal for contribution of translated Bible and donation of items went far and wide across Mizoram. During the second round, almost every village in the erstwhile LHDC contributed. They send gifts and boxes for their brethren at the Chin hill. By 1947, Aizawl had a post office. Rather than moving the donated items through volunteer village after village, at this time, the donated items could be moved through the post-officials. By August 1947, Pu Robuanga received more than hundred of boxes. Every year, he received boxes, till 1950.

Due to the effort of Gospel Mail, a significant transformation had taken in the Mizo villages of Chin hill. Prior to the second Gospel Mail, Mizo villages beyond the Triaui had only four churches (None prior to the Gospel Mail). Due to the Gospel mail, the number of churches rose to One hundred thirty Seven!²³ The Gospel spread by the volunteers saw their success beyond the border. It evangelized many villages at the Chin hill.

Mizo language was promoted due to the Gospel Mail, converted Christians across the border - sang, danced and praised the God. The newly baptized Christians looked towards the Mizo Church for guidance and spiritual care. By 1963, there were thirty-three preaching stations, forty-five local congregations, six pastors with a Christian population of five thousand three hundred in the Dai and Matupi Area of Chin hill.²⁴

As part of the Gospel Mail, Mizoram Presbyterian Church (MPC) opened a school in 1954 at Saek village, which is located at the northern part of Chin hill, with the consent of government in Chin hill. They used Mizoram school text books on this side of the border at the Presbyterian run school. The students were taught in Mizo tawng (Mizo language). It can be recalled that the teachers at the Presbyterian run school were also from Mizoram. They were Pu Papawng from Khawbung (a village at Champhai District of Mizoram) and his assistant Pu Hrangchhuana from Durtlang, Aizawl. The school was opened for four years and later it was closed in 1968 due to shortages of fund and pressure from the Military Junta of Myanmar (Lalthangliana 2001, p.854).²⁵

Gospel Mail showcased the messages of - love, memory and cordial relationship for the Mizo brethren at both sides of the border. The Gospel Mail that went to Myanmar from Mizoram spiritually awakened the Church and the Mizo societies at the Chin hill of Burma.

During 1965, the Mizoram Presbyterian tried to send delegates to Burma to strengthen co-operation with the American Baptist Mission (ABM) and Methodist Church (MC) in Chin hill. Sending Mizo Christian Preacher also became difficult due to the shortage of fund and changing socio-political and economic scenarios both in Mizoram (Famine in Mizoram) and in Burma (General Ne Win Military Junta). Hence, the activities of Presbyterian Church of Mizoram through the Gospel Mail dwindled!

²² Vanlallawma (1999), *Chanchntha Dak*, Aizawl: Hrilthansanga.

²³ According to Rev JM Lloyd (2004), "History of Church in Mizoram (Harvest in the hill)", *Gospel Centenary Series No.1*. Aizawl: Synod Publication Board. At the beginning there were only two churches at the Dai and Matupi area of Chin hill. Many new churches from all denominations came up later.

²⁴ Rev. Dr. Zaihmingthanga (2016), *The History of Christianity in Mizoram*, Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, Pp.24-33.

²⁵ After Rev. A. Carson died on 1st April, 1908 at Hakha, the Baptist Missionary Society sent Rev. Joseph Herbert Cope and his wife Elizabeth Smith Cope to take up Rev. Cason's place. They started their ministry with Mrs. Carson for two years. Dr. J.G. Wooding, Mrs. Laura Hardin Carson and Rev. J.H. Cope contributed to prepare a book on different Mizo clan in Chin hill. The number of school increased gradually. 2,350 people became literate out of 30,000 plus population among the Chin people in 1922. See details in B Lalthangliana (2001), *Ka Lungkham*, Aizawl: Lalrinthanga, Pp. 851-854).

Historical Woes, Zo Map Making and Zo Reunification Organization (ZORO)

During 1834-35, a treaty was signed between the King of Burma and the British representative. As part of the treaty, a line representing the boundary between Burma and British India was created. Captain Pemberton was the political agent of the British, stationed at Imphal in Manipur during 1833-38. At that time, he was highly influential in the making of the boundary line between Burma and British India. He drew for the first time, the imaginary line that bifurcated the Zo country and the Zo habitats. As per the Archival records and from other sources, it is generally accepted that Pemberton line was the first line (dotted lines on a map) that divided Mizo brethren and their habitat between two British administrative units of Burma and India.²⁶ The line bifurcates the geographical spaces and villages as different subjects with different jurisdiction. It also dislocated the historical sites, spiritual sites and revered sites such as Khampat Bungpui (a banyan tree considered to be scared at Chin hill), Rih Dil (a lake at Chin hill) and many Menhir sites of the Mizos. The line divided their brethren and split apart their cultural roots. During 1840s, the line however did not carry any political meanings to the communities, residing at the both sides of the Pemberton line, initially. This aspect was captured in an appropriate manner in the words of Alexander Mackenzie -

“According to the boundary laid down by Captain Pemberton, contained in the Treaty of 1834, part of the Sootie (Zo) tribes at present live in Manipur and part in Burmese or independent territory. So far as our records show, the Burmese government does not appear even to have exercised any control over the Sooties (Zomi) to the south of the Manipur boundary line. The whole tribe seems to be practically independent, and not to have been affected at all by the Treaty of 1834. No Burmese officers appear to have ever taken charge of this tract of territory under the fifth Article of the Treaty”.

²⁷ (Mackenzie, 1995 Reprint, Pp.173-174)

Later there was an attempt to redraw the line that separated villages between Mizoram and Burma by again during 1900-01. As mentioned above, the officials followed and maintained the riverine and natural streams as the established border between the two countries. For instance, on 16th April 1901, correspondence and letter of exchanges between FJ Monahan (Chief Commissioner of Assam) and Chief Secretary of Burma revealed that they reviewed the Pemberton line, which represented the border between Chin hill and Luhsai hill.²⁸ They reviewed and agreed that the border runs from - north to south, which was basically the course of Triaui River, as detailed earlier by Captain Pemberton. They agreed on the existing Pemberton line as the demarcated border between Mizoram and Burma. By 1937, the political establishment of Burma incepted and it was bifurcated from the Bengal Presidency. No significant change on border occurred. The Pemberton line of 1934 became the India-Burma border.²⁹

Further, Vumson³⁰ in his text ‘Zo History’ mentioned that Mizo habitats were bifurcated by the outsiders like British political agents and Officials, which were not through the consent of the elders. Vumson questions the ethical questions and criticized the drawing of political map and the dividing of the Mizo ethnic across three countries by Sir Robert Radcliffe, who was the Border Commissioner during British India. Vumson further mentioned that Radcliffe never set foot on the region. Rather the map maker sketch the map dividing all sorts of ethnic homelands – Naga, Mizo, Chakma, Hajong, Bengali, Assamese at Fort William, Kolkata. In

²⁶ Further details See Bianca Son (2013), “*The Making of the Zo: The Chin of Burma and the Lushai and Kuki of India through Colonial and Local Narratives 1826–1917 and 1947–1988*”, Doctoral dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies.

²⁷ Alexander Mackenzie (1884, Reprint 1995), *The Northeast Frontier of India*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications.

²⁸ Mizoram State Archive, Sl.No. CB-1, Pol-5.

²⁹ The Lushai Expedition of 1871-72 brought the Lushai hill under the British rule from 1889. In 1891, the British created the South and North Lushai hill district, each district under a Superintendent or Political Officer. The South was administered from Bengal and the North from Assam. In 1898 the two districts were merged and the Lushai hill was made a part of Assam. With the partition of Burma from India, in 1937, the Lushai hill was ceded to India.

³⁰ Vumson (1993), *Zo History*, Aizawl: Published by the Author.

Vumson's assessment of the Mizo history, he mentioned that they were denied of their rights to have a say on their political boundaries. He wrote -

“This action, once again, intensified the kind of irredentist feeling among the Zomi, that had been growing since the separation of India and Burma in 1937”. (Vumson 1993, p.299)

What about the Mizo villages on the west bordering between India and Bangladesh during the course of Indian Independence? By the turn of 1947, which was during the eve of Indian Independence, Bordoloi Committee Report (BCR) of July 1947, recommended the Chittagong hill Tract (CHT) and southern part of Tippera hill to be ceded to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).³¹ The report also bifurcated the geographical areas inhabited by Mizo villages between India and East Pakistan. It may be noted here – CHT was administered from Bengal since 1860 through the Act XXII of 1860. The historical tragedy of the bifurcated villages and habitats during the eve of Indian Independence was detailed in SK Chaube's text 'Hill Politics in Northeast India'.³² Chaube mentioned,

“The loss of the Chittagong hill Tract created for India a number of problems. The Kuki-Chin solidarity over the southern part of hill Tipperah, the Chittagong hill tract and the Lushai hill was broken, and intensified the kind of 'irredentist' feeling that had been growing among the people since the separation of India and Burma in 1937”. (Chaube 1999, Reprint, p.86)

During 1946-47, political drama unfolds at the Lushai hill (now Mizoram) during the eve of Indian Independence the fate of the hill was not clear whether to join India or Burma. At that time, opinions of the Superintendent (the highest official administrator), two political parties – Mizo Union (MU)³³ and United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO), and the Lushai hill Village Chiefs Council were different during 1947. During that time, there were diverse opinions - on where Mizoram will be? MU was in favor of joining India. The Chiefs Council was in favor of joining Burma. UMFO was in favor of joining Burma. McDonald – the Superintendent - was in favor of neither joining Burma nor India; rather voicing for the Crown Colony Policy (CCP)³⁴ under the Governor of Assam Sir Robert Reid. It envisaged that British should retain these regions under schedule area when Burma and India became independent.³⁵

On 15th August 1947, the news for independent reached late in Lushai hill. Late though, parts of Zo settlements went to Assam (now forming Mizoram), one part went to Manipur (forming Churachandpur and Chandel districts and, the Sadar hill), another parts went to Tripura (Vanghmun hill), another part went to Pakistan (now Bangladesh) while the Burmese part formed the Chin State, and parts of Arakan, Magwe and Sagang division.³⁶ Elderly Mizo until now has a strong memory of the fraught history of 1947. During fieldwork, a

³¹ Vumson (1993), *Zo History*, Aizawl: Published by the Author, p.231.

³² SK Chaube (1999, Reprint), *hill Politics in Northeast India*, Bombay: Orient Longman.

³³ MU was the first political party of Mizoram. Till 1946, the superintendent did not allow any Mizo under his administration for popular participation in politics. By 1946, Superintendent AHR McDonald lifted the ban on political participation.

³⁴ Initially this policy was kept confidentially and planned by Governor Robert Reid of Assam. It envisaged that excluded areas in Assam administration under the 1935 Government of India Act, differ markedly among themselves, but they have this one characteristic in common, that neither racially, historically, culturally, nor linguistically have they any affinity with the people of the plains or with peoples of India proper.

³⁵ The Crown Colony Scheme of Robert Reid and the arguments of the British Constitutional expert Reginald Coupland, details see David R Syiemlieh (2014), *On the Edge of Empire*, New Delhi: Sage.

³⁶ On the eve of Indian Independence '1947', *Pu Khawtinkhuma* and *Pu Vanthuama* of Mizo Union signed the incorporation of Lushai hill to India on the condition that the Lushai will be allowed to opt out of the Indian Union when willing to do so subject to a minimum period of ten years. In the 1950's MAUTAM (famine) broke out in the Mizo hill. This famine devastated the entire hill. They formed a special committee called Mizo National Famine (MNFF) to render voluntary service to the people most affected by the famine. The Mautam of the 1950s was severe and there was popular discontentment against the Indian Government over the poor tackling of the famine. The insensitivity of the Government of India revived in the people the dreams of their own independence. In 1964-65, 'independence' became a burning issue among their intellectuals and college students. When the famine was over, on

Mizo elder informed that they heard the news of Mizoram becoming a part of India at the evening, only. The elder also mentioned that the Indian Flag was unfurled only at the evening of August 15, 1947.

As of now, the border delimitation and border demarcation between India and Myanmar is based on the agreement on international boundary between the Indian government and the Union Government of Burma with India on 10th March 1967. The governments agreed to the formal delimitation and demarcation of the border, which has already divided villages, since, the Pemberton line.

On Mediating Institutions and Its Ethos

World Zo Convention, for the first time was held in Champhai, Mizoram on 20th May 1988. It was jointly organized by – Zomi National Congress (Manipur) and Peoples Conference (Mizoram). The outcome of the Convention was the formation of Zo Reunification Organization (ZORO). ZORO covers all the Zo tribes– Chin, Mizo, Kuki, political parties of Zo like the MNF, Peoples Conference (PC), their subsidiary organizations and associations, who consider themselves as the Zo descendants from the Zo habitats of Mizoram, Bangladesh, Chin hill, Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya. The participants organized a long march, which began on 23rd May 1988 from Champhai (a border township at the Mizoram – Chin hill) to Aizawl. Participants of the convention reached Aizawl on the 28th May 1988.³⁷ Participants at the convention also organized a week long march. Participants and civil society members joined the march and gathered steam on their way.³⁸ After a week, they reached Aizawl. The first formal function to unify all the Zo descendants was held on 31st May 1988, at the Vanapa Hall, Aizawl. The main motive for the inception of ZORO was to bring solidarity, even though they were divided by border. Items such as – handicraft, traditional dance and cultural show were showcased during the convention.

During fieldwork, ZORO leaders mentioned that till date, only three ZORO conferences were held, due to the lack of financial support from the countries they belong to. Twice in Mizoram – at Aizawl on 1988 and 1993. And, during 2013 at Churachandpur, which is a Mizo township in Manipur. During fieldwork, ZORO members informed that even though they wanted to organize once in three years, they could not due to the shortage of funds. After the second conference (1993) and the third Conference (2013), the objectives are not yet fulfilled; yet remained the same. The leaders of the mediating institution, during fieldwork interview mentioned, “to be able to protect our land only when we unified ourselves and exercise our right as an indigenous people”.³⁹ The body emphasized for the unification of all their descendants living mainly in three countries and reminded its members across the borderlands of Mizoram, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Introspecting the main objective of ZORO, in an opinion page on the leading newspaper of Mizoram - Vanglaini – with the title ‘Reunification Hi’, which was written by Lalrinawma Pa (1988),⁴⁰ mentioned that when there is a need of reunification, it clearly shows that there was a separation some time ago. The separation as mentioned in the article was the bifurcation during the border delimitation and demarcation of 1967. The article also mentioned that since the time of British rule, the Mizo clans were divided into provinces - Teddim, Falam at Myanmar, Aizawl and Lunglei province in Mizoram, Vanhmun hill at Tripura and at the Chittaging hill tract in Bangladesh. It was only with the formation of ZORO in 1988, the first voice for reunification came into the picture of divided Mizo clans.

A 'Mizoram Map' drawn by the former Mizo National Front's (MNF) Senator Malsawma Colney, on behalf of the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP - the state's most influential student body) reminded the unfulfilled dream of reunification. It was published during 1995, by the MZP at Aizawl. The map shows the pre-British territories

October 28, 1961, the MNFF was converted into a political party called the Mizo National Front (MNF) under the leadership of Laldenga.

³⁷ Vanglaini (6 June 1988), Vol-VII No-127.

³⁸ Vanglaini (19 May, 1988), Vol-VII No-112.

³⁹ Fieldwork narratives, Aizawl, 21st May 2016.

⁴⁰ Vanglaini, (14 June 1988), Vol-VII No-134.

and Mizo villages in the three countries. Pu Laldenga⁴¹ had earlier mentioned about the idea of 'Greater Mizoram' in his Public speeches, during Rambuai (Mizo Insurgency) of 1966-86⁴².

During Rambuai, Zoram Map was not prepared and published. It was only after Mizoram achieved statehood (1987) and under Laldenga's leadership, the idea of Greater Mizoram as a geographical entity and as a political unity, was reborn and ultimately, the idea of the map was the outcome. Malsawma Colney was a former MNF Senate leader under Laldenga. During an interview, which was a part of the fieldwork, Malsawma Colney informed that he prepared the map so that though politically divided, the map will help in maintaining unity altogether and remembering the divided villages across the border. He was also questioned by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officials of India because of the drawing of the map that goes against the established rules of the nation.⁴³

Mizoram in this map is three times bigger than the political map of Mizoram, as we know of today. The map shows Mizo homelands across the Myanmar, Assam, Bangladesh and Manipur borderlands. During fieldwork, the mapmaker informed that even though the goal of MNF – complete independence - remains unfulfilled, the torch of Mizo nationalist movement remains as a soft corner in his heart. He relied on folktales, hymns and memories from oral histories as tools behind the making of the map. The spirit of the map according to him is to revive the feeling nationalism and the postcolonial displacement of the villages due to the divisive border. He also mentioned during the interview - the map does not pose threat to the national integrity of India, it just shows the land inhabited by Mizo tribe, and it aims to bring about 'mental integrity of the tribe'.⁴⁴

During Rambuai, it is also important to note that MNF made their militia camps and headquarters in the Mizo villages of Bangladesh and Myanmar, only – not elsewhere. During 1966-1986, Mizo villages at CHT and Arakan Hill (AH) were the chosen sites for MNF camps and MNF government in exile, under Pu Laldenga.

By 1966, Indian military operations within Mizoram forced the MNF to move the Headquarter to CHT and AH. It is important to note here that MNF did not establish headquarters in Chin hill, but ran MNF makeshift camps only, due to the objection by Burmese authorities.⁴⁵ However, MNF was supported by the Communist Party of Burma, which operates in the AH during that time. (Pachau and van Schendel 2014:343).⁴⁶ The MNF operating from the eastern side of Mizoram briefly held four towns across the border in Chin state in Burma (Bhaumik 1966:166).⁴⁷ During 1970, MNF made a pact with Burmese Communist Party. It was due to the 1970 pact between MNF and Communist party of Burma, Pu Laldenga managed to contact Pakistani diplomat in Rangoon and shifted his base to Rawalpindi, Pakistan. CHT is the preferred choice for MNF. CHT makes MNF easier to launch attack in Mizoram. After 1975, there was a regime change in Bangladesh. MNF detachments from AH started shifting their base in the CHT (for more details see Bhaumik 1966:200).

Novellas, Music, Lyrics and Network Do Not Fade Out

Captain C Khuma is a well-known Mizo fiction writer. He was born on 17th March 1914 at Reiek, Mizoram. He finished his middle school in Aizawl. He joined the British Army during 1934. During 1938, he did his short-term education course at Maymyo City, Burma. During his services at the army, he was promoted from a Rifleman to a Captain. After serving thirty-seven years in the army, he retired and settled down at Rangoon. The notable aspect in his fiction writing is the connections he made between places, events and characters. In

⁴¹ Laldenga played the 'Greater Mizoram Card' in a strategic manner so as to gather more support for the MNF goals from all the sections of Mizo society across the borderlands. He wanted independence of Greater Mizoram. He wanted to bring together the different Mizo tribes had divided by the British between India, Burma and Bangladesh, under a single administration.

⁴² Laldenga stressed upon the Mongoloid past of the Mizo. He derived his idea of Greater Mizoram from the Crown Colony Scheme of Robert Reid and the arguments of the British Constitutional expert Reginald Coupland.

⁴³ Interview with the Author during 2015.

⁴⁴ Interview with the Author during 2016.

⁴⁵ Subhir Bhowmick (1996), *Insurgent Crossfire: Northeast India*, New Delhi: Lancers, p 67.

⁴⁶ Joy LK Pachau and Willem van Schendel (2014), *The Camera as Witness*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁷ Subhir Bhowmick (1996), *Insurgent Crossfire: Northeast India*, New Delhi: Lancers.

his writings, he maintained the connections between Burma and Mizoram. The plot and characters of his Novellas were both set across the borders of Mizoram and Burma.

In one of his Novella, *Maymyo Sanapui* (1950), he revealed the divided Mizo habitats of Burma and Myanmar.⁴⁸ According to B Lalthangliana (1999)⁴⁹ *Maymyo Sanapui* is the first ever Mizo fiction ever printed in press, which was printed in Rangoon. The story was based on two lovers, the main character from Maymyo city of Burma and other main character from Mizoram, with the Second World War as the main background of the novel.

Another Novella, which revealed the cross-border connections between Mizoram and Burma, written by Captain C Khuma was *Chhingkhual Lungdi* (1950).⁵⁰ It was written, while he was in the Burmese Army. The story described the urge for many Mizo youths to join Burmese Army. The youths wanted to join the army, and they required cash to travel to Mandalay. The story mentioned that many youths involved in trading across the border, which were common prior to the Second World War. After earning a reasonable amount, they travelled to Mandalay and other towns of Burma, looking for better opportunities and also to get enrolled at the Burmese army.

Mizo musicians moved easily between Mizoram and Burma (Pachau and van Schendel 2014: 385). Western Music scene popped out at the main towns of Mizoram during the midst of Rambuai. It was a healing remedy for them, during the two decades of insurgency. During 1970s, one of the most admired singer/lyricist – Pi Lalsangzuali came out of the music scene. She was the first Mizo artist to release a solo-album in 1977. The Music scene did not confine within Mizoram. The All India Radio (AIR) at Aizawl played Pi Lalsangzuali's songs. The songs broadcasted from at the AIR – Aizawl - were hustled and listened in Chin hill. By late 1970s, songs performed by Mizo rock bands and musical groups from Tahan (Chin hill) became hit songs in Aizawl. During 1981, the bands toured and performed in concerts at Aizawl during Rambuai (Pachau & van Schendel 2014:392).

Vumson (1993) explained the music scene and cross-border exchange of music and lyrics in an apt manner –
 “As an example of cultural exchange, a music group called Zodi, from Tahan, visited Aizawl in 1980. The group became so popular that All India Radio of Aizawl was very often requested to play music by the group. In 1981, another music group from Tahan, the Vulmawi visited Aizawl. They became so popular with the people of West Zoram that they decided to tour the whole western area. They appeared (performed) in Kolasib, Serchhip, Lunglei, Saiha and Champhai, form where they returned to Tahan”.
 (Vumson 1993, p.321)

The trends of cross-border musical exchange and performance are getting stronger. Just the other day, Mizoram cable operators played tracks of many bands from Chin hill. T-Melody - a Mizo band from Tahan - has quite a number of sizeable fans in Mizoram. They toured Mizoram every year prior to the Christmas, since 2004. Like wise, artist and rock bands from Mizoram also tour Tahan, Falam, Hakha and Teddim on an annual basis.

Cannot End Borderlands Ties

July 2015 mentioned the solidarity and efforts to maintain stronger ties with Mizo villages in Chin hill. MZP and MSU are the most influential mediating institutions of today's Mizoram. On many counts, their campaigns and efforts mentioned about cross-border links and ties. They never denied of their brethren at the other side of the border. The press (Accessed from MZP General Headquarters)⁵¹ release mentions -

⁴⁸ Captain C Khuma (1950), *Maymyo Sanapui*, Rangoon: Lin Press.

⁴⁹ B Lalthangliana (2001), *Ka Lungkham*, Aizawl: Lalrinthanga.

⁵⁰ Captain C Khuma (1950), *Chhingkhual Lungdi*, Rangoon: Lin Press.

⁵¹ (Press Release Copy obtained from MZP General Headquarters, 4th November 2016).

“The Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) and Mizo Students’ Union (MSU) appreciate the initiatives taken by different NGOs and the government of Mizoram for the relief and aid of Zohnahthlak (Zo tribes and its sub-tribes), the victims of natural Calamities in Chin hill. The two students’ Organizations - MZP and MSU - also requested to all the students to donate for our brothers in Chin hill”.

“The MZP and MSU joint committee meeting was held at the MZP General Headquarters on 6th August 2015 discussing how the community students could help those victims of Myanmar natural catastrophe. The two students’ organization body requested all the students to donate the equivalent of a day’s lunch for our brothers who are suffering from floods and landslide in Chin hill. There is a plan for donation so that most of the students can donate for them. By remembering that even though their clans and sub-tribes are scattered in different places due to partition, mutual aid is always observed in times of suffering, the MZP and MSU are requesting each one of the students to donate money worth of their one day lunch for helping our brothers, our blood relatives who are suffering on account of floods and landslide in the Chin hill”.

During April 2016, MZP organized the Myanmar Unification Tour (MUT) cum 18th Chin⁵² Students Fellowship (CSF), Myanmar. The mediating institution made the move, and it is a recent outreach motive. They initiate such tours due to the improving political scenario across the border.⁵³ They organized a function during 17th – 18th April 2016, at Rih-Khawmawi, Myanmar. As per the press release of the function, MZP and CSF revealed that several Mizo leaders of Chin hill, Shillong, Assam, Manipur and Chittagong (Bangladesh) attended the event. The MZP wished Chawimawina (goodwill) to Chin State Chief Minister Mr. Lian Luaia, Chin State, Parliament Speaker Mr. Zo Bawih and Chin Affairs Minister Mr. Lal Thawm Thanga.

The 18th Chin university students’ fellowship conference was held at the Chin province, capital – Hakha - during 21st – 26th April 2016.⁵⁴ Their descendants from various borderlands attended the conference. On the evening of 22nd April 2016, a cultural program was also held at Hakha. During fieldwork, Mizo elders mentioned that Hakha was the western capital of their undivided habitat, and Aizawl was the eastern capital. During the event, the descendants performed their cultural dances’ and songs’.

On 26 April 2016, MZP organized a unification tour to Chin hill. MZP leaders visited the engineering colleges at Tahan⁵⁵ and Kalay. In these universities, there are sizeable numbers of students and professors from the Mizo community, especially from the Chin hill. Later, MZP and its visiting members attended the inauguration of the new democratic government of Sanmyo Bloc, Kalemoyo.

The newer networks between the Chin and Mizo societies have come into play through the efforts of MZP, MSU and other civil society organizations from both sides of the border. The newer networks created by mediating institutions, through their activities reveals the message of solidarity and to maintain links with a common playing field like the issues of common identity, common history, belongings, yet - divided by the border.

⁵² FK Lehmann wrote that Chins in Burma are the communities that inhabits in the Chin hill province of Burma. Mizo tribe is one of those communities inhabiting in the Chin hill. Chins also means the various Zo descendants like Kuki, Paite, Hmar, Mizo inhabiting in the Chin region. For further details, see Lehman, F.K (1963), *The Structure of Chin Society*, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, Pp.12-27.

⁵³ Better political environment in Myanmar occurs after the inauguration of the democratic transition led by Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyii and her party National League for Democracy (NLD) Party.

⁵⁴ MZP and MSU Mizoram Press Release of 7th July 2015. Copy obtained from MZP General HQ, Aizawl.

⁵⁵ Tahan is the part of Kalemoyo city, also one of the administrative centers of the Chin hill province of Myanmar.

During December 2016, Mizoram Chief Minister LalThanhawla mentioned the importance of closer ties with the neighboring country, during the Zo Fest. Speaking at the concluding ceremony of the three-day meet at Zokhawthar, near the Indo-Myanmar border, he said there is a need to strengthen the bonds between the Zo brethren in Mizoram and Myanmar. He was the chief guest during the festival. He also lamented on divided Zo descendants, he uttered, "We lost land in the west on the Indo-Bangladesh border. But we will never support fencing of the Indo-Myanmar border due to our close ties with our brothers living in the neighboring countries".⁵⁶ He further, mentioned, "Zo people were one of the worst sufferers of the British policy of divide and rule and the extended Zo brethren had been divided across three countries and even within the country across Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Assam. But despite this sad fact, he opined that all the Zo descendants and Chins are blood brothers and the divide by border cannot change our historical and newly evolving relationships".⁵⁷ He called upon their people to be law-abiding, responsible and trustworthy citizens of whichever country they reside in. On the acceptability of the Duhlian dialect, the lingua franca of the people, the chief minister said: "We must accept Zo tribes who do not understand Duhlian within our extended umbrella of their ethnic brethren".

The festival, organized by the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) - a students' body - aims at bringing the extended their hnahtlak spreaded across India, Bangladesh and Myanmar closer and was directed towards strengthening the unity and friendship of their descendant. Zo Fest was held for the first time in 2002 at Churachandpur, Manipur. The student body is the main organizer of the Fest, which aims at uniting all their descendants across the borderlands of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. North Eastern Council (NEC), Government of India has been the main sponsor for the two day Festival since its inception. Since 2002, MZP has been organizing Zo Fest once in every two years. During fieldwork at the recently held Festival, 7-9 December 2016 at Zokhawthar; cultural items, tradition, belonging, past and musicals were displayed. The main theme of the Fest since 2002-2016 has remained unchanged: Unau Kan Ni (We are brothers/sisters). Government officials during the festival claimed - they always provide shelter to their ethnic members whenever there were ethnic flare-ups at the borderland. The organizer along with the participants from the divided borderland expressed their efforts to coexist and strengthen their bonds of friendship and brotherhood.

To conclude the chapter, cross-border networks in the Myanmar-Mizoram is not always positive or laudable. On few cases, every year, it went problematic! It became problematic, mainly due to the existing illicit trades of drugs and jades across the border between Mizoram and Myanmar. Based on events and facts the older ties of close link and close networks are questioned on such moments. Many elders deemed such illicit trades hampering the close solidarity between Mizo and Chins across the borderlands. Mediating institutions and family network continues, despite of the undesirable events like illicit trade witnessing across borderlands. The second chapter will discuss and analyze these undesirable events and its outcomes witnessing at present, in the borderlands of Myanmar and Mizoram.

So far, GOI had agreed to the Mizoram government's request to build four new bridges across the Indo-Myanmar border. The paradox Mizoram government maintains is that they seek funds from GOI and World Bank to build bridges and better roads on the Mizoram-Myanmar border; whereas, they seek funds from World Bank and GOI to build walls and fences on the Bangladesh-Myanmar borderlands. The ongoing World Bank-funded project to widen Champhai-Zokhawthar road would eventually make inroads into Falam and Tiddim (Myanmar). No one talks about building new roads on the Mizoram-Bangladesh borderland; rather, murmurs to build walls to minimize infiltration of illegal migrants.

⁵⁶ Fieldwork narratives, 9th December 2016, Zokhawthar.

⁵⁷ Fieldwork narratives, 9th December 2016, Zokhawthar.

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