MAPPING IDENTITY: INVESTIGATING THE PRE-COLONIAL MIZO

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Mapping Identity: Investigating the Pre-Colonial Mizo

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled *Mapping Identity: Investigating the Pre-Colonial Mizo* submitted to Mizoram University by C Lalthangliana Junior in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies is purely an original research work accomplished by the scholar under my direct supervision and neither the thesis nor any part of it has so far been submitted to any educational institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I am, therefore, glad to recommend in all fairness that this dissertation be sent to the examiner(s) for an expeditious evaluation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies.

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DECLARATION

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I, C Lalthangliana Junior, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies.

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CONTENTS

Glossary of Mizo Terms Used

A stag -	A wild boar a
Chhinlung -	It literally translates to “stone cover” and refers to a vast cave from which the Mizo/Zo tribes emerged.
Chhuak -	Literally means ‘originated from’.
Chung Pathian -	A benevolent God that resided in the heavens
Fathang -	A tax/due paid to the Chief in the form of paddy.
Huai -	An evil spirit that harms human beings
Khawnbawl Upa -	A well respected elderly individual who assisted the Chief in his administration
Khuangchawi -	An event of celebration for the whole community lasting a week for the entire village, required to be organized by anyone aspiring to attain thangchhuah status.
Lasi -	A supernatural entity in the form of a beautiful maiden, that keeps watch over the animal kingdom
Lung Chhin -	Stone Cover. It refers to the same concept as Chhinlung.
Mitthi Khua -	Abode/Village of the dead
Mitthirawplam -	A religious ritual involving the worship of ancestral spirits
Muvanlai -	Hawk
Pasaltha -	As esteemed position (for men) in traditional Mizo society earned by dint of valour and hunting prowess.
Pathian -	A benevolent God
Pheichham -	A one legged supernatural entity that could grant wishes

Pialral -	Paradise
Ramhuai -	Same as Huai
Rih Dil -	The largest lake in Mizoram, which is currently situated in present-day Myanmar, was traditionally believed by the Mizo people to be the abode of the dead.
Rulngan -	Viper/Snake
Sechhun -	An occasion of festivity in which a mithun is chided and speared to death by the young men
Sele -	Wild mithun,
Thangchhuah -	A privileged position in traditional society by earned by virtue of economic affluence or exceptional hunting prowess
Thirdeng -	A blacksmith
Tlawmngaihna -	A moral code of conduct that requires individuals, especially men, to prioritize the collective welfare over their own wellbeing.
Tuihuai -	An evil spirit that resided in lakes and rivers
Upa -	Khawnbawl Upa
Zalen - of	An esteemed position earned in the traditional Mizo society by virtue exceptional skills in agricultural works.
Zawlbuk -	A public dormitory for men in traditional Mizo society where all the bachelors were expected to spend the night.
Zu -	An alcoholic beverage made from fermented rice

Chapter One

Introduction - Problemetics of Mizo Identity

Identity is a dynamic and multifaceted construct, encapsulating an individual's self-awareness, comprising personal attributes, memories, experiences, values, beliefs, and aspirations. It does not exist independently but emerges in relation to social dimensions, intertwining with diverse roles and memberships. Serving as a perceptual lens, identity shapes how individuals understand themselves and the world, evolving continuously through interactions, influences, and the interplay of personal and collective elements (Appiah 72). Adopting a historicist perspective, identity is views as socially embedded, rejecting individualism in favor of acknowledging the crucial roles of recognition and affirmation from others.

It manifests and assumes various forms shaped by the dynamic influences of communities, traditions, and factors like nationality, religion, and gender. This intricate interplay not only results in the plurality of identity but also underscore the complex nature of its formation. The thesis posits that this intricate interplay between individual and collective elements in identity formation is intricately linked to functional necessity, meaning that beyond the nuanced interactions of personal and social dimensions, identity serves functional roles, reflecting the pragmatic needs and adaptations within a given societal context.

Preoccupations with identity have intensified universally, significantly shaping the current global political configurations (Fukuyama x). This trend is not unique to the Mizos of Mizoram. After enduring colonial subjugation, they subsequently find themselves integrated into a nation-state entity with which they perceive no cultural affiliation. These circumstances have sparked passionate discussions surrounding the notion of Mizo identity.

The Mizos constitute the indigenous populace of Mizoram, an Indian state located in the northeastern part of the country. Located between Bangladesh to the west and Myanmar to the east, Mizoram shares borders with Manipur, Assam, and Tripura to the northeast, north, and northwest respectively. The precise origins of the

Mizo remain shrouded in some degree of ambiguity, with historical accounts pointing towards a possible migration from *chhinlung* (stone cover), China (Chhangte 8). This idea of *Chhinlung* as the origins of the Mizos is also substantiated by the folkloric narratives. From this point, it is believed that they embarked on a southward journey, leaving indelible marks on the cultural landscapes of the Shan State, Kabaw Valley, and Chin Hills in present day Myanmar. Finally, in the 16th century, they found their permanent home amidst the lush hills and fertile valleys of Mizoram.

Pre-colonial Mizo society was intricately structured around independent villages and chiefdoms. Though each village exhibited distinctive minor structural attributes that held relevance exclusively within its own context, "a general uniform socio-cultural pattern was said to be found throughout the mainland of the Mizo Hills" (Rokhum 29). The Mizo people thrived on a mix of shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering, forging a deep connection with their natural environment. However, this period was not devoid of conflict. Inter-tribal warfare and headhunting practices were prevalent, highlighting the martial spirit and cultural nuances of the Mizos.

The arrival of the British Raj in the late 19th century ushered in an era of transformative change for the Mizo people. The annexation of the region following the Lushai Expedition of 1890 marked the beginning of colonial rule, introducing a range of administrative and social reforms that irrevocably altered the Mizo way of life. One of the most significant impacts was the implementation of indirect rule. Under this system, the British utilized existing tribal chiefs as intermediaries, granting them limited autonomy in exchange for their cooperation (Zorema 150). While this approach maintained some semblance of local governance, it ultimately served to consolidate British control and undermine traditional Mizo power structures.

Another major change was the introduction of Christianity. In the pre-colonial dispensation, the traditional Mizo society was predominantly animistic, with the majority practicing ancestral worship and adhering to primitive religious belief

systems (McCall 67). However, the Christian missionaries' arrival in 1894 marked a paradigm shift in the Mizo society. Missionaries established schools and churches, proselytized extensively, and promoted Western values and practices. While Christianity initially faced resistance, it gradually gained converts and became deeply ingrained in Mizo culture.

According to the 2011 census, Christians now make up 87.17% of the population. This widespread embrace of Christianity has purportedly brought about a profound transformation, introducing a redefined understanding of the Mizo identity and causing a substantial paradigm shift in their cultural practices and belief systems. Formal education was also introduced during this period. The British established schools that taught English language and literature, mathematics, and other subject. Education provided opportunities for social mobility and upward economic advancement, but it also served to alienate some Mizo who felt it threatened their traditional way of life.

In addition to these changes, the British established new administrative structures that imposed centralized control over previously autonomous Mizo villages. This led to the erosion of traditional decision-making processes and the imposition of British laws and regulations. These profound changes prompted both adaptation and resistance from the Mizo people. On the one hand, many Mizo embraced Christianity and formal education, recognizing the opportunities they offered. They adapted their customs and traditions to accommodate these new influences. On the other hand, some Mizo remained deeply attached to their traditional way of life and resisted the imposition of British colonial rule. This tension between adaptation and resistance would continue to shape Mizo society throughout the colonial period and beyond.

With the independence of India in 1947, Mizoram initially remained within the boundaries of Assam. However, the desire for a distinct political identity led to the formation of the Mizo National Front (hereafter MNF) in 1961. This marked the beginning of a protracted struggle for self-determination, characterized by periods of armed resistance and political negotiation. The MNF's pursuit of an autonomous

nation-state culminated in the Mizo insurgency of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, a tumultuous period marked by violent conflict and social upheaval. However, this period also witnessed the emergence of a strong political leadership within the MNF, paving the way for a peaceful resolution and eventual political recognition. In 1972, Mizoram was granted Union Territory status, followed by the momentous achievement of full statehood within India in 1987.

Thus, their journey, spanning centuries and encompassing vast geographical terrains, presents a unique case study in human adaptation, cultural swerve, and the intricate dynamics of change and preservation of their identity. Migration, colonialism, the introduction of Christianity along with formal education, and the assimilation into a previously foreign nation-state entity collectively constitute morphogenic processes that have instigated transformations in the nature of their social reality. The advent of colonialism and the introduction of Christianity in particular, catalyzed a paradigm shift, introducing modernity to the erstwhile traditional society of the Mizos. This transformation posed a formidable challenge to their established cultural norms and, consequently, to their traditional identity. Simultaneously, the integration into a statist discourse heightened a palpable sense of subjugation, impelling them to articulate distinctive national identities. This articulation is a direct response to their assimilation into a broader national entity, which they perceive as lacking in a meaningful connection. Consequently, nationalism becomes a pivotal and integral aspect of their modern political experience.

In such historical contexts, discourses on ethnic and national identity have acquired a stratum of urgency and intricacy, especially with the assimilation of postcolonialism into these discourses, characterized by its analytical framework elucidating the impact of the colonial period on Mizo culture and identity, has introduced a layer of complexity to the ongoing narrative. Consequently, discerning the nuanced discourses interwoven within discussions on national identity (a rightist politics), especially when intertwined with a postcolonial approach (a leftist politics), can pose a formidable challenge.

This acquires particular salience within the contemporary theological and cultural discourses, which tries to reconcile a primordial Mizo national identity with that of Christianity. The latter, once perceived as a transformative spiritual doctrine, is now viewed through the prism of a colonial enterprise, implicated in the displacement of the traditional Mizo from its ethno-symbolic roots. Siamkima Khawlhring's analysis of the clash between the *Rih Dil* lake and the river Jordan is a telling example of this. Despite its geographical location in present-day Myanmar, the *Rih Dil* lake held profound significance within the Mizo cultural imaginary. As a perceived gateway to the afterlife, it exerted a profound influence on traditional Mizo cosmology, and as such, assumed a central role in their cultural semiotics. However, with the advent of colonialism and the imposition of Christianity, the revered *Rih Dil* lake was supplanted by the symbolic River Jordan, emblematic of an unfamiliar culture introduced by Christianity. This cultural displacement instigated the wholesale abandonment of Mizo cultural expressions and beliefs in favor of a Christian system. Despite this radical transformation, Khawlhring asserts that the *Rih Dil's* profound entrenchment in the Mizo identity renders its omission from the cultural imaginary tantamount to the potential extinction of the Mizo people. Consequently, the post-colonial Mizo grapples with the enduring presence of *Rih Dil* within its cultural consciousness (16-17). He further maintains that imitation, which is akin to mimicry involving the emulation of prevalent cultural norms and ideals by marginalized societies (Bhabha 86), continues to wield a profound influence on Mizo Christianity, persisting as a potent force shaping the Mizo Christian psyche, even in contemporary post-colonial contexts (Siamkima 116).

In the context of this urgent diagnosis, and the prevailing political milieu that emphasizes identity, it becomes imperative to effectuate the reconciliation of these ostensibly disparate cultures. At the forefront of this discussion is Lalhmingchhuanga Zongte, who posits that the post-colonial Mizo community has experienced an ethico-moral decline. He argues that this decline is due to a spiritual vacuum created by the introduction of Christianity, which is incongruent with the Mizo's indigenous cultural practices. At the crux of his principal thesis is the contention that this spiritual and cultural disjunction has compelled the Mizo populace to forsake their

cultural heritage and age-old traditions in favor of Christianity, concurrently adopting an adversarial stance against their own identity (79).

However, in spite of all these politico-cultural diagnosis, a notable lacuna in the current discourses on identity and the politics of disjuncture reside in the lack of critical examinations of the supposed original identity from which the contemporary identity has been displaced. While critics and scholars diligently delve into the disjuncture between the old and new Mizo identities, exposing cultural and moral decay resulting from this schism, and actively charting the socio-political trajectory for the reconciliation of these divergent identities, a glaring oversight that pertains to the conspicuous neglect in providing a comprehensive account of what precisely constitute the original Mizo identity still persists. And this thesis addresses this gap by critically examining the primordial pre-colonial Mizo identity, consequently reevaluating the 'disjuncture' thesis in the context of this investigation. The methodology employed is exclusively qualitative, relying solely on the hermeneutical approach.

This research delves into various aspects of pre-colonial Mizo society with several distinct objectives. Firstly, it seeks to understand the formation and structure of the dominant reality in that historical context, examining the intricacies of its underlying structures and practices. This involves exploring the social, political, economic, and religious systems that shaped daily life and established the norms of pre-colonial Mizo society. Secondly, the research aims to elluminate the relationship between the Mizo people and these prevailing practices – were they instituted by virtue of rational consensus or were they emergent properties? This entails examining how these practices influenced individual and collective behaviors, shaping social interactions, cultural values, and moral codes within the community.

The research seeks to provide a comprehensive account of pre-colonial Mizo identity and morality on the basis of the said analysis above. This involves investigating how the Mizo people saw themselves, their understanding of what is right and wrong, and how these concepts were reflected in their daily lives and social interactions. Through these interconnected explorations, the research not only aims

to shed light on the nature of these identity and morality within pre-colonial Mizo society, but also aims to understand 'why' such identity and morality particularly were dominant. By examining how these foundational aspects interacted, the research seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of the social and cultural dynamics that shaped the unique character of pre-colonial Mizo community. Finally, the thesis also aims to situate this pre-colonial identity within the post-colonial context and reevaluate the disjuncture thesis deliberated earlier. Thus, the research hopes to achieve a fuller understanding of the post-colonial Mizo identity by examining the dynamics of change and continuity in the pre-colonial identity.

The second chapter, aptly titled "Theorizing Identity", establishes a robust conceptual framework crucial for unraveling the nuanced processes of identity formation. This framework serves as a methodological principle, guiding the subsequent exploration of pre-colonial Mizo identity in the succeeding chapters.

In the third chapter, "The Formation of the Pre-Colonial Mizo Collective", a direct and comprehensive examination of pre-colonial Mizo identity unfolds. This involves the application of the previously established conceptual methodological framework from the second chapter. Historically contingent dominant reality, relational dynamics analysis, and a thorough account of the underlying reasons and mechanisms shaping pre-colonial Mizo identity are meticulously explored in this chapter. In the fourth chapter titled "The Precolonial in the Post-Colonial", the narrative shifts to the contextualization of pre-colonial Mizo identity within the post-colonial landscape. The aim is to assess the extent of influence or displacement of this identity under the impacts of colonialism and Christianity.

In essence, the thesis posits the Mizo identity as a dynamic continuum, where the collectivistic principles of the pre-colonial era persist as an integral force shaping the identity dynamics within the post-colonial milieu. This nuanced positioning, coupled with the analysis of hybridity, emphasizes the intricate relationship between historical roots and contemporary identity, showcasing the lasting imprint of collectivism on the Mizo community across temporal boundaries.

The thesis integrates an examination of colonial ethnographic and post-colonial historiographical accounts as data sources, even though they do not function as primary texts in the traditional sense. It also does not have specific fictional narratives as primary texts, as all existing fictional accounts of pre-colonial Mizo are either colonial or post-colonial texts. The pre-colonial Mizo society was primarily an oral traditions without written scripts, leading to the inclusion of some folkloric analysis, although these too, do not serve as the primary texts in the traditional sense. This is mainly due to the lack of historicity in folkloric representations, as oral memories are subject to dynamic homeostatic processes (Goody and Watt 60-67). This means that oral traditions tend to have perfect congruence with their historical context – thus correlating alterations in social organization and practice to alteration in oral traditions.

Despite its lack of historicity, Paul Ricoeur maintains that memory serves as the foundation on which history stands. He further argues that there memory precedes archive, and there is nothing better than the testimony of this memory to learn about the past (147). So, in spite of this discrepancy, the study does draw insights from the folk narratives including "Duhmanga leh Dardini" (Duhmanga and Dardini), "Chalkunga leh Thanghniangi" (Chalthanga and Thanghniangi), and "The Glorious Days of Tualte".

The tale of "Duhmanga leh Dardini" revolves around their physical beauty. Duhmanga, the son of the Chief, and Dardini, the daughter of a lowly widow, fall deeply in love despite social differences. Despite family expectations for Duhmanga to marry Saikii, he chooses Dardini. They marry without the consent of their families. However, Duhmanga, fulfilling his roles as a male and *pasaltha*, frequently leaves home, leaving Dardini alone with his family. During one such absence, Dardini is divorced by Duhmanga's family, prompting her mother to move to a distant village. Tragically, complications arise during their journey, leading to Dardini's death in the new village. Distraught upon discovering her death, Duhmanga seeks her out and, upon finding her grave, weeps until he joins her in death.

In the story of "Chalkunga leh Thanghniangi", Thanghniangi, the Chief's daughter, stands out for her exceptional beauty. Conversely, her lover, Chalkunga, is the son of a widow. Despite their deep affection, Chalkunga is hesitant to formalize their relationship due to significant social and economic disparities. Uncertain about the way forward, he grapples with the challenges posed by their differing statuses. However, their village faces a devastating raid by another village, resulting in loss of lives and many being taken as slaves, including Thanghniangi. After a considerable passage of time, Chalkunga embarks on a quest to find and rescue her. Their reunion marks a joyful occasion as they eventually marry each other.

"The Glory Days of Tualte", on the other hand, narrates the story of the village of Tualte, focusing on the characters Thangzachhinga, also known as Vana Pa, Rualtinkhuma, and the importance of *tlawmngaihna*, a moral code prioritizing the welfare of the community over individual expressions. Both individuals excel at *tlawmngaihna*, and hold the esteemed title of *Pasaltha*, an esteemed position earned by virtue of exceptional bravery and hunting prowess.

Thangzachhinga, initially the most short-tempered boy in the village, receives reprimands from the foremost *pasaltha* for his behavior and lack of *tlawmngaihna*. Recognizing that following his own feelings and reasons negates his individuality and diminishes his dignity, Thangzachhinga undergoes a transformation. Consequently, he becomes the most renowned *pasaltha* in Mizo history. Rualtinkhuma, inspired by Thangzachhinga's *tlawmngaihna*, strives to emulate him. Under Thangzachhinga's guidance, Rualtinkhuma ascends to become the foremost *pasaltha* in his village. Rualtinkhuma's character stands in stark contrast to Lalbela. Unlike Rualtinkhuma, Lalbela doesn not embodies the virtues of *tlawmngaihna*. As a consequence, he is rejected and stripped of any semblance of dignity.

These folkloric narratives play a crucial role as sources for examining the pre-colonial identity. They offer insights into the distinctions between the pre-colonial Mizo society, culture, and identity when compared to its post-colonial modern iteration. While these narratives serves as significant sources, it is important to emphasize that they are not the exclusive texts under analysis. The richness of

Mizo identity, as portrayed in these narratives, is interwoven into the broader context of discussions involving colonial and post-colonial accounts. This integration provides multifaceted insights into the dynamics of cultural evolution and transformation across historical epochs.

In addition to folkloric narratives, the analysis incorporates colonial ethnographic accounts, including but not limited to works such as *The Lushei-Kuki Clan* by J. Shakespeare, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* by NE Parry, *The Lushai Chrysalis* by McMacall, and A *Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India* by T.H Lewin. Such colonial accounts tend to exhibit a strong propensity to operate within the tenets of 'imaginative geography' *a la* Edward Said, thus perpetuating stereotypes and essentialist views that reductively simplify the intricate cultures of the colonized (53). They tend to mediate the decontextualization of colonized spaces, divorcing them from historical, social, and cultural realities, simplifying them to align with colonial narratives. This manipulation perpetuates power dynamics, reinforcing the superiority of the colonizer and the inferiority of the colonized. This impact extends to the identity and self-perception of colonized individuals, shaping both how they view themselves and how they are perceived by others (Said 55).

Despite these tendencies, their significance, in this case, lies in being among the earliest instances of scientifically documented records of the pre-colonial Mizos. Consequently, the thesis integrates these textual sources in conjunction with folkloric narratives, fostering a holistic comprehension of the historical milieu. Thus the inclusion of these colonial ethnographic accounts enriches the scholarly inquiry by offering valuable insights into the earliest encounters with and perceptions of the Mizos by colonial agents. While acknowledging the limitations inherent in such representations, the thesis underscores their historical importance as foundational records that capture the nascent observations and classifications of the Mizos' cultural tapestry. This nuanced approach, coupling colonial accounts with folkloric narratives, enhances the depth and breadth of the historical analysis, providing a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted mechanics at play during the pre-colonial era in Mizoram.

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Chapter 2

Theorizing Identity

Identity, as per Stuart Hall, functions in a state of erasure during the transitional phase between reversal and emergence. It represents an idea that defies conventional understanding but is indispensable for contemplating crucial questions. It is a complex concept that has been deconstructed from its original essentialist foundation. However, the enduring relevance of the concept of identity persists notwithstanding its deconstruction, owing to the absence of a compelling theoretical framework that supersedes its explanatory capacity. Scholars and theorists continue to engage with it in its deconstructed form, acknowledging the inherent limitations of reverting to the archaic essentialist paradigm that once defined its conceptualization (2).

Hall here is re-conceptualizing the concept of identity in a non-essentialist way. He argues that identity, rather than being static and timeless, is fluid, multi-varied/pluralistic, fragmented. He argues that identity is not so much about 'who we are?' as it is about 'who/what are we becoming?' or 'how have we been represented?' As such, he emphasizes the importance of analyzing identity within its distinct historical and institutional context, framed by specific discursive formations and practices, employing particular enunciative strategies (4). Hall, here, is invoking Michel Foucault to argue that identity must be examined and understood in relation to specific historical time period that has specific episteme and discursive practices i.e. dominant reality and notions of identity, that do not necessarily concur with other historical dispensations.

According to Foucault, meaning and reality are produced and confined within particular historical periods that have their own distinct discursive practices that produce them respectively. Though Foucault highlights the discontinuities and variations between discursive practices, he also acknowledges the presence of overlapping "epistemes" and the potential for interactions and transformations. However, it is important to note that while there may be connections and influences

between different periods, Foucault emphasizes the importance of recognizing their specificity and discontinuity(Foucault *Archaeology*).

What this means is that identity, meaning and reality in general have no essential component – a shared universal component that exists across history and geography. While Foucault acknowledges the persistence and operation of power relations that produces subjectivity across time, his theory negates the existence of universal or essential components of identity itself. Therefore, in order to understand identity, meaning and reality, the notion of historical continuity has to be rejected, and they must be examined in relation to their specific time period.

Hall further argues that identity is the emergent product of difference rather than commonality, and as such is always exclusive. Identity for him serves as a momentary connection to the subject positions formulated by discursive practices. (5) – in other words identity is temporal and subject to history. It is at this juncture between the subjects i.e. individuals, the discursive practices, and a specific point in time and space that identity emerges.

He specifically argues that the exploration of the intersection of individuals and discursive practices often prompts the consideration of identity. Specifically, by underscoring the process through which subjects are formed in relation to discursive practices and acknowledging the inherent politics of exclusion in this formative process, the significance of identification comes to the forefront (2).

The relationship between the individuals/subjects and discursive practices then needs to be analyzed in order for a 'particular' identity to be understood – 'particular' because identity and discursive practices, as mentioned before, are not diachronic entities or processes that continue through time. Rather, they are isolated instances, thus rendering a universal account of identity that defies spatial-temporality impossible. As such, understanding identity first requires asking the questions what 'discursive practices' were/are in vogue during a specific period of time? And what kinds of relationships were established between such 'practices' and the 'subjects'?'

In contemporary political and social theory, the term “discursive practices” is commonly employed as a synonym for “language use” or “linguistic practices”. It is used, mostly to refer to the production, dissemination, and consumption of texts or the ways in which people use language (Fairclough 73). However, Carol Bacchi and Jennifer Bonham argue that the term discursive practices, as conceptualized by Foucault, surpasses the confines of language and embodies a comprehensive amalgamation of ‘activities’ and ‘practices’ that contribute to the generation and dissemination of discourse/knowledge. It encompasses a diverse array of modalities through which knowledge is produced, shared, and consumed, extending beyond linguistic boundaries (173). These practices (can) embrace a wide spectrum of actions and processes that shape our understanding of the world, emphasizing that knowledge does not solely derive from language but emerges from multifarious endeavors such as research, authorship, reading, textual interpretation, and patterned way of life.

Discourses, on the other hand, are “sets of practices,” they refer to systems of ‘knowledge’ and meaning that shape our perception of the world and engender notions of “truth” within specific societal or contextual realms. These discourses are constructed and perpetuated through discursive practices, which encompass both language and a range of activities (Bacchi and Bonham 174). So, the term discourse refers to knowledge (system) and what is deemed as truth, rather than simply talking about language itself. His intention was to challenge the perception of knowledge as a static and absolute entity, elucidating that knowledge materializes through intricate interactions between diverse ‘practices’ contingent upon specific contexts and sites. These ‘practices’ encompass both tangible dimensions entailing material elements and intangible dimensions embodying ideas and meanings. What Bacchi and Bonham contend is that the term “discursive practices” aptly characterizes these knowledge-forming ‘practices’. Its focal point lies in the critical examination of the functioning and impact of specific knowledge systems or “discourses” on our understanding of the world (174). So, “discursive practices” transcend mere linguistic utilization or individual expression, signifying the comprehensive scope of ‘activities’ and ‘actions’ involved in the creation of knowledge. By comprehending

and analyzing these practices, one gains profound insight into the process of knowledge formation, as well as the emergence of diverse perspectives and understandings.

In essence, discourses function as knowledge systems that generate notions of truth, and they are actively shaped and perpetuated through a complex interplay of discursive practices involving both language and various activities. Collectively, these elements play a central role in shaping social reality and exert a profound influence on our understanding of the world. Thus, discursive practices extend beyond language and even encompass activities like storytelling and daily patterned routines. Storytelling serves as a vital medium for transmitting knowledge, traditions, and cultural values. It communicates important lessons, historical accounts, and cultural myths, fostering communication, education, and entertainment. Daily repeated routines and rituals reinforce social cohesion, cultural continuity, and provide a framework for understanding and organizing daily life. These activities embody cultural beliefs, social structures, and shared values, shaping social reality and contributing to our understanding of the world.

Gerth and Mills introduce the conceptual frameworks of "character structure" and "social structure" as interconnected elements that are united through the enactment of "roles" within various social institutions. These theoretical frameworks offer valuable insights for sociological analysis, particularly in understanding the multifaceted nature of the subject, discursive practices, encompassing both symbolic and material activities, and what constitute the 'interactions/relationship' between the two.

The "character structure" presents a comprehensive framework for understanding the subject/individual as a semiotically complete entity. This framework encompasses three components: the 'organism', the 'psychic structure', and the 'Person'. The subject, first and foremost is an organism driven by biological mechnisms, encompassing muscular and neuronal structures. These biological aspects are influenced by genetic, hormonal, and neurochemical factors, which significantly shape an individual's behavioral patterns and personality traits. The

‘psychic structure’, on the other hand, pertains to the transformative process through which biological elements such as impulses, sensations, and emotions undergo a conversion into socially meaningful units. This transformation occurs within the framework of social ‘roles’ and is oriented toward the pursuit of ‘goals’ associated with these ‘roles’. Consequently, the psychic structure mediates the translation of biological impulses into socially recognized behaviors (20).

The person, on the other hand, represents the culmination or the totality of the ‘character structure’, incorporating the interplay between the organism and the psychic structure. It is the subject with a fully formed social meaning and identity identity, intricately shaped by the ‘roles’ enacted within the social context. To fully grasp the nature of the person and its complex identity, it is crucial to consider it in terms of its relationship with the social ‘roles’ it enacts. These roles, embedded within the character structure, significantly contribute to the construction of the person’s social identity and behavior (Gerth and Mills 21).

So, the organism, first and foremost, constitutes the fundamental and underlying physical and biological basis that influences behavior and personality. It serves as the cornerstone in shaping an individual’s temperament, physical capacities, and sensory preferences, among other aspects. Additionally, the organism gives rise to innate impulses, sensations, and feelings, which are inherent and biologically rooted drives and instincts that manifest from birth and operate largely beyond conscious control. These encompass fundamental physiological drives like hunger and thirst, as well as more intricate emotional and behavioral impulses such as aggression, sexuality, and the pursuit of pleasure while avoiding pain. However, these biological traits alone do not provide sufficient explanations for understanding the subject. The integration of these undefined biological impulses into social activities is facilitated through the process of socialization. This integration is referedto as the “psychic structure”.

Socialization involves the acquisition and internalization of societal values, norms, and beliefs, shaping an individual’s unique personality and behavioral patterns. This occurs through mechanisms such as ‘repetition’, ‘suggestion’,

‘punishment’, and ‘reward’. Through these processes, the undefined biological impulses are aligned with socially expected ‘goals’ that are adopted or imposed through the internalization of the “expectations” of others, and when this alignment is achieved, they contribute to the individual’s fulfillment of their social ‘roles’. Raw impulses become conditioned towards specific ‘roles’, creating a desire or ‘psychic structure’ that motivates individuls to fulfill societl expectations. These roles take place within what Gerth and Mills describe as the “institutional orders”:

> Thus, the confluence of biological impulses and socially-oriented goals, facilitated by repetitive patterns, suggestive influences (expectations), as well as systems of punishment and reward, leads to the alignment of these impulses with preexisting social roles, thereby inducing a state of socialization. As this process unfolds over time, the initial impulsive response gradually transforms into a deliberate action, wherein individuals consciously select and prioritize goals from among the available options. In essence, this transformation imbues the impulse with purposefulness, signifying an active and intentional engagement in goal-oriented behavior. Gerth and Mills succinctly elucidate the real-time workings of this process through the socialization of an infant. (45)

In this intricate dynamics of feeding, the baby’s non-verbal cues become a language of needs, with the mother adeptly interpreting these signals. The correctness of her understanding is underscored by the baby’s physical engagement with the offered nourishment, creating a tangible connection between expressed hunger and the act of feeding. This interactive process not only fulfills a biological need but also initiates the subtle yet profound education of the infant’s palate and preferences. As the infant partakes in the act of feeding, the choices made by the caregiver in selecting and presenting food play a pivotal role in shaping the emerging tastes of the child. The infant learns not only what is nourishing but also begins to discern societal distinctions between what is socially acceptable to consume and what is not. This early stage of sensory exploration is not only a biological journey but also a social one, deeply intertwined with the norms and cues provided by the caregiver.

The development of the infant's appetite and tastes is a multifaceted process. Organic needs and the dependence on provided sustenance converge with the lived experiences of approval and disapproval communicated through the caregiver's expressions and gestures. The mother, acting as a guide, not only nourishes the body but also imparts cultural and social meanings to the act of eating. Through this nuanced interplay, the foundations of the infant's relationship with food and the early stages of cultural assimilation are laid.

Here, it is crucial to acknowledge that the emergence of purpose in human behavior. This purpose stems from two primary avenues; firstly, it arises from the frustration or deprivation of biological impulses, wherein the individual connects the deprived impulse to a socially significant object, selecting goals from available social objects. Secondly, desires and purposes develop in alignment with the goals of others, shaping individuals' aspirations. This "anticipation of goals" often takes the form of symbolized impulses, distinguishing between purposeful wishes and irrational or undefined impulses (Gerth and Mills 47). Raw biological impulses inherently target specific objects, and those lacking symbolic attachment are deemed irrational. The realization of these goals manifests as social roles, becoming the targets of oriented impulses. Over time, this orientation evolves into a purposive direction, where individuals actively select and direct goals in accordance with the roles and goals of others. Thus, the development of purpose is influenced by both the experience of goal deprivation and the adoption of others' expectations.

Emotions, too, extend beyond their biological origins, encompassing intricate social dimensions. Disruptions to smooth behavior, coupled with the absence of an immediate response, give rise to emotions, identified through expressive gestures and corresponding reactions. Beyond individual biology, emotions are shaped by social negotiation and the meaning assigned to specific situations. Repetitive encounters imbue certain experiences with emotional significance, eliciting expected emotional responses (Gerth and Mills 55). The exhibition of emotions is molded by social expectations, although occasional uncontrollable outbursts may occur. Chaotic feelings stemming from unexpected events are defined by others' emotional

reactions to the situation, illustrating that emotions follow social roles and undergo negotiation, imposition, or elicitation through intricate social gestures.

Perception, on the other hand, emerges from the interaction of biological sense organs with stimuli characteristics like intensity, duration, and size. The boundaries of perception are determined by the limitations of sense organs and selective attention, directing focus to specific stimuli while ignoring others. Attention, influenced by repetitive routines and social conditioning, aligns with stimuli relevant to social role enactment. Thus, perception, rooted in biological processes, undergoes socialization, shaping sense organ orientation toward specific social activities. Interconnected senses, such as smell and taste, illustrate "intersensory resemblance", revealing the overlap between auditory and gustatory sensations, as seen in describing music as "sweet" (Gerth and Mills 64).

So, the process of perception is influenced by social instructions and individual expectations related to social roles, shaping the way senses operate. Perception is not merely a direct and unfiltered reception of the physical environment through the senses, but rather it is intricately connected to internalized values and norms. These internalized constructs guide and direct attentions, shaping the way one perceives the world. Thus, perception is not isolated to the present moment, but is influenced by past experiences, and in turn, has implications for future perceptions.

So, the psychic structure involves a complex interplay of perception, feeling, and impulse. Attention is central, selectively focusing senses on specific stimuli, though impulses can sometimes override this process. Feelings influence perceptions, with emotional states impacting sensory interpretation. This interdependence leads to active tendencies, expressed through social roles and actions. The integration of sensory experiences with the psychic structure becomes socialized, enhancing the individual's ability to navigate and engage in their social environment. In essence, perceptions, feelings, and impulses dynamically interact to shape cognitive and behavioral responses within this interconnected framework.

Thus, the subject originates as a biological organism, undergoing a profound process of socialization that transforms its innate biological characteristics, aligning

it with socially oriented ‘roles’. Through the active assumption and embodiment of these ‘roles’, a stable subjectivity emerges, culminating in the formation of the “person.” This personhood entails a distinctive and discernible identity, profoundly influenced by dynamic engagement with multifaceted ‘social roles’ and ‘expectations’ in the social milieu. The ‘enactment’ of these ‘roles’ can be understood as a form of “discursive practice” *a la* Foucault, constituting the wellspring from which meaningful conceptions of the subject arise. ‘Roles’ function as ‘discourse’ too, embodying knowledge that shapes and regulates the production of the subject/individual identity i.e. the ‘person’, or what Foucault calls “docile bodies” through disciplinary power (*Discipline* 136). The ‘expectations’ compelling the adoption and adaptation to ‘roles’, on the other hand, represent the sociological elucidation of the panoptic process of ‘self-discipline’ and ‘surveillance.’

In this sense, the indeterminate impulses individuals experience are not mere biological traits; they intricately intertwine with subjectivity through the prism of ‘social roles’. This reciprocal interplay between biology and culture holds profound significance for the dynamic interrelationship between the organism and the psychic structure, resulting in the emergence of the ‘person’. The concept of the character structure represents the integration of biological and psychological elements through ‘roles’ (and expectations,) giving rise to a semiotically unified subject with a distinct identity and behavioral patterns.

So, role constitutes a set of behavioral ‘expectations’ held by ‘others’ toward an individual, representing an anticipated conduct pattern within their social environment. Individuals assume numerous roles across diverse social, professional, and personal contexts. These roles integrate segments of an individual’s conduct with the conduct of others. The person denotes the amalgamation of internalized social roles within an individual, serving as the collective embodiment of these internalized social roles.

Here, the expectations of others become the catalyst for the construction of a unified self-image i.e. an identity. These expectations manifest in three variants, namely the ‘significant other’, ‘authoritative other’, and the ‘generalized other’. The

significant other refers to individuals or groups shaping a person's self-image. These figures provide feedback, facilitating the internalization of prevalent norms and values. The authoritative other, represented by individuals or institutions with the power to enforce social norms, guides behavior in alignment with societal expectations. The generalized other integrate assessments from significant and authoritative figures into a unified framework, forming collective norms and values (Gerth and Mills, 95-97).

This internalization, akin to Foucault's panopticism, leads to self-disciplining, resulting in a fully realized identity, or what Foucault calls the "docile bodies". The concept centers on the formation of the subject and the mechanisms of power and surveillance that shape individuals within societal structures; simply put, it is a power mechanism that functions through visibility and the internalization of this surveillance. In this system, individuals, such as prisoners, are constantly aware of being observed, leading them to internalize the watchful gaze and modify their behavior accordingly. This internalized surveillance becomes a means of self-discipline, where individuals regulate their actions and behaviors based on the potential of being observed. The panopticon serves as a metaphor for broader social power dynamics, where surveillance and the internalization of disciplinary mechanisms are pervasive. Power, in this context, assumes a productive role, actively shaping and molding individuals' behavior and subjectivity through the constant threat of observation and evaluation (Foucault, *Discipline* 201).

The docile body, on the other hand, represents a disciplined and regulated body that is shaped and controlled through various social institutions, practices, and techniques of power i.e. discourses/knowledge and its discursive practices. This disciplinary power operates through mechanisms such as surveillance, normalization, and the internalization of social norms and 'expectations,' or in other words, the adoption and enactment of 'social roles'/'discursive practices' (*Discipline* 137). Within this framework, the docile body becomes a site where identity is produced, regulated, and disciplined, thus exemplifying Foucault's emphasis on power as a productive force that actively creates and shapes specific modes of embodiment and identity.

In other words, individual behaviors, gestures, and bodily practices are subjected to external control and manipulation which are then internalized, thus leading to the formation of specific identities that conform to societal norms and expectations, demonstrating how power operates to produce certain subjectivities and behaviors that align with dominant social norms and expectations. As such, the 'docile body' or the 'person', is an unified identity and is the outcome of the subject that embodies and performs socially prescribed 'roles' and 'behaviors,' or discursive practices to use the foucauldian parlance, thereby contributing to the construction of identity and social reality within the prevailing social and power structures, thus representing the outcome of power's productive capacity in organizing and regulating bodies withn a givn social context.

Language, as a primary medium for interpersonal communication, fulfills a pivotal function in mediating the adoption and imposition of roles. Human ability to produce and control various noises, coordinating different body organs, forms the basis of speech development. However, language is inherently a social process, and its acquisition depends not only on physiological elements but also on sociocultural context. Language proficiency results from the complex interplay between the capacity to produce sounds and engaging in social interactions and shared cultural practices. It transcends individual vocal capabilities, becoming an intricate fabric woven through collective engagement and mutual understanding (Gerth and Mills 80).

As such, language serves as a medium for individuals to express thoughts and emotions, fundamentally facilitating the coordination of human behavior. As a system of signs, language enables the exchange of information and shapes future conduct. Effective social interaction through language necessitates shared meaning among all parties involved. Words derive meaning not only through their relation to other words but also through contextual factors such as social and behavioral dynamics, known as pragmatics. It is a system facilitating the transmission of intentions, desires, and expectations among individuals, allowing them to align roles and goals through conveying information, making requests, expressing preferences, and negotiating meanings. This coordination process involves both the production

and interpretation of language, drawing upon shared meanings, social norms, and cultural conventions for effective communication within diverse social contexts.

Thus, it is through the medium of language that a unified identity is produced. However, this semiotically unified self is not a fixed representation that remains the same. Instead, the person undergoes dynamic transformations, devoid of an inherent, unchanging essence. Self-image evolves and fluctuates in response to social interactions and the expectations and evaluations imposed by 'others'. As the person matures, s/he acquire the capacity to adopt self-models of their own volition, selecting from the repertoire of socially accessible models.

Individuals assimilate behavioral models, primarily influenced by external sources. As they read and navigate social intricacies, they tap into a repository of socially organized memories. These chosen models, whether constructed through personal imagination or influenced by external sources, may not always conform to the preferences of the immediate social circles. Within this complex interplay of self-concept and external expectations, individuals actively contribute to the formation of their self-image. This dynamic process involves a thoughtful negotiation, where individuals either accept, modify, remain indifferent, or resist prevailing norms and judgments within their immediate social context. The capacity to craft a self-image that harmoniously integrates personal expectations with external appraisals is pivotal for fostering individual autonomy and resilience. The concept of autonomy in self-image assumes a critical role, as individuals overly reliant on immediate opinions and appraisals from their social milieu face the risk of being stigmatized as inadequate. Autonomy in self-image demands a nuanced negotiation between external influences and pre-existing self-conceptions, thus intricately navigating the continual evolution of our self-image. This perpetual interplay between external appraisals and internalized models mirrors the inherent dynamism characterizing the construction of human identity (Gerth and Mills 85).

Thus, the process of maturation and the conscious selection of self-models foster the emergence of a more personalized and individuated concept of self. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that even this individuated self remains

subject to social negotiation, as it is derived from existing socially available models. Individuals reinforce their conception of a favorable self by actively selecting and attending to stimuli or individuals that validate and support their self-image. As the self-image is reinforced, it tends to attain a certain level of stability, thereby prompting the person to avoid situations or others that challenge their valued self-image. The term "cumulative confirmation" is used to describe this process, which in turn allows for the emergence of a more individualized sense of identity. They also acknowledged that not all relationships can be chosen, particularly in the case of children, and some relationships may have long-lasting negative effects on a person's self-image that persist into adulthood (Gerth and Mills 86).

The selection of individuals in the process of reiterating one's valued self-image is greatly influenced and constrained by one's 'position' and 'career' within various institutional contexts. When a person's position and career involve significant others who hold favorable perceptions of the individual's self-image, a convergence of self-images between the person and others occurs, leading to a sense of unity in the self. The position of an individual pertains to their circle of current others, whose evaluations and expectations performs a fundamental role in shaping the person's self-image. The career, on the other hand, refers to a "sequence of previous significant others" who have exerted a similar impact on the individual's self-image (Gerth & Mills, 93-94).

The concept of the "significant others" refers to individuals or groups whom the person attends to and whose evaluations shape his or her (the person's) self-image. The significant others hold considerable influence over the person's life and serve as pivotal sources of socialization and identification. Examples of significant others encompass parental figures, educators, mentors, and intimate companions, among other influential figures. The significant others play a crucial role in providing feedback to individuals regarding their behavior and attitudes, facilitating their understanding and internalization of the norms and values prevalent in their social environment. The concept of the "authoritative other", on the other hand, refers to individuals or institutions endowed with the power to enforce social norms and impose consequences for non-compliance. These authoritative others, such as

governmental bodies or religious authorities, assume a pivotal role in exerting control and discipline in an individual's life, offering guidance on how to comport oneself in alignment with prevailing social norms (Gerth & Mills 86).

The notion of the "generalized others" entails the integration of assessments and values derived from significant others and authoritative others, resulting in the formation of a coherent pattern. It represents the consolidation of the appraisals offered by various individuals into a unified framework. Specifically, when the evaluations from significant others and authoritative figures are amalgamated and internalized by an individual, they assume the form of the generalized other (Gerth and Mills 95-97). This concept encompasses the experience of being subject to the assessments of others, even in their absence, thereby exerting a formative influence on the individual's self-image. Consequently, the generalized others encompass collective norms, values, and attitudes prevalent in the broader society, serving as a reference point for the individual's behavior and attitudes. It encompasses cultural, historical, and political norms and values, embodying the societal perspective regarding appropriate conduct and attitudes within diverse social contexts. This, again, offers a potent sociological elucidation of Foucault's concept of panopticism, wherein continual surveillance that individuals experience becomes internalized. This internalization, in turn, leads to the self-disciplining of each subject, ultimately giving rise to meaningful identities. These identities (docile bodies) are brought forth through the surveillance mechanism of expectations and evaluations imposed by others, shaping a cohesive self-image or persona (*Discipline* 201).

So, the significant other is a specific and personal reference point for the individual, while the authoritative other is a more formal and authoritative reference point. The Generalized Other, on the other hand, represents the collective values and norms of the entire society. These concepts are interrelated in that the individual's experiences with their significant others and authoritative others contribute to their internalization of the cultural norms and values represented by the Generalized Other. Over time, these internalized norms and values come to form a significant part of the individual's character structure and sense of self.

In a society characterized by varying expectations and valuations from significant others, individuals develop conflicting self-images. Consequently, individuals may cultivate multiple self-images, selectively presenting themselves in specific ways to different groups. The chosen style of self-presentation serves as a link between the perceived image that an individual believes others have of him/her and the self-image he/she desires others to validate (94). However, in collectivist societies, like that of the pre-colonial Mizo society, marked by stereotypical roles, individuals are more likely to conform to predefined roles, leaving little room for divergence between the self-image and the externally perceived image. Such collectivist societies prioritize group harmony over individual self-expression, resulting in less emphasis on self-image These societies often have rigid roles and clear expectations, limiting differences between self-perception and external perceptions. Career-related changes in self-images are predictable in such settings, with well established age-specific roles adhering to traditional norms. Aspirations conform to stereotypical expectations, ensuring awareness of desired next steps and likely future achievements.

In a non-collectivist society characterized by a lack of shared career patterns and coherence in the expectations and evaluations of others, individuals may employ strategies of self-representation, such as “hypocrisy” and “posing”, to seek validation of their desired self-image from others. Such societies offer greater diversity in terms of individual aspirations and opportunities for advancement, allowing individuals the freedom to choose from a range of roles, including occupations and intimate relationships. In this context, hypocrisy pertains to the discrepancy between an individual’s genuine beliefs and behaviors and the beliefs and behaviors they publicly exhibit. This dissonance emerges when individuals perceive societal pressures to conform to norms and expectations that conflict with their personal values and convictions (Gerth and Mills 95).

The fragmentation and diversity of modern society, thus, can lead individuals to engage in hypocrisy and posing as a way to manage the impression they make on others. In traditional societies, like the traditional Mizo society, there was often a clear career path and set of expectations for individuals to follow, which meant that

there was less need for people to constantly present themselves in a certain way to others. However, in modern societies, there is more diversity in occupational roles and ways of life, which creates a sense of competition and uncertainty. As such, people may have conflicting desires for how they want to present themselves, and they may worry about how others will perceive them if they present themselves in a certain way. As a result, individuals may engage in public relation by putting on a façade or persona that they believe will be more acceptable to others, even if it is not an accurate representation of their true self. This conceptual deliberation will serve as a useful methodological frameworke in analyzing the traditional pre-colonial Mizo identity and its point of divergence from its more modern iteration.

In a collectivist society, the concept of self-image is less emphasized as individuals prioritize group harmony and conformity over individual self-expression. As a cultural orientation, it places emphasis on interdependence within the self, exhibiting a propensity for aligning personal and communal goals and prioritizing the objectives of the group. In such a culture, cognitions are guided by collective norms, obligations, and duties, shaping individuals' social behavior. Additionally, collectivist societies emphasize the maintenance of relationships, even in circumstances where such relationships may yield disadvantages (Triandis 44). Consequently, the negotiation between one's self-image and the image held by others, whether significant or authoritative, becomes less relevant. Instead of needing to adopt different styles of representation to seek confirmation from others, individuals readily internalize the set of expectations and appraisals of the collective as their own self-image. This process of identity formation is rooted in the collectivistic values of the society, where individual identities are interconnected and defined by group affiliation and social roles.

Harry Triandis argues that within this context of collectivistic cultures, individuals exhibit strong interconnectedness, perceiving themselves as integral components of larger collective entities such as family, co-workers, tribes, and nations. Their conduct is primarily influenced and guided by the norms and obligations imposed by these collectives, with a distinct prioritization of collective goals over personal aspirations. The emphasis lies on the individual's sense of

belonging and connectedness to fellow members of these collectives. Collectivists desire homogeneous and unified ingroups, where unanimity in thoughts, emotions, and behaviors is sought to maintain harmony. Conversely, individualists place less emphasis on harmony and may view arguments as a means of clarifying and resolving differences (9).

So, by embracing a collectivist perspective, individuals find a sense of belonging and validation by conforming to the 'expectations' and norms of their social group. Rather than navigating conflicting self-images, they align their identity with the shared values and ideals of the collective i.e. the generalized others. This emphasis on collective identity and conformity fosters social cohesion and stability, and reduces the need for individualistic self-presentation or negotiation between personal self-image and societal expectations, thus imbuing such collectivism with functional necessity. This lack of the notion of the individual self, that is independent of the collective identity in a collectivistic identity is very well elucidate by Geert Hofstede in *Culture's Consequences*; individuals experiencing depression in individualist cultures often grapple with heightened feelings of guilt and frequently find it challenging to alleviate the stress associated with personal decision-making. In contrast, individuals with depression in collectivist cultures tend to sustain a functional capacity, as their social networks often assume the responsibility of making essential decisions on their behalf. He further indicates that,

> Depressed patients in individualist cultures suffer more from guilt and are often unable to overcome the stress of personal decisions. Depressed patients in collectivist cultures can more often continue functioning because their social networks make the necessary decisions for them anyway. Schizophrenic patients in individualist cultures will usually be hospitalized and isolated from their families. In collectivist cultures, their illness may be seen as a family affair and the subjective experience of an individual's distress is apparently minimize. (242)

In this connection, Dwairy and Van Sickle have also demonstrated the same tendency in collectivistic society in relation to psychotherapy. They argue that

overarching objective of psychotherapy is frequently characterized as the attainment of an integration of self or the actualization of self. Yet, these objectives would face disapproval in Arabic society, where the primacy of collective identity supersedes individual pursuits. While Western psychotherapy may assist in mitigating internal conflicts experienced by Arab clients, it often gives rise to heightened tension between the individual and society. Indeed, many fundamental techniques employed in psychotherapy stand in contradiction to core beliefs entrenched within Arabic culture (231).

Thus, in a collectivistic society, the cultivation of multiple self-images and the selective presentation of oneself to different groups is deemed unnecessary. Instead, a dominant concept of the self is determined by the collective, and all members are anticipated to embrace and conform to this collective self-concept. Individual identities are subsumed within the larger framework of the collective identity, emphasizing the importance of unity, cohesion, and shared values. This collective self-identity serves as a guiding principle for behavior, social interactions, and the preservation of harmonious group dynamics. The emphasis on conformity to the collective self not only reinforces the cohesion of the group but also provides a sense of belonging and security for individuals within the collective context.

While Gerth and Mills assert that the generalized others may not solely represent society, it still holds substantial relevance in traditional collectivistic cultural contexts. The generalized others encompasses the expectations and appraisals of numerous specific individuals including the expectations of the significant other and the authoritative other, which are organized into patterns and internalized by individuals. In collectivistic cultures, where the cohesive functioning of the group and the prioritization of community interests above individual ambitions are emphasized, there is a high degree of coherence in the expectations of others, thus reducing the individual's imperative for posing and adopting various self-image and roles. This limited diversity in available roles amplifies the importance of the generalized other. As a result, the self-image of individuals is heavily influenced and constrained by the generalized other, which embodies the prevailing societal traditions, norms, and conventions. The concept serves as a representation of the

shared norms, values, and attitudes that form the singular foundation of the collective identity. These deeply ingrained norms and conventions are rooted in societal traditions, customs, and cultural heritage, serving as fundamental guiding principles for individual behavior. Consequently, individuals in collectivistic cultures predominantly adopt a self-image that aligns with the collective ethos produced by the generalized other. This conceptual framework on the logic of collectivistic identity will serves as an important hermeneutical tool analyzing and understanding the tradition Mizo identity.

Thus, in a nutshell, the expectations and appraisals of others align closely with societal values and established social norms in a collectivistic society, and as a result, individuals' self-images are predominantly shaped by conforming to the collective expectations, rather than expressing a wide range of diverse roles or identities. The generalized other, in this context, embodies the collective's shared understandings and perspectives, dictating and constraining the overall self-image of individuals. By internalizing and conforming to the expectations of the generalized other, individuals integrate themselves into the larger social fabric, contributing to the maintenance of social harmony and collective well-being. The prominence of the generalized other underscores its role as a guiding force that shapes individual behavior and self-perception within the collective framework of a collectivistic culture.

The character structure reflects an individual's internalized self, while the "person" is its external manifestation shaped by internalized roles and expectations. It integrates biological and psychological factors, serving as the outward expression in the enactment of social roles and facilitating interaction with the world. Acting as an intermediary, the person represents consciousness—capturing an individual's self-awareness and societal roles. In essence, it symbolizes how individuals comprehend their position in the world.

So, the primary functional objective of the person is the enactment of social 'roles'. And the adoption of roles follows the dictates of the expectations of others. A social 'role' encompasses a distinct set of behaviors, attitudes, and expectations

associated with a specific social position or status, such as parenthood, employment, friendship, or community membership (11). As mentioned before, this perspective recognizes individuals as dynamic and adaptable entities, rather than static and unchanging beings, as they continuously adjust to various roles and circumstances. As indicated before, the expectations linked to a particular role shape an individual's thoughts, emotions, and actions within that role. Thus, the person is perpetually adapting to diverse social contexts and navigating the associated expectations and norms. This perspective underscores the dynamic and fluid nature of individual identity, emphasizing the significance of "social structure" and cultural norms in shaping individual behavior and personality.

In other words, it is the roles that the person enacts, and his enactment of such roles - the action - that gives a person his/her identity, meaning and purpose, that enabled him/her to make sense of the world around him/her and to adjust accordingly. Gerth and Mills further argues The arrangement/configuration of roles is crucial for shaping a specific social framework, and it also holds psychological significance for individuals embodying these social structures (14). What this mean is that consistent performance of expected roles and fulfillment of responsibilities create observable patterns of behavior. Over time, these observed behaviors become accepted norms, shaping the collective understanding of what is considered normal and appropriate within a particular role or institution. It serves as the foundation for developing and maintaining norms and thus morality, as individuals conforming to their roles reinforce associated norms, contributing to their perpetuation.

This means that the arrangement of roles within a society plays a crucial role in shaping not just individual identity but also social stratification and structure. It influences hierarchical relationships, power dynamics, and social differentiation by defining expectations, responsibilities, and privileges. This organizational aspect actively shapes the overall social order, determining individuals' positions in the hierarchy and impacting social interactions, identities, and life opportunities. Essentially, the allocation and structure of roles construct and perpetuate social inequalities, highlighting their significance in understanding the interplay between social structure, power, and individual agency.

Thus, roles serve as the foundational constituent of the subject, denoting individual's identity, and the social structure, denoting society itself (Gerth and Mills 109). It is the role that assumes primary significance, being organized or established by an authoritative entity referred to as the "head role". When a head figure exercises authority over other individuals who enact these roles, an 'institution' is created. The institution, in turn, becomes a component of the broader 'social structure,' i.e. society (Gerth and Mills 11). Social institutions, thus, are formed by the organization of predefined roles instituted by authority, and are tied to specific societal positions – meaning it establishes hierarchy. The organization of social institutions, on the other hand, serve as enduring structures that govern various aspects of social life, contributing to societal stability and functioning (Abrahams 51).

And, just as role is multi-varied so is institution. They are dynamic, undergoing continuous changes and evolution in response to social, economic, and cultural factors. Roles are also shaped by the broader institutional orders within which they are embedded (Abrahams 52). For example, the roles within the familial order are influenced by the economic order, as families must navigate economic challenges and opportunities in order to provide for their members. Different roles produce institutional orders, as groups of individuals performing certain roles create and maintain institutions that serve specific functions within a society. These institutions, in turn, shape and regulate the roles that individuals perform within them. In other words, the relationship between roles and institutional orders is complex and dynamic, with each influencing and being influenced by the other.

Social structure, thus, is composed of interconnected institutional orders and spheres. An institutional order classifies institutions based on their functions, with each institution having a formal structure for coordination. These orders, including political, economic, military, kinship, and religious, interact to form a complex system, reflecting the diverse domains of social organization (Gerth and Mills 28). Individuals within these orders may not be consciously aware of overarching objectives, yet their roles contribute to fulfilling these ends.

Talcott Parsons refers to this classification of institutions base of function as "functional differentiation". He emphasises that societies develop specialized subsystems or institutions to perform distinct social functions. It involves the division and allocation of societal tasks and roles to different institutions based on their specific functions and expertise. These institutions, such as the family, economy, religion, education, and politics, operate as separate subsystems with their own internal structures and processes. It is driven by the increasing complexity and interdependence of social systems. As societies evolve, they require more specialized and efficient mechanisms to handle various social functions. Differentiation allows for the specialization of institutions, each focusing on specific tasks and contributing to the overall functioning and stability of society (158).

However, the concept of institutional order, while significant, is not exhaustive. Less structured social aspects fall under "sphere", e.g., informal conversations and public conduct, reflecting a less formal facet with specific purposes, values, and norms, influenced by broader societal values. Gerth and Mills identify common components in all institutional orders as technology, symbols, status, and education, forming the main elements of "spheres". Technology, from tools to communication devices, is integral to role implementation. Symbols, like language and gestures, convey meaning. Status is based on roles, and education transmits skills and values for roles within institutional orders (29-30).

Much like Gerth and Mills, Parsons' understanding of institutions encompasses various aspects of social organization, including formal organizations like government bodies, educational institutions, social roles like occupational roles, familial roles, and cultural systems like religious institutions, legal systems. These institutions are characterized by established rules, norms, and expectations that guide individual behavior within specific domains of social life. He argues that institutions provide frameworks for social interaction, shaping and regulating the behavior of individuals. They serve as mechanisms of social control, guiding individuals to conform to accepted patterns of behavior and promoting social order (53).

Parsons argued that functional differentiation is a necessary and adaptive process for societal development. Each institution has its own unique set of functions and responsibilities, and they coordinate and interact with one another to maintain social order and ensure the smooth functioning of society as a whole. Through functional differentiation, societies can effectively meet the diverse needs and challenges they face by assigning specific tasks to specialized institutions. Meaning that functional differentiation, and the specialized roles that they adopt and imposed, are necessary for the functional stability of the society

This functional differentiation is one of the key characteristics of "organic solidarity" i.e. a more complex modern society. Therefore, in traditional societies, where "*Gemeinschaft*"/"expressive orientation" is predominant, functional differentiation tends to be less pronounced or even absent. *Gemeinschaft*, simply put, is a type of collectivity that emphasizes expressive interests, which refer to the emotional and relational aspects of social life. *Gemeinschaft* is defined by strong bonds, common principles, and a feeling of unity within the community. The focus is on maintaining interpersonal connections, emotional bonds, and the well-being of the community. In a *Gemeinschaft*, individuals often act in concert based on a sense of mutual trust and a shared identity (100).

So, traditional societies i.e. mechanical solidarity typically exhibit a lower level of functional differentiation compared to modern or complex societies. Meaning that social roles and functions tend to be less specialized and more integrated within a single institution or system. For example, in a traditional agrarian society, the family unit may encompass various functions such as economic production, socialization of children, religious rituals, and community governance. Social order and cohesion are maintained primarily through the mechanism of "mechanical solidarity". Mechanical solidarity, as delineated before, is based on shared beliefs, values, and collective consciousness, which create a sense of unity among individuals. In traditional societies, people have a strong attachment to tradition and conform to established norms and roles.

Durkheim posits that social facts like institutions and the collective consciousness of the generalized others are not only vital for maintaining social order but are crucial for the very persistence and continuity of society. Institutions, by reinforcing the social whole, ensure that individuals align their actions with the needs and values of the larger society. In more traditional collectivistic societies or "mechanical societies", characterized by high social solidarity and homogeneity, institutions, along with customs, rituals, norms, and values, play an even more crucial role in maintaining the social whole. In such societies, a limited division of labor and shared responsibilities contribute to homogeneity and a collective identity. Strict rules and punishments collectively imposed maintain social order, and violations are seen as offenses against the collective conscience. This fosters a robust feeling of unity and inclusion within the community, ensuring the smooth functionality and continuity of society. In this functional context, social facts, including institutions, arise out of necessity, conditioning the subject and producing specific types of identity conducive to societal ends (*The Division* 36).

So, traditional societies i.e. mechanical solidarity typically exhibit a lower level of functional differentiation compared to modern or complex societies. Meaning that social roles and functions tend to be less specialized and more integrated within a single institution or system. For example, in a traditional agrarian society, the family unit may encompass various functions such as economic production, socialization of children, religious rituals, and community governance. Social order and cohesion are maintained primarily through this mechanism. This Mechanical solidarity, is based on shared beliefs, values, and collective consciousness, which create a sense of unity among individuals. In traditional societies, people have a strong attachment to tradition and conform to established norms and roles.

Social facts represent the external and collective forces that dictate the thoughts, behaviors, and social interactions of individuals within a society. As defined by Durkheim, they exist outside of individual consciousness and transcend personal interpretations. They are objective realities that can be observed and studied. Examples of social facts include customs and traditions, religion, laws,

language, social institutions like family, schools, government, and social norms like expectations. These elements possess an existence independent of individuals and exert a profound influence on their lives. He maintained that they are collective phenomena that emerge from social interactions i.e. 'actions' and shared beliefs within a society. They go beyond the actions or characteristics of individual members and arise from what he calls the "collective consciousness", and social structures. According to him, human beings are inherently social beings, and their sense of self and identity is deeply intertwined with the "collective consciousness" of society society (*The Elementary* 15).

Collective consciousness is the shared beliefs, values, norms and they are the shared sense of identity and belonging, history and culture that exist within a social group or society as a whole; the entirety of shared beliefs, feelings and attitudes among the ordinary members of society constitutes a distinct system with its own existence. This system is often referred to as the collective or common conscience, permeating throughout the entirety of society. It operates independently of the specific circumstances individuals may find themselves in and extends across successive generations, serving as a connecting thread between them. Importantly, it is a phenomenon distinct from the consciousness of individual members, even though its realization occurs within individuals (Dingley 36)

According to him, social facts and collective consciousness are mutually constitutive. Social facts shape the collective consciousness by influencing individual behavior and thought, while the collective consciousness reflects and reiterates the shared beliefs and values that arise from social facts. They form a dynamic relationship where social facts create and maintain the collective consciousness, and the collective consciousness reinforces and perpetuates social facts (3).

In this sense, they are responsible for fostering a sense of collective identity in a society, and according to Durkheim, while they originate externally to the individual they exercise coercive power over individuals. Even when embraced voluntarily, the underlying coercion remains, though it may be less palpable. This intrinsic coercive nature becomes apparent when resistance is attempted, as it asserts

itself in such instances. The dichotomy arises when the individual willingly conforms, experiencing a reduced perception of coercion, yet the fundamental characteristic persists, revealing itself when confronted with attempts to resist these external influences (2).

Thus, social facts impose themselves upon people through the collective consciousness, shaping their thoughts, actions, and behaviors. Much like expectation in the form of the generalized others, they exercise control and constraint by influencing individual choices and limiting personal freedim. They carry a weight and authority within society, making them not easily disregarded or altered by individual preferences. They are also constraining and obligatory in nature. They establish norms, rules, and expectations that individuals are expected to conform to. These norms govern social behavior and dictate what is considered acceptable or unacceptable within a given society. Deviation from these norms may result in social sanctions, highlighting the binding nature of social facts on individual actions.

He also emphasized that these social facts are regular and patterned. They exhibit consistency and repetition in social life, forming the basis for social order and stability. These patterns provide a framework within which individuals operate and interact, contributing to the cohesion and integration of society. Durkheim viewed society as an organism where each part contributes to the overall functioning and stability of the whole. The smooth operation of society is contingent upon social facts such as norms, values, and institutions. They offer a structure of norms and anticipations that direct individual conduct and foster a collective awareness. (*The Division* 128 -131). Moreover, they also serve as influential agents of socialization, inculcating societal mores, and fortifying the foundation of social order and stability. Through this process of socialization, individuals internalize the shared beliefs and behavioral patterns deemed indispensable for harmonious coexistence (*The Division* 173).

Thus, roles- expectations, identities-institutions, and societies in general, are not arbitrary constructs; instead, they emerge out of functional necessity and serve to fulfill specific social needs. It is evident that these elements play crucial roles in

ensuring the smooth functioning and continuity of social systems. Roles, for instance, provide a framework for individuals to contribute to the collective functioning of society, guided by expectations that maintain order and cohesion. Identities, shaped by roles and societal expectations, contribute to the sense of self and communal belonging. Institutions, as organized structures of roles, are essential for the coordination and governance of societal functions. Finally, societies, encompassing a web of interconnected roles and institutions, represent the larger collective that relies on these elements for stability and progression. In essence, these components are interwoven threads essential for the fabric of social systems, designed not by chance but by the inherent needs of human societies.

Hence, social structure comprises both institutional orders and the spheres. And the interrelations among these orders and spheres (to other orders and spheres) is determinative of the unity and arrangement of a social structure (31). In simpler terms, the primary element of a character structure is the person, whereas the main component of the social structure is the institutions, and they are brought together by the roles that the person enacts. The organizations of these roles in a patterned order then give rise to institutional orders. The ordered aggregation of the institutions and the spheres then give rise to social structures – the totality of social reality. The role, then, is the source of the person's identity and it is the relationship between the subject i.e. the person and the social structure i.e. society. The role that Gerth and Mills talk about is the "relationship" that Hall talks about in his *Cultural Identity*.

All these considerations underscore the acknowledgment that individuals are not solely determined by their own choices and actions but are significantly shaped by larger social structures and institutions—the historical context—in which they are embedded. The notion of "institutional formation" emphasizes the understanding that individuals do not exist in isolation but rather emerge and develop within a complex network of institutions, including family, education, religion, and government. These institutions establish a framework of roles, norms, and expectations that individuals internalize and integrate into their self-perception and conduct. The institutional formation of persons highlights the recognition that individuals' identities, values, and behaviors are profoundly influenced by the social institutions and roles they

occupy. It acknowledges the interplay between individual agency and the constraints and opportunities imposed by the social structures within which individuals are situated (174).

Thus, it can be concluded that identity emerges from the interactive relationship between the subject and discursive practices within the context of roles/actions. This relationship is heavily influenced by discourses, including historical factors. Identity, whether collectivistic or individualistic, is contingent upon these historical factors, although the degree of influence may vary. Discourses such as institutions, social facts, and collective consciousness have emerged and persist due to functional necessity, making identity in such contexts non-arbitrary. Particularly in traditional collectivistic societies, a specific collectivistic identity is functionally imperative to ensure the continuity of the society as a whole. However, despite this functional necessity, identity is neither static nor timeless, as it is inherently contingent upon history, making it inherently diachronic. This theoretical synthesis will serve as a useful heuristics when examining the pre-colonial Mizo Identity.

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Chapter Three

The Emergence of the Precolonial Mizo Collective

Efforts to trace the historical origins of the Mizos have hitherto yielded perplexity and uncertainty, as scholars have struggled to provide definitive explanations for the settlement of the Mizos in their current geographical location. Nonetheless, a prevailing conjecture gaining momentum among academia and the wider populace postulates that the Mizos may have originated from a Mongoloid or Tibeto-Burman tribe, with likely roots in the regions of Tibet or China. The oral tradition of the Mizos points to *Chhinlung* as their ancestral homeland, a location increasingly believed to have been situated somewhere in China. It is this locale that holds significance in the mythological narratives of the Mizos, bearing witness to their purported origins and migration to their present abode. However, despite the traction garnered by this hypothesis, the exact historical trajectory of their migration and settlement remains an unresolved enigma, continuing to pose challenges to scholars and researchers seeking definitive conclusions on the subject.

The term *Chhinlung* carries the symbolic meaning of a 'stone cover', which appears to be a poetic expression synonymous with *lung chhin*, signifying a cavern believed to be the origin point from which the Mizos emerged. In *The Lushei-Kuki Clan*, J. Shakespeare expounds upon the significance of *Chhinlung* as the place of origin for all clans, where they emerged from. According to this account, two Ralte individuals emerged simultaneously and commenced speaking, which led the divine being *Pathian* to the perception that there were an excessive number of men, prompting Him to close the cave with a huge stone cover (94).

There are minor discrepancies in the content The term *Chhinlung* carries the symbolic meaning of a 'stone cover', which appears to be a poetic expression synonymous with *lung chhin*, signifying a cavern believed to be the origin point from which the Mizos emerged. In *The Lushei-Kuki Clan*, J. Shakespeare expounds upon the significance of *Chhinlung* as the place of origin for all clans, where they emerged from. According to this account, two Ralte individuals emerged simultaneously and commenced speaking, which led the divine being *Pathian* to the perception that there

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of the *Chhinlung* narrative across different Mizo sub-clans. The Maras' rendition of the tale, as documented by N.E. Parry, demonstrates a remarkable explanatory power, elucidating the divergences among the various sub-clans and providing insights into why the Lusei emerged as the most dominant clan. These nuances in the *Chhinlung* narrative contribute to the rich tapestry of Mizo cultural heritage and its intrinsic significance in understanding the origins and historical development of the Mizos as a distinct ethnic community:

> Long ago…men all came out of a hole below the earth. As the founder of each Mara group came out of the earth he called out his name. Tlongsai called out "I am Tlongsai"; Zeuhnang called out "I am Zeuhnang; Hawthai called out "I am Hawthai"; Sebeu called out "I am Sebeu" ; Heima called out "I am Heima". Accordingly, God thought that a very large number of Mara had come out and stopped the way. When the Lushei came out of the hole, however, only the first one to come out called out, "I am Lushei", and all the rest came out silently. God, only hearing the one man announce his arrival, thought that only one Lushei had come out,, and gave them a much longer time, during which Lusheis were pouring out of the hole silently in great numbers. It is for this reason that Lusheis to this day are more numerous than Maras. After all men had come out of the whole in the earth God made their languages different, and they remain so to this day (74).

Diverse interpretations surrounding the concept of *Chhinlung* have been posited by various individuals, with one of the earliest Mizo historians, Liangkhaia, offering an intriguing perspective. According to him, *Chhinlung* does not represent a symbolic entity but rather refers to an actual person named Chhinlunga, believed to be a Chinese man. The narrative portrays Chhinlunga as an individual who experienced familial discord, prompting him to depart with a substantial following. These followers settled in the region of Burma circa 750 A.D. Following Chhinlunga's demise, the people who had migrated from this place began to identify

themselves as *Chhinlung chhuak*, signifying their origin from *Chhinlung* (Chhangte 7).

Liangkhaia's historical account presents Chhinlunga as a pivotal figure, and his followers' migration to different locations in the aftermath of his passing adds depth to the narrative. This interpretation highlights the historical significance of *Chhinlung* in the cultural identity of the Mizo community, as those who trace their ancestry back to this individual continue to identify themselves as descendants of *Chhinlung*.

A distinct and contrasting interpretation of *Chhinlung* is presented by K. Zawla. According to Zawla's perspective, *Chhinlung* does not symbolize an individual or a mythical entity, but rather signifies a hole in the Great Wall of China. This aperture purportedly served as a passage through which marginalized segments of Chinese society sought escape, redirecting their migration to places such as Shanghai or other destinations. Zawla posits that the forebears of the Mizos were among these marginalized groups who utilized this opening to flee from China. Subsequently, they embarked on a journey from Shanghai to Burma, where they became known as *Chinlu*. Over time, this designation underwent modifications, eventually culminating in the term *Chhinlung* (13). This argument offers a novel perspective on the *Chhinlung* narrative, depicting it as a tangible historical passage rather than a mythological or figurative entity.

Chhinlung, regardless of its definitive historical nature, holds a pivotal and revered position within the cultural imagination of the Mizo community. As a shared origin narrative, it signifies the common heritage of diverse Mizo/Zo sub-clans, indicating their former existence as a relatively unified and homogeneous group with a singular origin story. However, the course of history has witnessed their fragmentation due to continuous migrations and other influencing factors, including geographical disparities. Nevertheless, *Chhinlung* has served as a potent unifying element, fostering a sense of similarity and kinship among the Mizos. This collective origin narrative acts as a central cultural semiotic, shaping the contemporary identity of the Mizo community. Even in the present day, *Chhinlung* remains a crucial

element in determining the scope and essence of Mizo cultural identity, perpetuating a sense of shared heritage and cohesion among its members.

Contemporary scholars have put forth a hypothesis suggesting that the Mizos departed from their original place of origin, transitioning to the plains of Burma during the late pre-Christian and early Christian eras. Upon their arrival in Burma, they established their settlement at Kawlphai before later migrating to the Khampat region around 950 A.D. Among the accounts of their oral history, Khampat stands as the sole location with empirical verification, preceding their eventual settlement in the Chin Hills. During this historical phase, the Mizos remained undivided into distinct clans, coexisting as one cohesive tribe for approximately two centuries (Lalzazova 20). Their unity was characterized by a shared culture and language, contributing to their collective identity as a singular community.

The final phase of the Mizos' migration saw them departing from the Khampat region circa 1200 A.D. Subsequently, they established settlements in the Chin Hills area during the period spanning from 1450 to 1700 A.D. It is hypothesized that this migration followed a clan-wise pattern, leading to their dispersion into different geographic locations (Lalzazova 23). The topographical characteristics of the hilly terrain in their new settlements, in contrast to the previous Khampat settlement, hindered the replication of a large-scale settlement structure. As a consequence of the geographical dispersal, limited intercommunication emerged between the various clan-based villages. This isolation fostered distinct developmental trajectories, contributing to the evolution of diverse rules and administrative systems within the different settlements. The geographical and social factors at play during this phase of migratory movements had played a pivotal part in influencing and constructing the cultural and political diversity among the Mizos (Lalzazova 23).

This inevitably gave rise to inter-clan conflicts and tribal wars. These hostilities served to scatter the various kin groups across diverse territories, exacerbating the prevalence of clan-based tribalism within the Mizo community. According to historian Lalrimawia, this inter-clan strife became a crucial catalyst for

disunity among the Mizos in the historical context (14). Consequently, the lack of a cohesive political structure and the persistent tribal rivalries posed significant hindrances to the unification of the Mizos as a singular race or the development of a unified nation. The absence of a unified identity further contributed to the challenge of their recognition by neighboring communities, as each clan was distinguished by different names in the eyes of their neighbors. In the contexts of these historical complexities, they gradually evolved their own distinct identities, and over time, they have cultivated unique cultural traits and forged a collective sense of identity, culminating in the establishment of a more cohesive Mizo community.

The nature of such dispersed settlements led to the emergence of the village as the default socio-governance framework. Sing Khaw Khai asserts that Mizo/Zo society exhibits fundamental characteristics akin to a state, resembling the structure of a Greek-City State, despite the potential variation in territorial expanse and population size. Within the Mizo/Zo societal framework, individuals are regarded as equals under the purview of divine law (142). This comparison draws attention to the presence of organized governance and normative principles that govern Mizo/Zo communities, which mirrors the system of Greek city-states. These aspects that mirrored the Greek-City State system include the autonomous village system and quasi socio-political egalitarianism.

During the 16th century, the region between the Run and Tiau rivers experienced inter-tribal conflicts and territorial disputes, leading to a significant clan-based migration from the Chin Hills to Mizoram. The Hmars initiated the migration, succeeded by Lusei chiefs, and later, chiefs from clans like the Lais and Maras. By the early 18th century, these chiefs had firmly established their villages, with Lusei chiefs governing the northwest and southwest, Mara chiefs in the southeast, and Lai chiefs in the southwest of pre-colonial Mizoram. Sailo ruling chiefs emerged as dominant forces, extending their authority over three-fourths of Mizoram, particularly in the west and upper south. Paite and Hmar chiefs held sway in the northeast, bordering Cachar and Manipur. Other ruling chiefs and clans were largely subject to the governance of the Sailo chiefs.

Geography played a pivotal role in shaping the pre-colonial Mizos' social institutions and political landscape. Inter-village conflicts, often centered around land disputes, were intensified by the geographical demands of Jhumming cultivation. Population growth and the consequent need for arable land led to northward and westward expansions, exacerbating the scarcity of cultivable areas. Challenges in maintaining Jhum lands were heightened by violent confrontations with formidable Mizo/Zo tribes in the Chin Hills, limiting trade activities and destabilizing the economy. To sustain their positions and authority, Mizo chiefs sought alternative sources of income, eventually resorting to raids on neighboring plains like Cachar, Manipur, Chittagong Hill Tract, and Tripura for economic gains by the latter half of the 19th century.

These aggressive actions naturally earned the Mizos derogatory monikers such as "savage," "barbarian," and "head hunters" in the eyes of outsiders. The complex interplay between geographical constraints, population growth, territorial pressures, and economic challenges laid the foundation for the Mizos' engagements in raiding activities. These historical factors provide insights into the multifaceted dynamics that influenced by the politico-economic and societal realities, and economic realities of traditional Mizo community, revealing the complexities of their historical experiences and identity formation.

In the challenging natural environment, physical and mental strength were highly valued. This emphasis on strength contributed to the elevation of male roles and status above those of women. Men were expected to defend and provide for the village, even at the risk of their own lives. McCall aptly noted this inherently male-centric nature of Mizo society, describing it as "a country for men before it is for women and children" (26). The patriarchal foundations of the pre-colonial Mizo social fabric were evident in the predominant tracing of ancestral lineage through the male line. Gender-based demarcations were pronounced in domestic and broader social contexts, limiting women's involvement in key political roles and administrative functions within establishments like the *Zawlbuk*. Women were marginalized in terms of inheritance entitlements, with their primary roles confined

to the domestic sphere and familial responsibilities, lacking substantive authority in broader realms.

Thus, the Mizos' political and social life revolved around survival imperatives, necessitating cooperation and collective harmony within villages. In such challenging geographical context marked by land disputes and Jhumming cultivation demands, cooperation was not just a social ideal but a practical strategy for navigating environmental intricacies. The interdependence of individuals and villages became a vital necessity rather than a mere abstract construct. Recognizing that well-being, both individually and collectively, was linked to collective efforts, the Mizos embraced such a collective ethos. In times of scarcity or conflict, the community's ability to unite, share resources, and collectively address challenges became a cornerstone of their socio-political life—an enduring foundation for collective existence.

In essence, the Mizos' political and social life was predominantly collectivistic, and this collectivism was not merely shaped by abstract principles or power structures but by the tangible demands of their surroundings. The imperative for survival created a social fabric woven with threads of cooperation, unity, and collective stability, providing a resilient foundation for their collective existence. Thus, society then, centered on the core of the village, where collective interests took precedence over individual concerns. This collective ethos is concisely captured in their saying: 'it is better to war against seven villages than to have a conflict with a neighbor'. As a result, the idea of the autonomous individual, as understood in modern contexts, had no existence in the pre-colonial Mizo society. Social institutions not only entirely negated individual agency but also significantly restricted the authority of the chiefs.

Barring the democratic elements, Sing Khaw Khai's depiction of Mizo/Zo society as bearing similarities to the Greek-City-States that emphasized equality before the divine law holds particular accuracy in highlighting the pre-colonial Mizo political-administrative structure. The Mizo society, as mentioned before, predominantly operated on a self-contained independent village system, with each

village exercising its own sovereignty. Despite the theoretical absoluteness of the chiefs' power and prestige, the practical implementation of this authority was subject to the constraints of tradition and customs inherited from antiquity which prioritized collective welfare. The political praxis of the chiefs was shaped by their adherence to long-established traditions and customs, limiting the extent of their absolute authority in governing and ruling.

The traditional customs within the Mizo society functioned as a form of constitutionalism, akin to a rule of law that effectively hindered the concentration of power within a single institutional entity. In essence, these customs acted as mechanisms to prevent the unchecked accumulation of authority. Thus, from a foundational perspective, traditional customs functioned as agents of social and political equity, instilling a predominantly egalitarian ethos within the community. However, it is crucial to avoid misconstruing this dynamic as indicative of an absence of divisions within the pre-colonial Mizo society. Unlike the democratic structure observed in Greek City-States, Mizo villages did not possess the same level of autonomy attributed to individuals in Greek democracy. In fact, the concept of individual autonomy was virtually nonexistent within traditional Mizo society. Instead, the locus of influence lay predominantly within social institutions, and this influence was extensively dispersed across various entities.

And, in spite of this constitutionalism, it is also crucial to acknowledge that social divisions were present in pre-colonial Mizo society, as evidenced by the experiences of Dardini and Chalkunga in the tales "Dardini leh Duhmang" and "Chalkunga leh Thanghniangi". Duhmanga's family explicitly rejecting Dardini based on her socio-economic status illustrates the existence of class and social distinctions ("Dardini leh Duhmanga" 175). Similarly, Chalkunga's hesitation to pursue a relationship with Thanghniangi, despite no familial rejection, highlights the prevalence of such inequalities within their collectivist framework. Chalkunga's low self-esteem stems from internalizing the 'expectations' of the significant and the generalized others, leading to the negation of his individuality (199). However, it is crucial to contextualize these social divisions within the framework of collectivism, which prioritizes the well-being of the community.

This absence of individuality is also discernible in their socio-governance system; contrary to the Greek City-States, pre-colonial Mizo society lacked democratic features as democracy relies on the autonomous agency of individuals. Real power primarily resided within social institutions, distributed across diverse organizational frameworks. Though direct citizen participation was lacking, social and political affairs were consistently determined and mediated through these institutional channels. These institutions mirrored the concept of the 'general will' by Jean Jacques Rousseau, representing collective interests. The general will embodies the idea that these institutions reflected the collective consensus, ensuring a balance between different interests and perspectives. Consequently, the traditional customs of Mizo society, functioning as a type of constitutional framework, worked to prevent an unchecked concentration of power and fostered a more or less egalitarian atmosphere. Although not directly analogous to Greek City-States in terms of autonomy and democratic structures, the distribution of power in Mizo society was predominantly mediated through institutions that resonated with the notion of the 'general will', effectively representing the collective interests of the community.

Rousseau posits that a state's viability hinges on a cohesive community formed through consensus on fundamental principles of behavior. This consensus creates an immersive environment, influencing not only individuals' actions but also shaping what remains unexpressed. Unlike mere public opinion, this consensus is the source from which public opinions emerge, binding the community and compelling sustained, patterned behaviors. He calls this consensus the "general will", encompassing various factors such as religious and national sentiments, traditional customs, societal interests, and loyalties. It also encompasses and supersedes individual interests and serves as a cohesive force within the community, leading to the emergence of a shared community interest (30).

If an individual's interests conflict with the general will, society holds the authority to compel compliance. Genuine freedom, according to Rousseau, resides in aligning one's actions with the ordered pattern dictated by the general will, emphasizing a true sense of freedom in collective commitment to the common good. This principle extends to political authorities as well. Rousseau further posits that

this act of compulsion is self-imposed, stemming from the individual's own consensus that contributes to the formation of the general will. Since the general will is derived from the collective consensus of individuals, it inherently aligns with their personal interests. Therefore, it cannot encompass conflicting interests, as it essentially reflects the interests of the whole collective. This intricate interplay underscores the symbiotic relationship between individual and collective interests within the context of the theory of the general will.

As per Rousseau, the sovereign, comprised entirely of the individuals constituting it, neither possesses nor can possess any interests contrary to those of its constituents. Consequently, the sovereign requires no guarantee for its subjects, as it is inconceivable for the collective entity to wish harm upon its own members. However, the relationship of the subjects to the sovereign is not reciprocal. Each individual, in their capacity as a human being, may harbor a personal will conflicting with the general will. This dual role, as both an individual and a citizen, introduces a crucial element to the social compact – the tacit understanding that whoever rejects obedience to the general will will be compelled by the entire body of the sovereign. Essentially, this compulsion implies being forced into freedom, a condition that, by binding each citizen to their country, shields them from any form of personal subjugation. This fundamental principle serves as the linchpin in the functioning of the political machinery, legitimizing civil undertakings that would otherwise be devoid of reason, prone to tyranny, and susceptible to grievous abuses (14-15).

The concept of the sovereign, emanating from the collective composition of its individual constituents, underscores a fundamental tenet: that the sovereign entity is inherently aligned with the interests of its members. In this symbiotic relationship, the sovereign requires no external guarantee for the well-being of its subjects, as any contrary interest would be antithetical to its very nature. This inherent harmony between the sovereign and its constituents establishes a foundation of mutual benefit and collective welfare.

Conversely, the dynamic between the subjects and the sovereign introduces a nuanced complexity. Each individual, operating both as a distinct human being and a

citizen, possesses a dual will—one that is personal and another that aligns with the overarching general will. This duality introduces a critical aspect to the social compact—an implicit agreement that anyone rejecting obedience to the general will will face compulsion from the entire body of the sovereign. As indicated above, this compulsion is often framed as being 'forced to be free', and it is a pivotal element in preserving individual liberty within the larger social framework. It signifies that adherence to the general will, as a condition of citizenship, safeguards each individual against personal subjugation and arbitrary authority. This principle operates as a linchpin in the intricate machinery of politics, providing legitimacy to civil undertakings that would otherwise lack rationality, be susceptible to tyranny, and prone to egregious abuses.

Simply put, the general will involves an individual's voluntary consent, encapsulating his/her personal interests. True personal freedom is achieved by conforming to the structured framework dictated by the general will. Resistance to this conformity invites external pressure, compelling individuals to comply. This principle applies universally, extending even to political authorities who are also subject to the jurisdiction of the general will. He succinctly arguest that the question of who holds the responsibility for legislating becomes obsolete, as laws are manifestations of the general will. Likewise, inquiries into whether the prince stands above the law lose relevance, as the prince is an integral member of the state. The notion of unjust laws also dissipates, as no one can be unjust to oneself. The apparent paradox of being both free and subject to laws is resolved by recognizing that these laws merely formalize and register our collective wills (Rousseau 30). The paradox lies in the idea that individual submission to the general will leads, as mentioned before, to the realization of genuine freedom. The overarching authority of the general will extends to all, highlighting its influential role in shaping the collective governance of the community.

The traditional Mizo society exhibited notable functional parallels with this notion of the general will. Individual identities were intricately woven into a collective fabric, defined by predetermined roles aligned with the common interest. The community operated cohesively with a shared understanding of roles and

responsibilities, fostering a sense of unity. Deviation or opposition to this general will was considered heretical, and instances of such transgressions were notably rare. A notable instance of this principle in practice in the traditional pre-modernl Mizo society pertains to the conduct of unmarried maidens. These young women were anticipated to exhibit gracious hospitality and courteous demeanor towards all suitors who sought their affections. Guided by the traditional moral code, these maidens were prohibited from displaying preferential treatment even to their romantic companions. The observance of such courteous behavior was paramount. Failure to uphold this standard would trigger a response from the young men in the *Zawlbuk*, a location that served as a nightly meeting place for bachelors within the community. The *Zawlbuk* bore the responsibility of sanctioning corrective action. In the event of a breach, it was customary for the community to collectively disassemble the maiden's dwelling, symbolizing a form of reprimand and instruction.

Another instance illustrating the imposition of the general will to compel conformity can be observed in situations involving young boys who faltered or declined in the task of gathering dry wood for combustion at the community gathering space at the *Zawlbuk*. A prescribed duty assigned to the young boys was the consistent collection of dry wood to fuel the fires at the *Zawlbuk*. Negligence or refusal to fulfill this responsibility incurred significant censure and chastisement by the *Zawlbuk* as per the prevailing norms of the society.

However, Rousseau emphasizes individual's contribution and consent in forming the general will, which represents collective rational agreement. While individuals are expected to conform to the general will, their involvement in shaping it underscores a delicate balance between individualism and collective interests. In Rousseau's perspective, the dynamic interaction between the individual and the collective welfare is crucial. Unlike a purely authoritarian imposition, the theory recognizes the significance of individuality within the social contract. This synthesis of collective perspective and individual engagement aims to reconcile individual interests with broader community welfare. Individuals play a pivotal role in shaping the general will during collective decision-making, influencing its formation through active participation and consent. However, once the general will solidifies as a

collective consensus for collective welfare, individual agency to deviate diminishes, reflecting a balance between individual contribution and collective cohesion.

Thus, individuals are not passive subjects merely submitting to an external force. This nuanced approach seeks to balance the autonomy and uniqueness of individuals with the necessity of collective governance. Rousseau's theory acknowledges the tension between individual freedom and collective order, aiming to establish a harmonious coexistence. The active involvement of individuals in shaping the general will is recognition of their agency and rational contribution to the collective decision-making process. This approach reflects his endeavor to strike a balance between individualism and the collective good within the social contract.

The pre-colonial Mizo society exhibited a remarkable alignment with Rousseau's conceptual framework in terms of the operational principles attributes of the general will. However, the intricate formation of this collective ethos within the Mizo societal structure unveil its manifestation as an emergent property with its origin embedded in the functional utility it serves—primarily addressing security imperatives against nature and violent enemies—rather than being a consensus reached though rational deliberations by individual members. The compelling necessity of this collectivism stems from its critical and inescapable function, thereby laying the essential foundation for the individual consents that facilitate its inception.

A proppian analysis of Mizo folklore substantiate the predominance of this collective ethos in pre-colonial Mizo society. The recurring presence of collectivistic stratification, along with the categorical negation of individual identity conflicting with this stratification, is a foundational aspect in numerous tales. The narrative structure of these folklores mirrors the society's collective disposition, highlighting shared values, a collective identity, and the subordination of individual agency to the overarching collective narrative. In essence, Propp's concept of the *fabula,* in Mizo folklore, offers a nuanced portrayal of collectivism. It presents a comprehensive depiction where societal roles, relationships, and conflicts converge, emphasizing the paramount significance of the community over the individualistic paradigm.

The narrative of “Duhmanga leh Dardini”, for instance, vividly portrays the pervasive collectivistic stratification that governs various facets of Mizo social life. Their tragic tale unfolds within the framework of this all-encompassing collective social order. Their initial encounter and love affair are intricately shaped by religious rituals like *inthawi* and societal norms of courtship, which though not mandatory, strongly dictates the social lives of bachelors. However, their matrimonial aspirations face insurmountable challenges due to Duhmanga’s social obligations as a man and a *pasaltha* (a priviledged status earned by men by serving the welfare of the community) compelling him to fulfill collective duties, leading to the tragic demise of Dardini. Both characters find themselves entirely subject to the ‘authority’ of others and the ‘expectations’ of the collective. Despite their efforts to resist these constraints and maintain their bond against societal odds, their struggle is nullified by the overwhelming force of collectivistic stratification, leaving no room for individual agency in their social rebellion in the form of their marriage.

Similarly, in the tale of “Chalkunga leh Thanghniangi”, the intricacies of Thanghniangi’s romantic feelings towards Chalkunga introduce a multifaceted challenge. Beyond the conventional hurdles of rival suitors, their predicament is compounded by a clash with entrenched traditional norms that fail to recognize Chalkunga’s individuality due to his societal standing. Their prospect of being together hinges on a radical societal upheavel, steered by transformative morphogenic forces. Despite Chalkunga not encountering direct opposition from Thanghniangi’s family, he grapples with Gerth and Mill’s notion of the “generalized others” (— the collective consciousness that refuses to recognize or warrant values in him as a unique individual. He is constantly reminded of this negation of his individuality through the “significant others” (Gerth and Mills 95) in his surroundings. This narrative follows a recurring pattern where the rigid social structure systematically stifles individual agency, underscoring the prevailing theme of collectivistic stratification in Mizo folklore.

As deliberated in second chapter, individual identity is intricately molded by the diverse ‘roles’ he/she embodied, and the selection of these roles is fundamentally dictated by the logic of societal ‘expectations’ (Gerth and Mills 137). The nature of

this identity formation involves the dynamic interplay between an individual and his/her social milieu. The roles a person assumes serve as pivotal components in this ongoing construction of identity, influencing and being influenced by societal norms, cultural expectations, and interpersonal relationships. As individuals navigate these roles, they engage in a continuous dialogue with their surroundings, contributing to the evolving narrative of their identity.

However, in traditional collectivistic societies, though individual identity is intricately linked to the roles he/she undertakes, roles, and therefore identity, are imposed on individuals rather than being chosen. This process is governed by the 'expectations' set by 'significant', 'authoritative', and 'generalized others' that prioritize collective welfare and functional utility over individual expressions. The resulting identities tend to be more homogeneous within such cultural contexts. Changes in one's identity are facilitated through the adoption of socially prescribed roles, guided by the dictates of collective interest. And since 'expectations' underscore the unassailable nature of the General Will by virtue of its basis on the principle of functional necessity, there is no room for divergent identities.

As per Gerth and Mills, in a society marked by distinct roles and well-defined societal expectations, individuals find themselves in a milieu where differences in self-perception and the perceptions others hold of them are limited. The intricacies of self-presentation, the discrepancy between public and private opinions, and the potential divergence between stated views and genuine sentiments are not prominent concerns. Within this societal framework, one's self-image tends to remain relatively stable and foreseeable as they navigate through their professional journey. Age-related roles are clearly understood, adhered to with tradition, and seamlessly aligned with shifting expectations. The past and future self-images harmoniously coexist, mirroring the smooth transitions in societal expectations as individuals progress through standard career stages. Aspirations follow established patterns, widely recognized and accepted as appropriate. Consequently, both the individual and their significant others possess a shared understanding of the desired trajectory, anticipating the next phase and acknowledging the probable outcome under optimal

conditions. This conformity to societal norms and expectations fosters a sense of predictability and alignment between personal aspirations and societal roles (94).

In the Pre-colonial Mizo society, the experience of children and childhood, among other things, exhibits a striking manifestation of these conceptual deliberations. They were assigned roles based on their age and gender in alignment with functional imperatives of the society, and they were closely observed by significant others to ensure they conformed to the "expectations" of the generalized others;

> Certain tasks were given to children who were taught according to their approximate age.... So when the stronger more able bodied men and women left to work the fields, the older children, grandparents and other adults took on their roles as caretakers of children of the village. Because the village functioned in this manner, care-taking and teaching of children become a communal responsibility although children were also taught gender roles and communality in their homes...Children grew up in the close scrutiny and watchful eyes of the adult/communal gaze. Respect for elders become a natural rule in the child's world view because he/she could potentially learn something from any elder, whether it's a joke, how to make a catapult, how to sharpen a dao or decapitate a chicken or how to make a pattern on a shawl or how to spin a cotton. (Zama 88-90)

Thus, the allocation of roles and responsibilities in traditional Mizo society, based on gender and age, played a crucial role in ensuring its functional efficiency. Had it not been for this division of roles, agricultural works away from home would have suffered major setbacks as a large portion of the able bodied workers would have to tend to these children. This division facilitated by the 'expectations'("close scrutiny and watchful eyes") of the 'significant others', was the outcome of functional necessity, and was then in turn indispensable for maintaining optimal productivity and operational coherence within the societal network. Moreover, this structural distribution fosters the acknowledgment and reverence for maturity and old age, meaning that it led to the internalization of 'expectations' pertinent to their age

and genders. In traditional societies, the passage of time is intricately connected to assuming specific roles and identities, tightly linked with functional domains, and accompanied by the accrual of societal respect and status.

Role, and therefore identity (personhood), were imposed by the collective on the individual basis of traditional patterns that followed the dictates of functional utility. And it was imposed through the logic of "expectations" from the significant, the authoritative and the generalized others. Hence, social statuses were earned through notable achievements in designated functions and roles serving the community. Exceptional proficiency in activities like crop cultivation or hunting, along with valor in facing adversaries, led to elevated positions. Substantial recognition required outstanding contributions achieved by excelling in allocated functions and roles (Thomas 10). This stratification, based on functional prowess, avoided a rigid manifestation where societal status and identity are predetermined at birth, with the exception of chieftainship (Rokhum 30).

In collectivist cultures, individuals indeed conceive their identity as integral parts of broader social collectives—be it family, community, or nation. This perspective prioritizes collective goals and values over personal ambitions, anchoring identity and belonging within these groups. Behavioral patterns align with established social norms and obligations, emphasizing group harmony. Individuals in collectivist frameworks intertwine their sense of self with relational networks, prioritizing social congruence. The preference for unified thoughts and actions within the group fosters comfort in interactions with like-minded individuals, valuing conflict resolution as essential for preserving group harmony (Triandis 43-44). The pre-colonial epoch was marked by such a collectivist inclinations, signifying a pronounced emphasis on cohesive group dynamics where the individual's sense of self was subordinate to the overarching collective consciousness. This prevailing collectivist ethos permeated every facet of their socio-cultural fabric and cognitive engagements, exerting a profound influence on their thought processes, social interactions, and decision-making mechanisms.

In fact, societal differentiations that existed were rooted in *tlawmngaihna,* an ethico-moral code that shaped the collectivist structure of the society. This framework emphasized sacrificing personal interests for the well-being of the community. It is a behavioral code that demanded a profound commitment from individuals, particularly males, who were not only expected but also prepared to make profound sacrifices, including their lives, without hesitation, for the betterment of their fellow community members and the society as a whole. Central to this ethos was the principle that individuals were obligated to place the interests of others and the society above their personal interests. Adherence to *tlawmngaihna* was essential for social advancement, leaving limited room for individual identity and fostering uniformity for the functional stability of the society. The status of chiefs, whether inherited or earned, primarily conferred symbolic rather than economic privileges. Even within this privileged class, adherence to tradition and the moral principles of t*lawmngaihna* remained paramount, highlighting the pervasive influence of collectivist values.

Thus, substantial recognition within the Mizo society necessitated direct and outstanding contributions to the community through roles already predetermined by traditional normativity. This form of stratification, based on functional prowess, as mentioned before, was an open system that allowed anyone to attain socially privileged positions by serving the community. Hence, social differentiations, exemplified by the challenges faced by the character of Chalkunga, are outcomes of a functional logic that prioritizes collective welfare. Given Chalkunga's robust health and strength as a young man, there is no impediment to his excelling at *tlawmngaihna* and achieving prestige in society. The open-ended nature of social differentiation, thus, serves as a challenge for individuals to actively pursue social prestige through dedicated service to the community.

An actual instance of a privileged institution acquired through *tlawmngaihna* is exemplified by the *pasaltha*. The *pasaltha* role commands authority and respect yet does not entail the subjugation of other constituents. The *pasaltha* rank is conferred through feats and achievements in warfare and hunting, as well as through contributory sacrifices benefiting the collective society. A *pasaltha* assumes the

responsibility of ensuring the village's security, safeguarding women and children against adversaries and wildlife. Moreover, the *pasaltha* undertakes the role of mentoring young men, nurturing them into proficient warriors, accomplished hunters, and esteemed members of the community. This emblematic illustration underscores the intricate interplay of rank, hierarchy, and multifaceted responsibilities within the traditional Mizo societal structure. And it is an inclusive institution accessible to anyone, regardless of class or status.

Another illustrative instance of this phenomenon is depicted in "The Glory Days of Tualte", where the character Lalbela faces rejection by his desired partner, Thakimi, due to his perceived deficiency in *tlawmngaihna*. Initially, Thankimi is drawn to Lalbela for his genuine self. However, when courted by *Rualtinkhuma*, a respected *pasaltha,* Thakimi chooses him over Lalbela. She openly embarrasses Lalbela by highlighting his lack of *tlawmngaihna* in front of other suitors. Despite Lalbela having valid reasons for his actions, they contradict the societal norms established by the generalized others. Consequently, his reasons go unrecognized, and his individuality is entirely disregarded, reducing him to a laughing stock in the eyes of significant others. However, aside from his own lack of determination, and perhaps his idleness and cowardly nature, there is nothing that hinders Lalbela from adopting the virtues of *tlawmngaihna* and acquiring the status of *pasaltha*. In fact, the affections of Thakimi demands that he adopts these virtues and prestige.

Nevertheless, social differentiations did existed, however, while displaying elements of privilege that was primarily centered around chieftainship, such stratification did not conform to the economic class stratification observed in more advanced societies. The elevation of a chief and the emergence of a select class were often tied to hereditary lineage and contributions to administrative tasks. Economic variations were present, ranging from poverty to affluence, but the privileged status within this structure was predominantly traditional and semiotic rather than purely economic. Despite their elevated positions, both chiefs and the select class remained subject to the pervasive influence of tradition and the moral principles of *tlawmngaihna*.

Rank differentiation is a form of societal structures that often finds its basis in the delineation of descent (Mair 58). A paradigmatic manifestation of such rank-based differentiation in traditional Mizo society is observed within the institution of chieftainship. However, even the Chief and affluent members adhered to tradition and the moral code of *tlawmngaihna*, requiring active support for the less privileged. The chief, exemplifying this commitment, allocated resources to the socioeconomically disadvantaged, mitigating societal divisions. Similar collective spirit was evident in hunting expeditions led by the *pasaltha*, ensuring equitable distribution of the game among the community, allowing widows and households without male members to participate in occasional meat consumption. The pre-colonial Mizo society, thus, featured a cohesive pattern of resource sharing, collaboration, and recognition of contributions, that was not instituted by a centralized political authority, but arose from an ethico-moral system –*tlawmngaihna* - and the collective stratification it spawned. As such, the traditional Mizo social stratification fostered harmonious coexistence over personal desires, rendering this collective stratification functionally necessary for the stability and continuity of the society.

The *chief's* administration relied on a council of senior citizens known as *Khawnbawl Upa,* or simply *Upa,* directly appointed by the chief. Despite their esteemed status, the *Upas* could be dismissed for proven incompetence. Collaborating with the chief, the council oversaw various aspects of village welfare, including security, agricultural expansion, and daily affairs. They played a crucial role in resolving disputes, holding hearings at the chief's residence. The *Upa* institution had two categories: *Upa Min*, enjoying senior privileges like tax exemptions and preferred cultivation land, and regular *Upas*, also exempt from certain taxes and granted the right to choose cultivation plots. Their leadership was vital in the absence of the chief. Administrative processes in Mizo society were deeply rooted in traditions and customary laws, emphasizing the Upas' need for a profound understanding of these norms.

Another administrative position in the village was the *Zalen*. Offering support to chiefs during challenges and exempting individuals from the *Fathang* tax. They

had priority in choosing land for jhum cultivation. The skilled cultivators known as *Ramhual* enjoyed privileges, selecting prime cultivable land, albeit with higher *Fathang* (due/tax) payments and the 'obligation to share their harvest with others'. The *Thirdeng* (blacksmith) held a significant function in crafting tools for village activities, without direct involvement in jhum cultivation. Households contributed paddy from their jhum to support the blacksmith's work.

Thus, traditional Mizo society exemplifies social collectivism through various aspects of its organizational structure and practices. This communal way of life was deeply ingrained in their social fabric, reflecting a shared commitment to the welfare of the entire community; the chief wielded authority with a unique blend of privileges and responsibilities. Rather than exploiting his position for personal gain, the chief's role was intricately tied to the welfare of the community. Tributes and levies were collected from the subjects. However, these contributions were not solely for the chief's benefit. They were structured in a way that enabled the chief to provide support to the less privileged members of the society.

This reciprocal arrangement reflected the community's commitment to *tlawmngaihna,* and mutual aid and shared well-being. The administrative mechanisms and decision-making dynamics within the Mizo society operated on a foundational principle of adhering to established traditions and customary laws. This emphasis on tradition aimed to prioritize the collective welfare of the community, superseding rational motivations that were not contingent upon established traditional norms in the decision-making process. This approach mandated that the chief and the *Upas,* as key figures within the governance structure, possessed a profound grasp of these traditional norms and legal frameworks. This understanding was imperative for them to competently execute their duties and responsibilities in a manner that harmonized with the communal ethos and historical precedents. Thus, in this connection, Parry has directly noted that traditional customs entirely dictated village administration (*A Monograph* 1).

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Another factor curbing the chief's authority was the citizens' political agency in selecting their leaders, albeit in a non-electoral manner. The populace retained the prerogative to migrate to an alternative village if they were dissatisfied with a chief's governance. As the chiefs' prestige and influence hinged on their subjects' number and the village's size, prudence dictated their exercise of power. Barring rare exceptions, the majority of Mizo chiefs displayed fairness and benevolence in their interactions with subjects. This disposition led TH Lewin to characterize the Mizo political structure as a "democracy tempered by despotism" (as qtd in Sangkima 36).

NE Parry stated that "the chief was the father of his people; he helped them when they were in distress and in all their crises, and the people helped the chief in return"(1). Chieftainship was initially adopted by the Mizos, particularly by the Luseis, as a pragmatic security measure against enemies, wild animals, social disorder, and disharmony. This development is believed to have occurred during their settlements between the Tiau and Run rivers around the period of 1500 to 1700 A.D. And it began to take shape in the Lusei society between 1600 and 1625 A.D. (Bawihtlung 2). In the Lai and Mara societies, the institution can be linked to the establishment of their settlement in the Chin Hills spanning from 1300 to 1700 A.D. (Lalchhuanawma 49-50). Functioning as a semi-nomadic agrarian society, the Mizos continually migrated in search of security and new fertile lands for cultivation. This pursuit for fertile land, as indicated earlier, often resulted in clashes among different clans, as they competed for resources. It is speculated that these recurrent conflicts could have been influential in catalyzing the emergence of chieftainship within the Mizo society.

Thus, chieftainship developed out of functional necessity as a measure against chaos, whether natural or social – so that people could be more properly led, administered and protected; so that the village could be more properly organised. Despite its pragmatic origin, chieftainship became hereditary in the course of time (Verghese & Thanzawna 38). The inception of chieftainship within the Mizo community exhibits certain parallels with Thomas Hobbes' conceptualization of the emergence of the commonwealth (the state/monarchy), facilitated by a 'social contract'. This contractual arrangement was necessitated by the inherent disorder and the harsh brutality of the 'state of nature', signifying a condition before the establishment of a state devoid of political organization or authority. According to him, the state of nature was described as a condition of conflict and war, specifically a war of all against all' (81), given the absence of a unifying power for individuals to acknowledge and submit to. Individuals in such a state were deemed as "lawless creatures," exercising complete freedom and "liberty" to employ their power at their discretion for self-preservation (82).

Hobbes maintains that mitigating human turmoil involves surrendering personal freedoms in favor of a sovereign authority, be it an individual or collective assembly. In this contractual transformation, individuals exchange their inherent rights for those vested in the sovereign or commonwealth, forfeiting freedoms from the state of nature. The ascendancy of state authority results from a collective contractual arrangement, establishing absolute dominion that overrides individual citizens'' rights (138). In essence, a 'social contract' was forged among equals, wherein individuals relinquished personal freedoms to a chosen 'sovereign' in exchange for rights, security, and tranquility. The sovereign's primary mandate was to safeguard and maintain peace, not to ensure a 'good life' for constituents but to establish conditions for its pursuit (112). Importantly, Hobbes' unequivocal authoritarian nature in the concept of the "commonwealth" or "sovereign" did not seem to replicate itself in the context of Mizo chieftainship as its authority was severely delimited by collective imperative of social reality in the form of *tlawmngaihna.*

This prevailing value system, centered on *tlawmngaihna* and the corresponding collectivist stratification, resulted from a dynamic negotiation involving the subject/individual, the collective entity, the natural environment, and the realm of the supernatural. Elements encompassing security, migration, village resettlement, linguistic patterns, daily behavioral norms, and more, were considerably shaped by these ongoing negotiations with nature and the supernatural. Over a span of time, this iterative process culminated in the establishment of structured social and political-administrative systems. In essence, these frameworks operated as the conduit through which the society arranged itself by allocating systematic functions to its constituents. This allocation of functions and roles extended to every individual, contingent upon factors such as age, gender, familial association, and other pertinent considerations. This prevailing collectivist ethos permeated every facet of their socio-cultural fabric and cognitive engagements, exerting a profound influence on their thought processes, social interactions, and decision-making mechanisms.

An instance of how this negotiation translated into socio-behavioral norms can be observed in the relational dynamics of traditional Mizo couples. Men, despite their affection for spouses, displayed a demeanor devoid of apparent affection. This was rooted in the belief that overt displays of love could evoke the jealousy of *Khuanu*, a supernatural entity, leading to separation and demise. Thus, men adopted sternness to avoid this fate. This example illustrates the profound influence of the sacred realm on daily existence in Mizo society, where every facet of behavioral norms and cognitive processes was dictated by the collective negotiation with the natural and supernatural realms. The coexistence of sacred and secular domains in Mizo society reflects the intricate interplay between societal and metaphysical dimensions (Zongte 36).

Thus, the unwavering focus on community well-being led to a complete suppression of individual desires and experiences. Any semblance of private life was deemed detrimental, as it could potentially foster (personal) values and patterns that contradicted the collective's priorities. This suppression extended to the deepest reaches of the individual's consciousness, with religious beliefs and rituals acting as

tools to enforce this conformity and prevent any deviation from the collective ideal. In this way, every facet of their daily behavioral norms and cognitive processes was influenced and dictated by the collective to which each individual belonged. In turn, this collective was engaged in a continual negotiation with the natural world, often imbued with supernatural connotations. The negotiation with nature was intrinsically intertwined with negotiation with the supernatural realm. In the Mizo society, the sacred and secular domains coexisted harmoniously, reflecting the intricate interplay between societal and metaphysical dimensions.

Their metaphysical conception encompassed a deistic paradigm centered around acknowledging a singular supreme deity, *Pathian*, believed to be omnipotent and benevolent but uninvolved in human affairs. Referred to as *Chung Pathian*, signifying "God in heaven/sky". Alongside this, a steadfast conviction in ancestral spirits persisted, believed to bestow blessings upon descendants. Ritual veneration of ancestors, known *as mitthirawplam*, involved creating adorned ancestral models. The Mizos conducted processions around the village, carrying these models to appease ancestors and influence their destinies, either positively or adversely (Rokhum 35-36). In *Lushai Chrysalis*, A.G.

In addition to their deistic convictions, they also held a polytheistic belief system involving spirits permeating the world, residing in objects like trees, hills, caves, and mountains. Known as *Huai* or *Ramhuai* and *Tuihuai*, these spirits were often seen as malevolent entities, causing fear and believed to be responsible for adversities and calamities. The Mizos sought to appease these spirits through offerings to mitigate their negative influence. It is crucial to note that Mizos did not worship these *Huais* but aimed to pacify them to alleviate afflictions. Alongside malevolent spirits, benevolent ones like *Lasi* and *Pheichham* were part of their belief system. *Lasi* was a female guardian of animals, occasionally blessing *Pasaltha* during hunting. In contrast, *Pheichham* appeared as a one-legged male figure, capable of bestowing wealth upon those who captured it (Rokhum 36).

Animal domestication in Mizo society was profoundly influenced by their religious belief system. The domestication of animals, including pigs, chickens,

goats, mithuns, and dogs, held economic and cultural significance in Mizo society. Beyond mere indicators of wealth, animals, particularly the mithun, symbolized communal prosperity. While privately owned, the mithun carried collective importance within the village, serving as a prized communal asset and a key medium of exchange. This cultural interplay between animals and society also extended beyond economic considerations, encompassing spiritual and ceremonial dimensions. Animals played a central role in religious ceremonies and rituals, emphasizing their intrinsic connection to both material and spiritual aspects of Mizo culture.

In *Primitive Culture*, Edward Burnett Tylor introduces the term "animism," encapsulating diverse forms of belief in spiritual entities. This concept is subsequently categorized into two distinct manifestations: the doctrine of souls and the doctrine of spirits. The doctrine of souls pertains to the conviction that human beings possess enduring souls that persist beyond death in varying forms. In contrast, the 'doctrine of spirits' denotes the belief in the existence of other spiritual entities imbued with personalized attributes. According to Tylor, the belief in the soul's continuity in the afterlife engenders practices such as ancestor worship. Furthermore, he posits that the fetishization, or attribution of spiritual essence to inanimate objects and the physical environment constitutes humanity's endeavor to elucidate enigmatic causal factors. He contends that "spirits are simply personified causes," encapsulating a viewpoint where these spiritual entities serve as anthropomorphic explanations for unexplained phenomena (100).

The pre-colonial Mizo deistic-polytheistic belief system could thus be categorize as an animistic system. This belief system, encompassing both malevolent and benevolent spirits, led to a network of taboos shaping daily lives. Rooted in the fear of spirits, these taboos influenced and regulated behavior and social norms as a precautionary measure against potential harm from malevolent spirits. Adherence to these taboos served as protection for individuals and the community, contributing to the collectivistic social stratification and establishing norms, including the formulation of daily behavioral codes. Thus, this prevailing collectivist ethos permeated every facet of their socio-cultural fabric and cognitive engagements, exerting a profound influence on their thought processes, social interactions, and

decision-making mechanisms. In this intricate tapestry, the notion of the individual as it is contemporarily understood assumed a minimalistic role.

Thus, their religious beliefs, centered on a distant and benevolent deity, *Pathian*, and their engagement with the supernatural, notably the ritual *mitthirawplam*, played a pivotal role in shaping their collectivistic social stratification. The belief in *Pathian*'s non-intervention fosters self-reliance and collective responsibility, discouraging individualism. Rituals, like *mitthirawplam*, connecting the living with ancestral spirits, reinforce continuity and shared identity across generations. Creating ancestral models and carrying them in processions visually represents their collective past, reinforcing the idea that their identity is deeply intertwined with their ancestors. Ritual veneration transmits collective wisdom and values, providing stability to their identity and emphasizing enduring traditions passed down through generations.

Such metaphysical conception of collectivism meant that deviating from this system had severe consequences, not just in the form of an 'unhomely' effect, but in terms of one's mortality as well, as breaching such norms had potentially fatal consequences. As a result, this conception had endowed the collectivistic order not only with functional, but also with existential and ontological necessity. Hence, endowing social institutions considerable authority, marked by unyielding norms rather than legal constructs enforced by political authorities.

The conception of the afterlife in the form of *Mitthi Khua* and *Pialral* particularly had significantly influenced on Mizo societal values and social stratification. The *Thangchhuah*, a socially privileged position, was intricately tied to the concept of *Pialral* - a paradise. Upon death, individuals were believed to either transition to "*Mitthi Khua*" (the village of the dead) or *Pialral* (Paradise) Commoners were destined for *Mitthi Khua*, where existence was akin to their earthly lifestyle—still requiring work to sustain themselves. In contrast, *Pialral* was the destination for the affluent and those who achieved *Thangchhuah* status in their lifetime. Unlike *Mitthi Khua*, *Pialral* offered comfort and opulence. Abundant provisions such as food, rice, meat, and rice beer were readily available, and individuals were relieved

of the necessity to labor for sustenance. Traditionally, there existed two categories of *Thangchhuah*: *In lama Thangchhuah,* and *ram lama Thangchhuah*.

Inlama Thangchhuah primarily hinges upon economic affluence, demanding a substantial display of wealth. To attain this esteemed position, an individual is required to host the *Khuangchawi* feast for the entire village, spanning at least seven days. This elaborate feast entails the sacrifice of at least two mithuns and a pig to cater to the village. Abundant quantities of *zu* (rice beer) must be available throughout the feast. Additionally, the individual must execute the *Sechhun* ritual through the sacrifice of another mithun. Notably, a *Thangchhuah* is expected to host three such *Khuangchawi* feasts within their lifetime. Upon achieving this position, the individual gains the privilege of wearing a special turban and opening a unique window in their dwelling (Baveja 30). Conversely, *Ramlama Thangchhuah* denotes a status primarily attained through acts of courage and bravery. To ascend to this position, an individual must accomplish a series of noteworthy feats. These feats encompass hunting and successfully capturing specific wildlife species, including a bear, a barking deer, a *sele* (wild mithun), a stag, a wild boar, a *muvanlai* (hawk), and a *rulngan* (viper) (Baveja 30-32).

This *Thangchhuah* institution also served as a manifestation of the convergence between social privilege and religious beliefs within the Mizo society. The attainment of *Thangchhuah* status not only signified personal success but was also deeply intertwined with the aspiration for a favorable afterlife in *Pialral,* and it was achieved, more or less, by serving the welfare of the whole society. As such, the position held implications beyond social prestige, reflecting a fusion of individual achievement and collective well-being within the context of their metaphysical beliefs. It is a privilege attained through collective benefit rather than to the detriment of others or the community. Here, it can be inferred that the ethico-moral system of *tlawmngaihna* underpinning the collectivism of the pre-colonial society originated from functional necessity and was conceived through their metaphysical beliefs.

Such metaphysical conceptualization (in the traditional Mizo society) establishes a value system based on collective service, contributing to a hierarchical framework. Disparate afterlife experiences, where commoners resemble their terrestrial existence and elevated individuals enjoy opulence, highlight a belief in persistent hierarchical roles in the metaphysical domain. This hierarchy mirrors societal stratification, indicating that traditional Mizo society's specific stratification originates from continuous interaction with the supernatural. Socially privileged roles, like *Thangchhuah*, stem from utilitarian relevance, ensuring semiotic and functional stability for the community. These roles are attained through dedicated service to community well-being, grounded in the principles of *tlawmngaihna* and proficiency in designated responsibilities serving both the individual and the community.

The collectivistic social stratification in traditional Mizo society, thus, emerged from a sustained interaction with the natural and supernatural realms. At its core is the principle of *tlawmngaihna*, intricately woven into their metaphysical perceptions. This is most aptly reflected in the speech of Vana Pa in "The Glory Days of Tualte"

> It is always the staunch courage and *tlawmngaihna* of young men and women that bind and unite communities from falling apart It is these qualities of young brave hearts that are the citadels of our land and tribes…therefore let none of s behave in unwanted ways. Such anti socials are said by our elders 'This person does not deserve to live along life'. Those who commit adultery and roam about the night are said to die in the hands of wild tigers. (231; trans. Ralte)

This interplay between the individual and the collective, nature and the supernatural, the metaphysical afterlife and the ethical framework of *tlawmngaihna* significantly influenced the societal structure, functionality, and longevity of the collective. *Tlawmngaihna,* embodied in the *thangchhuah* institution, originates from complex metaphysical notions about existence beyond death. This metaphysical foundation guided moral-ethical principles, fostering stability, functional dynamics,

and community sustenance. Deviations from established norms were viewed as existential threats, challenging the holistic stability of the societal framework.

In essence, the Mizos' negotiation with nature and the supernatural shapes their collectivistic stratification, reinforcing values of mutual support, shared identity, and common well-being. Religious beliefs foster unity, guiding social interactions and collective roles. This negotiation establishes a worldview where the community prevails, reflecting the integral role of the supernatural in shaping collective dynamics and identity. Taboos regulate daily behavior, maintaining collective harmony and preventing disruptions to the supernatural balance or societal order. This interplay makes deviation from collectivism practically impossible, leading to severe consequences like social condemnation, loss of dignity, and societal exclusion. Deviation is seen not only as a breach of societal norms but also as a violation of natural and supernatural orders, carrying potentially fatal outcomes. This interaction significantly shapes their collective identity, social stratification, and behavioral norms, creating a society governed by unyielding norms rather than political authorities.

The assemblage of taboos and the moral-ethical tenets forming the bedrock of this collective stratification can be interpreted as a morphostasis—a cohesive force that upholds cultural equilibrium and ensures the uninterrupted continuation of the society. As Marvin Olsen suggests, morphostasis involves processes that maintain prevailing conditions and system configuration, ensuring sustained suitability over time. This includes activities like equilibrium maintenance, homeostatic regulation, and balance establishment. Balancing involves maintaining optimal equilibrium between system components, while homeostasis ensures internal stability despite external perturbations. Resilience is achieved through negative feedback mechanisms within diverse institutional frameworks, including the state, penitentiaries, cultural establishments, and religious institutions (26).

Within the Mizo context, this equilibrium stems from the harmonious fusion of metaphysical beliefs and socio-ethical norms, all working in concert to establish a functional, balanced, and enduring communal structure. The collective stratification

and the moral-ethical constructs embedded therein function as interdependent elements that mutually sustain the overarching cultural fabric, safeguarding tradition, and propelling collective existence forward.

Thus, the pre-colonial Mizo identity was a predominantly collectivistic identity. The emergence of this collectivism and its moral code *tlawmngaihna* can be attributed to functional necessity that serves the society rather than to individual rationality as Rousseau has indicated. In essence, the assemblage of taboos and the moral-ethical tenets forming the bedrock of this collective identity can be interpreted as a morphostasis—a cohesive force that upholds cultural equilibrium and ensures the uninterrupted continuation of the society. This equilibrium stems from the harmonious fusion of metaphysical beliefs and socio-ethical norms (*tlawmngaihna*), all working in concert to establish a functional, balanced, and enduring commonwealth structure. The collective stratification and the moral-ethical constructs embedded therein function as interdependent elements that mutually sustain the overarching cultural fabric, safeguarding tradition, and propelling collective existence forward.

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Chapter Four

The Precolonial in the Post-Colonial

The pre-colonial traditional Mizo society was predominantly animistic, and the majority of the population practiced ancestral worship and adhered to primitive religion. The British gradually established their influence and control over Mizoram, formerly referred to as Lushai Hills, during the 19th century. The initial contact between the British and the Mizo people took place in the 1840s, primarily through military expeditions that the British. However, it wasn't until the Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-1890 that the British fully established their authority over the region. Mizoram remained under British rule until India gained independence in 1947.

The advent of Christianity among the Mizos around 1894, facilitated by the Christian missionaries from Wales and Britain, instigated substantial societal modifications that left a profound impact on the cultural bedrock of Mizo society. As indicated by the 2011 census, Christians now constitute 87.17% of the population, indicating the complete supplanting of the traditional cultural identity. This widespread adoption of Christianity has supposedly engendered a profound transformation, ushering in a redefined comprehension of the Mizo identity itself and affecting a significant paradigm shift in their cultural practices and belief systems.

As such, there exists a prevailing inclination among contemporary Mizo scholars and intellectuals to ascribe cultural displacements within the post-colonial Mizo community to the impact of colonialism, primarily stemming from the introduction of Christianity. The majority of these analyses converge upon the conclusion that this disruption has severed the Mizos from their traditional identity, which contravenes the fundamental principles and doctrines of Christianity. As a consequence of these unfolding dynamics, a profound existential quandary has emerged, giving rise to a deeply introspective crisis of identity. The persistent reiterations of 'evidences' of this 'displacement' has solidified this conclusion into an accepted orthodoxy, consequently evolving it into a widely acknowledged truism; notably, the notion of "mimicry," which entails the emulation of prevailing cultural

customs and ideals by marginalized societies, has exerted a significant influence on Mizo Christianity, persisting as a profound and enduring force on the Mizo Christian psyche, even in contemporary post-colonial circumstances (Siamkima 116). The aftereffects of colonialism have rendered several traditional Mizo cultural signifiers unacceptable to ecclesiastical Puritanism, thereby subverting their values; indeed, early Mizo converts deemed traditional Mizo poetic expressions unsuitable for adoption in hymnal compositions (Zongte 55).

The contemporary Mizo cultural praxis is marked by a plethora of evidence that substantiate the subject under discussion. Diverse scholars, spanning across a wide range of academic disciplines, have extensively explored this topic. In *Savun Kawrfual* (Pelted Robe) the noted theologian Lalhmingchhuanga Zongte postulates a moral and ethical decline in the post-colonial Mizo community. He attributes this decline to a spiritual void at the core of Christianity, which has been thrust upon the Mizo people in a manner that runs counter to their cultural practices. His primary thesis posits that this spiritual and cultural dislocation has caused the Mizos to forsake their cultural heritage and traditions in favor of Christianity, while simultaneously opposing these erstwhile customs (79). The ramifications of this dislocation on the Mizo psyche include a sense of profound ambivalence, and disorientation, as the novel faith has occasioned the emergence of new cultural norms that are often seen as incompatible with Mizo culture. This has caused a schism within the community, leading to a loss of cultural continuity and a struggle to reconcile traditional practices with new religious beliefs.

In *Zalenna Ram* (Land of Freedom) Siamkima Khawlhring contends that the pre-colonial Mizo cosmology was organized around the *Rih Dil* lake, which, despite being situated in present-day Myanmar, holds a critical position in the Mizo cultural imaginary. The lake was believed to be the gateway to the afterlife, serving as the dwelling place for the departed, and it significantly shaped the Mizo's metaphysical understanding of their being, occupying a central role in their cultural semiotics. However, the advent of colonialism and Christianity brought about a dramatic shift in this cosmological paradigm, supplanting the revered *Rih Dil* lake with the river Jordan, a symbol of an unfamiliar culture, exemplified by Christianity. This cultural

displacement resulted in the wholesale abandonment of Mizo cultural expressions and beliefs in favor of an alien system. Nonetheless, Khawlhring contends that *Rih Dil* was so deeply entrenched in the Mizo identity that its omission from the cultural imaginary would signify the extinction of the Mizo people. Hence, despite the significant cultural detour, the post-colonial Mizo struggles to eradicate *Rih Dil* from its cultural consciousness (16-17). Moreover, Khawlhring posits that the Mizo's yearning for its traditional cultural expressions and beliefs is evident in its literature and music, notwithstanding the various attempts at mimicking the cultural norms and practices of the Christian missionaries (92-93).

Liangkhaia expresses concern about the rejection of traditional poetic language in Christian hymn composition. He expresses discomfiture with the notion that this linguistic style is categorized as pagan and, consequently, unsuitable for integration into Christian hymnody. He underscores the indispensability of traditional poetic diction in the construction of Christian hymns, emphasizing its significance and value. He contends that such poetic expressions should not be automatically considered fundamentally incompatible with Christianity. Furthermore, he highlights that the absence of these traditional elements, referred to as "traces of paganism," in contemporary Christian hymns is a more significant concern than any perceived presence of pagan elements within the traditional poetic language (93).

Zongte cogently sums up all these by observing how the Christian faith has spurned and rebuffed numerous components of the Mizo cultural semiotics, such as customary musical instruments, sing-song melodies, poetic words, dances, and attire. This repudiation has been grounded in the conviction that these cultural expressions are affiliated with the pre-colonial pagan era and, consequently, are at odds with Christianity. Zongte maintains that Christianity's renunciation and opposition of these cultural facets amount to a rejection and opposition of the very essence of the Mizo identity (Mizo-ness) itself. Thus, it is an incontrovertible fact that some degree of incongruity subsists between the Mizo traditional culture/identity and the novel Christian faith. He further observes that the Mizo pre-colonial religion already revolved around the worship of *Pathian*, which in modern times is equated with the

Christian God. However, their understanding of the true nature of Pathian remained uncertain (101).

He argues that a stark dichotomy existed between the sacred and the secular in Western religious praxis *vis a vis* Christianity, which was diametrically opposed to the integral nature of the pre-colonial Mizo religious belief system. The latter encompassed a comprehensive system that pervaded every facet of the Mizo way of life, from their social organization and agricultural practices to their clothing, behavior, morality, and cuisine. The advent of Christianity resulted in the internalization of the dichotomy found in the colonialist' culture, resulting in a substantial curtailment of religion's impact on daily Mizo life. As a result, the moral foundation of the Mizo community has been significantly eroded, contributing to a severe ethical decay; Zongte contends that this adoption of the clear demarcation between the sacred and the secular domains in Christian praxis has significantly diminished religion's scope of influence on the daily lives of the Mizo people. Consequently, the Mizo society's religious outlook is now limited to a narrow segment of their existence, while secular domains remain largely untouched by religious principles. This constriction of religion's impact on the Mizo people's daily lives results in an inescapable moral void, ultimately leading to the erosion of the moral values and codes that once regulated their social structure. The resulting pervasive moral decline poses significant challenges to their cultural identity and future progress, and the absence of guiding principles in these once religiously regulated domains contributes to the societal ethical decay(106-107).

Although the postcolonial argument presented by Zongte and other scholars regarding the correlation between the adoption of Christianity and the contemporary cultural predicament encountered by Mizo society may initially seem persuasive, it is imperative to recognize that the traditional collective cultural identity of the Mizos has endured and remained unaltered in the post-colonial era (Lalkhawngaihi & Fente 205-206). Notwithstanding Christianity's aversion towards certain traditional cultural symbols and its limited encroachment into secular domains due to its dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, it has, in reality, functioned as a mechanism to reinforce and sustain the pre-existing cultural identity. Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge that

the embrace of Christianity within the Mizo community, far from uprooting their cultural identity, has served as a vehicle for its preservation and rejuvenation.

The discourse surrounding postcolonial Mizo identity and culture often neglects the pre-colonial Mizo identity and culture, which serves as the fundamental basis from which the post-colonial identity appears to have been displaced. This research aims to challenge this oversight and argues that the pre-colonial Mizo society, akin to numerous pre-modern societies, exemplified a collectivist nature that fostered a corresponding collective identity. Through this collectivist perspective, the postcolonial argument on cultural displacement loses its credibility, revealing that the Mizo community has retained its collective identity despite the significant disruptions experienced during the colonial period. Therefore, it becomes imperative to incorporate the pre-colonial Mizo identity as an essential component in the examination of the post-colonial Mizo identity, as well as other post-colonial societies.

The intricate relationship between Mizo culture and Christianity is intimately intertwined with the collective fabric of the former. Recognizing the significance of social cohesion and community within Mizo society, Christianity assimilated and incorporated the existing collectivistic framework and its associated values into its own teachings, thereby fortifying the pre-existing collectivistic identity of the Mizo people. This interaction was not unidirectional, but rather a reciprocal exchange, wherein fundamental elements of Mizo culture and identity gradually permeated Christianity and influenced its manifestation within the community. Consequently, Christianity functioned as a conduit for the preservation and transmission of traditional cultural values and practices, effectively reinforcing the collectivistic essence of Mizo identity (Pachuau 174).

Contrary to the widely held belief that the adoption of Christianity led to the displacement of the Mizo people's pre-colonial identity and culture, this research argues that the collectivistic nature of the Mizo identity persisted and was even reinforced by the appropriation of Christianity. This synthesis of Mizo culture and Christianity created a distinct and resilient cultural identity that has adapted to the

changing social and cultural dynamics of the post-colonial era. This phenomenon is exceptional when examined in the wider context of Christianity's influence on the Western world, where it is regarded as the origin of modern identity *vis a vis* individualism. In contrast, Christianity's impact on the Mizo community perpetuates and reinforces the traditional collectivistic identity of the community. This unique and complex relationship between religion and culture in the Mizo community challenges normative notions of Christianity's influence on individualistic Western culture.

Thus, this interplay between Christianity and the Mizo people presents a symbiotic relationship where the pre-existing collectivistic identity of the Mizo culture has been preserved and sustained through the integration of Christianity. Instead of cultural dislocation, a unique synthesis of Mizo culture and Christianity has emerged, capable of adapting to the changing social and cultural landscape of the post-colonial era. This harmonious coexistence is a remarkable deviation from the typical influence of Christianity on the Western world, where it promotes individualism as a core value. However, in the Mizo context, Christianity serves to reinforce the traditional collectivistic identity of the community, rather than promoting individualism. This exceptional phenomenon illustrates an intricate and unique interplay between religion and culture within the Mizo community, unlike the normative impact of Christianity on individualistic Western cultures.

This research engages in a nuanced investigation of the complex and paradoxical relationship between Christianity and traditional Mizo collectivism, which challenges the normative Western Christian emphasis on individualism. To achieve this, the research delves into an exploration of the origins and evolution of modern identity, specifically individualism, and compares it with the traditional Mizo collectivistic identity. By scrutinizing the nature and persistence of these cultural and identity constructs over time, the research endeavors to illuminate the underlying dynamics that shape this unique relationship. Ultimately, this investigation aims to contribute to a deeper comprehension of contemporary post-colonial Mizo culture and identity, as well as to offer insights into the intricacies of cultural and identity shifts in response to the forces of modernity and globalization.

Francis Fukuyama posits that the emergence of individualism in medieval Europe can be attributed to the Catholic Church's enforcement of regulations that prohibited practices such as cross-cousin marriage, levirate, concubinage, adoption, and divorce. These policies aimed to curtail the transfer of property between kinship groups, thereby rendering the traditional means of property inheritance obsolete. Furthermore, the Church encouraged donations made willingly of land and property, thereby increasing its material benefits from Christians who owned property and passed away without heirs. By eroding the kinship-oriented social stratification that dominated other regions of the world, these policies were instrumental in facilitating the rise of individualistic values in Europe over time. All these resulted in the emergence of a distinctly individualistic European society during the Middle Ages, well before the commencement of state-building and centuries ahead of the Reformation, Enlightenment, and Industrial Revolution. Instead of being a product of these major modernizing shifts, the changes in family dynamics were likely a contributing factor that facilitated the initiation of the modernization process (*The Origins* 239).

Fukuyama further argues that the modern Western concept of identity vis-a-vis individualism is rooted in the Reformation Movement of the 16th century, specifically in the theological perspectives of Martin Luther, with a focus on the personal and private nature of an individual's relationship with God challenged the hierarchical structures of the Church and prioritized the agency and personal convictions of the individual over established collective norms and practices. This shift towards individualism was contrary to the traditional emphasis on collective identity and customs. Fukuyama argues that Luther's emphasis on faith as a private relationship between man and God was central to the development of individualistic values in the West. This Christian understanding of individualism was later secularized and transformed into its contemporary form by influential thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant (*Identity* 29-39). Thus, Christianity has been instrumental in shaping the emergence of individualism and its cultural and social implications.

In contemporary times, the notion of individualism is characterized by the conviction that all individuals are innately free and equal, with political institutions serving as mere instruments to safeguard this inherent freedom. Fukuyama identifies three fundamental components of this modern understanding of individual identity. First, thymos represents an inherent facet of human personality seeks recognition. Second, the distinction between one's inner and outer self elevates the moral value of the inner self above external societal expectations. Lastly, the changing notion of dignity. entails that acknowledgement is owed to all individuals, not just a select few (Fukuyama 37).

In relation to social stratification, individualism and collectivism constitute patterns called "cultural syndromes" that are characterized by collective beliefs, attitudes, norms, roles, and values organized around a central theme, these cultural elements are prevalent in specific geographic regions during particular historic periods (Triandis 43). Simply put, they are patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that are characteristic of a particular culture or cultural group, and they define the way people from a particular culture perceive and interact with the world around them. Triandis argues that cultural syndromes are learned through the process of socialization, which involves the transmission of cultural values, beliefs, and norms from one generation to the next (44). These values and beliefs, these syndromes are responsible for the construction of the self i.e. identity by influencing the way individuals from a particular culture see themselves, others, and the world, and they influence how they behave in social situations. The acquisition and consolidation of these syndromes is driven by the process of socialization, which transmits cultural values, beliefs, and norms from one generation to the next, and shapes the self-concepts, intergroup attitudes, and social conduct of individuals within a cultural context (Triandis 44). Consequently, these cultural syndromes shape the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dispositions of individuals within a given culture, molding their self-concepts, intergroup perceptions, and social conduct.

Triandis posits that these cultural syndromes are ubiquitous and existent in many societies. Individualistic cultural syndromes are characterized by prioritizing the significance of the individual over the group, highlighting personal achievement,

independence, and autonomy. In contrast, collectivistic cultural syndromes are characterized by placing greater emphasis on the group, with an accentuation on maintaining social harmony, interdependence, and loyalty to the group (45); he asserts that these two cultural syndromes manifest themselves through four universal dimensions. The first dimension concerns the definition of the self, where collectivism emphasizes interdependence and individualism emphasizes independence. This is reflected in daily life through resource-sharing and conformity to group norms. The second dimension pertains to the alignment of personal and collective goals, with collectivism prioritizing group goals and individualism prioritizing personal goals. The third dimension relates to the role of norms, obligations, and duties in guiding social behavior in collectivist cultures, while individualistic cultures emphasize personal attitudes, needs, rights, and contracts. The fourth and final dimension concerns relationships, with collectivist cultures emphasizing their maintenance even when disadvantageous, while individualistic cultures rationally analyze the benefits and drawbacks of maintaining relationships. Together, these dimensions serve to characterize and distinguish between individualistic and collectivistic cultural syndromes, and their implications for individuals' behavior and attitudes (43-44). Triandis' conception of cultural syndromes provides a conceptual framework for comprehending how culture shapes individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, and how these patterns of thought and action are transmitted across successive generations.

Simply put, in collectivistic cultures, individuals construe themselves as interdependent and interrelated components of expansive social collectives, encompassing family, community, or nation. Such individuals evince a proclivity to prioritize the collective goals and values over their own personal interests and aspirations, anchoring their identity and sense of belonging in their membership in these groups. They frequently frame their roles and responsibilities within the confines of the social norms, duties, and obligations imposed by their group affiliations. Their sense of self is intimately intertwined with their relationships with others, and they strive to uphold social harmony and coherence within their collectives. Collectivists espouse a predilection for monolithic and homogeneous in-

groups, with unanimity in thought, emotion, and action, as they perceive such groups to be conducive to harmonious functioning. They are more comfortable in the presence of like-minded individuals than individualists and deem conflict resolution as a salutary measure.

Individualistic cultures, on the other hand, are characterized by a strong emphasis on personal autonomy, independence, and self-expression, with individuals viewing themselves as distinct and separate from larger social collectives. They prioritize their personal needs, preferences, and desires over those of their group affiliations, deriving their sense of identity and self-worth from their individual achievements and accomplishments. Such individuals are driven by personal goals, interests, and values, and are more likely to question and challenge the norms and expectations of their social context, exhibiting a greater inclination towards critical thinking. In contrast, collectivistic cultures discourage critical inquiry, prioritizing the collective goals and values over individual interests and aspirations. Individuals in such cultures perceive themselves as interdependent and interconnected parts of larger social collectives, deriving their sense of self from their relationships with others and striving to maintain social harmony and cohesion within their groups.

The emergence of individualism as a defining feature of modernity has had far-reaching implications for the construction of both personal identity and cultural syndrome. In contrast to traditional social structures that were based on inherited class or caste, contemporary social hierarchies prioritize merit and achievement as key determinants of status. The cultural shift towards individualism has been driven by a confluence of historical and cultural factors, including the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment movement. The former challenged the power of the Catholic Church and gave rise to a more personalized, individualistic form of religious expression. The emphasis on direct access to scripture and personal interpretation of religious doctrine encouraged people to view themselves as autonomous agents with the ability to shape their own spiritual destinies. The Enlightenment, on the other hand, championed the importance of reason, critical inquiry, and personal autonomy. This paved the way for the rise of scientific inquiry and the development of secular humanism, which places the individual at the center

of human existence and values individual freedom and autonomy above all else. Consequently, the concept of the individual as a self-determining agent has become a central tenet of modern thought, pervading intellectual and cultural movements across a wide spectrum.

Modernity itself is a multifaceted concept that entails numerous defining features, as highlighted by Geert Hofstede. One such feature is the emergence of the nuclear family as the primary social unit, which is accompanied by a reduction in familial complexity. In addition, Hofstede identifies a shift from "tradition-directed types" to "inner-directed types," a phenomenon characteristic of societies undergoing transitional growth. These inner-directed types prioritize individualistic goals over collective ones due to the absence of established traditions. Another hallmark of modernity is the transition from *Gemeinschaft* entities, where social harmony is based on shared beliefs and habits, to *Gesellschaft* entities, which prioritize specific instrumental goals. The rise of the modern state, scientific progress, and growing commercialization have been credited with this shift. Although modern societies tend to remain relatively stable in the face of economic and technological change, this transition from collectivism to individualism is a consistent pattern associated with modernity (210-211).

So, contrary to the prevalent notion of cultural homogenization, modernity does not necessarily entail the displacement of traditional values and norms with a standardized set of 'modern values'. Rather, societies display an exceptional ability to sustain their unique cultural identities even in the face of rapid economic and technological progress. This quasi-homeostatic nature of societies stems from the tenacity of deeply ingrained cultural traditions, the vigor of social norms and institutions, and the reluctance of individuals and groups who have vested interests in maintaining the status quo to embrace change. These multifarious factors contribute to the variegated gamut of cultural expressions and practices that exist across societies, even as they undergo the effects of modernization.

However, in spite of this tendency towards equilibrium, a consistent trend associated with modernity is the transition from collectivistic social orders to

individualistic ones, as demonstrated by an increasing emphasis on personal autonomy, self-expression, and fulfillment. However, this shift is not rigidly predetermined and is contingent upon a multifaceted interplay of cultural, historical, and economic factors. Therefore, it is possible for societies to preserve their collective values and norms in the context of modernization, or to adopt a fusion of traditional and modern elements.

He argues that the relationship between individualism and collectivism goes beyond social hierarchy and extends to societal norms, impacting people's self-concept and mental programming (210). This suggests that individualism and collectivism are not simply cultural patterns, but rather fundamental aspects of one's identity that shape and define individuals' sense of self. In other words, these orientations are not just surface-level characteristics, but deeply ingrained features that play a crucial role in determining who individuals are and how they interact with the world around them.

Triandis succinctly summarizes the difference in mental programming between individualists and collectivists; modern individuals are characterized by their openness to new experiences, relative independence from parental authority, concern with time and planning, willingness to defer gratification, belief in man's mastery over nature, control over environmental reinforcements, faith in determinism and science, broad cosmopolitan perspectives, participation in competitive standards of excellence, and overall optimism about controlling their environment. In contrast, traditional individuals tend to have narrow in-groups, view the world with suspicion, believe in limited and chance-driven goodness obtained through pleasing gods, identify strongly with their parents for guidance, consider planning a waste of time, do not defer gratification, feel at the mercy of obscure environmental factors with a tendency towards mysticism, prioritize interpersonal relations as an end rather than a means, and perceive themselves under the influence of external mystical powers (as qtd in Hofstede 211)

Modernity, as a historical epoch, is characterized by a discernible shift from traditional social structures and values towards a more pronounced emphasis on

individualism. This transformation is evident in the way modern societies organize their institutions and prioritize certain values. In particular, the prioritization of individualism is reflected in the social stratification of modern societies, with the decline of extended family units and the rise of more nuclear family structures being a notable manifestation. Additionally, modern societies have become increasingly meritocratic, with social mobility based on individual achievement rather than inherited status. Notably, the emphasis on individualism is also reflected in how contemporary individuals perceive themselves and construct their identities. Unlike traditional societies, where identity is largely determined by one's social status and roles within the community, modern individuals are encouraged to cultivate a unique sense of self. This emphasis on individualism has given rise to an array of diverse identities and lifestyles as individuals endeavor to assert their individuality and differentiate themselves from others.

The emergence of modern individualism has its genesis back in the Reformation Movement led by Martin Luther, which elevated individual faith and conscience above the authority of the Catholic Church and challenged the medieval emphasis on collective identity and group solidarity. The Reformation's emphasis on personal responsibility and direct access to God laid the groundwork for modern secular individualism. The advent of capitalism and industrialization further entrenched this individualistic ethos, as individuals began to view themselves as economic and political agents with unique skills and talents to offer. The resulting social order prioritized personal autonomy, achievement, and self-realization, which led to the evolution of a uniquely modern understanding of identity.

In the Mizo community, Christianity has been perceived as a catalyst for modernization. Nevertheless, contrary to the notion that it would cause a transition from collectivist to individualistic norms, Christianity has instead been assimilated into the pre-existing collectivistic cultural framework of the Mizo people. This process of assimilation has given rise to a unique form of syncretism that has evolved over time. The incorporation of Christian beliefs and practices into the Mizo community has been deeply influenced by their collectivist values, resulting in a distinctive manifestation of Christianity that reflects the Mizo cultural identity.

Within the Mizo community, the introduction of Christianity is widely acknowledged as a catalyst for modernity. However, in contrast to the conventional notion that modernity entails a shift from collectivism to individualism, Christianity has instead become assimilated into the existing collectivist framework of Mizo culture. This assimilation has resulted in a unique form of syncretism that has undergone an evolutionary process. The incorporation of Christian beliefs and practices within the Mizo community has been shaped by its collective values, which have given rise to a distinct manifestation of Christianity that reflects the Mizo cultural identity.

Triandis' characterization of collectivism aptly encapsulates the core values and behavioral norms of the Mizo society, where the collective takes precedence over individuals. In the pre-colonial epoch, the Mizo community exemplified high levels of collectivism, wherein individual identity was subordinate to the collective identity. The collective pervaded every aspect of their social and cognitive activities and was deeply influenced by superstitious beliefs and the community's interface with nature, which was often perceived as a supernatural entity. In such a context, the individual, as it is understood today, was simply a nonentity.

In the Mizo community, the domains of the sacred and the secular were closely interwoven, with the former exerting a pervasive influence on the latter. A striking example of this is the reserved and aloof expression of affection between Mizo couples in the pre-colonial era, which was not driven by patriarchal or toxic masculine norms, but instead by a deeply ingrained fear of arousing the jealousy of *Khuanu*, a supernatural entity. This fear stemmed from the belief that the expression of love could provoke *Khuanu* to separate the couple through death, thus upending the community's social and supernatural order. This illustrates the extent to which Mizo cultural identity was shaped by the interplay of the sacred and the secular, resulting in a syncretic and distinctive cultural expression. Even in the present day, Mizo society remains deeply rooted in collectivism, with supernatural beliefs continuing to exert a significant influence on daily life.

The collectivistic ethos of the Mizo culture, which prioritizes the collective over the individual, remains deeply ingrained in contemporary post-colonial society, as demonstrated by Grace Lalkhawngaihi and H.K. Laldinpuii Fente in their paper "Collectivistic Culture Orientation across Age and Gender in a Mizo Society". While younger generations may display a slightly less collectivistic orientation, cultural norms remain robustly affirmed. Older adults, in particular, tend to adhere more strongly to collectivistic values. This collectivist outlook is reflected in the plethora of community-based organizations (CBOs) that every individual in the Mizo community belongs to, including the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), the Young Mizo Associations (YMA), Mizo Upa Pawl (MUP), and among others, which embody the collective attitudes and values of the community as a whole (205-206).

This community-based organizations and church-based groups in the Mizo society serve as the primary means through which the community regulates the behavior and cognitive activities of its members, conditioning their entire social life and reinforcing their collective identity. These groups play a crucial part in influencing the collective attitudes and values of society, particularly through church-based groups, in particular, holding a significant sway. The collectivist outlook of the Mizo society is deeply ingrained and pervasive, influencing not just social behavior but also cognitive and psychological orientations. The paper underscores the crucial role played by these organizations and groups in upholding and propagating the Mizo culture's collectivist ethos, which continues to shape the societal structure and the behavior of individual members. This highlights the society's unwavering commitment to its collective values and norms, which underscores the significance of the community's collectivistic orientation.

Notwithstanding Zongte's argument that post-colonial Mizo society has undergone a disruption in its cultural and identity formations is countered by the enduring pre-colonial collectivistic ethos and identity in the post-colonial era. This raises doubts about the causal link between the supposed dislocation and perceived moral decay in the Mizo community. Despite the partitioning of the sacred and secular domains, the Mizo society remains largely collectivistic, reflective of its pre-

colonial era, and does not inherently gravitate towards individualism as observed in Western cultures. The emergence of individualism in the West was linked to the Reformation Movement, and Christianity has been closely associated with its propagation ever since. However, the Mizo community's social fabric is intrinsically collectivistic, and individualism, whether as a function of identity or social stratification, is virtually non-existent. Though the demarcation of the sacred and secular has been adopted within the prism of Christianity, the underlying principle of individualism that motivated its implementation in Western societies is absent in Mizo culture.

In order to comprehend how cultures, identities, and societies persist over time, it is essential to examine the underlying mechanisms that enable their continuity. Marvin Olsen's work on social organization highlights the dualistic nature of social systems, characterized by two fundamental processes known as "morphogenesis" and "morphostasis". Morphogenesis refers to the processes that modify or expand a system's conditions or state, leading to change or growth over time. Morphostasis, on the other hand, refers to the processes that conserve or uphold a system's existing features or overall state, ensuring its continued utility over time. This includes balancing, homeostasis, and equilibrium maintenance. Balancing involves maintaining an appropriate balance between different components within the system, while homeostasis refers to the process by which a social system maintains internal stability despite external disturbances or changes, through negative feedback mechanisms implemented within various institutions such as the state, prisons, cultural organizations, and religion (26). In contrast to homeostasis, the concept of equilibrium describes the tendency of social systems to return to their original state following any external disruption or change (Henry 308). Therefore, these two processes operate in tandem to maintain the continuity of social systems while allowing for growth and change

In social theory, homeostasis and equilibrium are utilized to explain the self-regulating nature of social systems. These mechanisms are crucial to understanding how cultures, identities, and societies persist over time, as they enable social systems to adapt to changing circumstances while preserving their essential features and

characteristics. By balancing preservation with adaptation and growth, social systems are able to maintain their continuity and stability, even in the face of significant external pressures and challenges.

According to Vilfredo Pareto's theory, any modification in one component of a social system will inevitably create repercussions in interconnected units that would collectively work to mitigate the initial disturbance and restore balance (Abhrams 43). Consequently, when social systems are subjected to external pressures, the internal mechanisms of the system will naturally react and strive to re-establish a state of equilibrium, resulting in the reinstatement of societal norms and stability. Thus, the concepts of homeostasis and equilibrium play a pivotal role in enabling society to sustain its identity and stability over long periods by regulating the processes of change within the social system.

Changes in society are typically a result of external factors that come from natural or human-induced sources, and sometimes, a combination of both. Natural forces may take on different forms such as changes in weather, blockages of important trade routes, or the spread of infectious diseases. On the other hand, human-induced forces include events like political and economic hegemony, scientific exploration, commerce, conquest, and technological progress. Hofstede argues that modifications in societal norms and value systems are not typically enacted directly at the normative levels. This means that societal norms or value systems of a society are hardly ever changed through the immediate embrace of external values. Rather, alterations in societal norms and value systems are contingent upon ecological context— economic, hygienic technological, shifts. (13).

He posits that external stimuli, whether natural or human-made, impact the ecological factors that underpin societal norms, such as geography, demography, and technology. In turn, these norms shape the structures and functioning of societal institutions, ranging from family patterns to legislation. Though these institutions are a product of both ecological factors and societal norms, they, in turn, reinforce the pre-existing societal norms and ecological factors, creating a stable cultural pattern. This stability engenders significant resistance to change, culminating in a self-

regulating quasi-equilibrium state known as the “stabilizing of culture pattern.” This phenomenon has been observed in societies such as the Jews, Gypsies, and Basques, who have managed to maintain their cultural identities over centuries, even in the face of subjugation, forced migration, and language loss (13). In essence, societies possess the ability to preserve their identities over an extended period, largely unaffected by external circumstances.

The retention of pre-colonial cultural identity in response to external stimuli exemplifies a significant instance of the resistance to change in cultural identity, highlighting the capacity of societal and cultural systems to maintain their core values and identity over time. The preservation of Mizo cultural identity can be attributed to the interplay between morphogenic and morphostatic processes. Morphogenic processes, activated by external forces such as colonialism and the introduction of Christianity, threaten the existing cultural norms and value systems of a society, potentially leading to cultural change. However, the morphostatic processes inherent within societal structures and institutions, such as family patterns, social stratifications, and socialization emphases, serve to reinforce these cultural norms and value systems, resulting in cultural stability.

The cultural aspects related to individualism and collectivism are also important factors in the preservation of Mizo cultural identity. Collectivism, characterized by a strong sense of community and interdependence, is prevalent in Mizo society and contributes to the preservation of their cultural identity. The Mizo have a strong attachment to their tribe and its collective welfare, which serves as a basis for their social organization. This collectivist orientation may serve as a mechanism for preserving cultural identity, as it reinforces the cultural norms and values that have been passed down through generations. In contrast, individualism, characterized by a focus on personal autonomy and independence, may lead to a weakening of cultural identity, as individuals prioritize their own interests over those of their community or culture. However, the Mizo do not exhibit this tendency, as their collectivist orientation reinforces their cultural identity and serves as a mechanism for cultural preservation.

So, the dynamics of sociocultural transformations are predominantly driven by morphogenic processes, instigated by external forces impacting ecological factors. These factors, in turn, dictate prevailing social norms and value systems, influencing the structures and functions of societal institutions. These institutions then dictate the cognitive programming of people and determine their self-concept and identity. Morphogenic processes, however, are counteracted by the morphostatic processes that reinforce existing social norms, value systems, and ecological factors through the structures and functioning of institutions, thus engendering exceptional cultural stability. In spite of this stability, sociocultural systems show tendency to shift from collectivism to individualism due to external stimuli, with modernity being a significant driver of this transition, discernible across diverse cultures and societies.

The Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman, too, provides a semiotic account of how culture and society achieve diversity while simultaneously sustaining stability. According to Lotman, the interplay between organic life and its surroundings is sustained through the reception and interpretation of information, which is essential for survival. To facilitate this process, Lotman advocates for the expansion of the diversity of messages and the languages utilized in their communication, recognizing that continuous production of new languages is crucial for the integration of information into the cultural organism. Furthermore, Lotman contends that the complexity of human existence necessitates a unique language, which he identifies as art. Art, in contrast to other languages that aid comprehension of external realities, functions as an auto-communicative instrument that enables individuals to articulate and explore their own experiences (Patoine and Hope 17-18).

Thus, Pierre-Louis Patoine and Jonathan Hope assert that Lotman's semiotic approach highlights the role of language diversity and artistic expression in the maintenance of cultural identity and social stability: in this context, the artistic languages serving as a tool for self-comprehension should be viewed as integral to a cyclical process of preservation and nurturing, rather than subscribing to the teleological, linear notion of progress advocated by avant-garde movements (such as the Futurists, Suprematists, Constructivists...) in the early 20th century (Patoine and Hope 17).

As per Lotman, art functions as a unique language, and as such, is a critical auto-communicative tool that allows individuals to express their own experiences on both a micro and macro level. The interplay between organic life and its environment, Lotman argues, necessitates the continuous production of new languages to integrate the flow of information into the cultural organism. Art, as a distinct language, plays a vital role in sustaining equilibrium and serves as a homeostatic process that modulates and sustains complex societal organizations. In this light, culture functions as a control system, relying on semiotic processes that utilize various codes or languages to exchange information and maintain stability. The role of art, therefore, is essential in maintaining the balance of the societal ecosystem, ensuring cultural diversity while preserving stability (Damasio 38).

It should be noted, however, that this same process of exchange and communication, too, brings about heterogeneity, individuality, and freedom. As culture evolves, it values originality over repetition, leading to the development of new genres, movements, and styles. The more codes/languages there are in a culture, the more freedom individuals have; Lotman observes that, in primitive folk cultures, the art of repetition was highly valued. As folklore evolved into literature, however, originality began to be prized over repetition, leading to an emphasis on difference as a key indicator of artistic value. This notion of heterogeneity is linked to the idea that freedom is directly proportional to the plurality of codes or languages within a given culture; the more codes/languages there are in a culture, the more freedom individuals have. However, to maintain stability, cultures develop meta-codes that describe the diverse languages used. Thus, as history progresses and the number of codes and languages increases, so too does the degree of freedom, leading to a self-regulating process that fosters stability and growth.

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Thus, this process of diversification is counteracted by the development of meta-codes or meta-linguistic descriptions of these heterogeneous codes or languages (Lotman 97). These meta-codes are, in essence, higher-level codes that serve to describe and categorize the various codes and languages within a given culture. They function as a way to maintain stability and order within a culture, helping to ensure that the self-regulating tendencies of society are not overwhelmed by excessive heterogeneity; they help to regulate diversity by providing a means of distinguishing between meaningful and meaningless variations in cultural expression. By establishing a set of rules and conventions for interpretation and creation, meta-codes provide a framework for evaluating the value and significance of different cultural artifacts. This allows for a degree of diversity within a culture while still maintaining a sense of coherence and stability.

External influences, such as modernity and the proliferation of arts, can disrupt the self-regulating tendencies of culture by introducing new codes or languages, thereby affording greater degrees of freedom and individuality. The Reformation Movement serves as an example of how diversification of a repetitive code or language, such as Catholicism, can bring about heterogeneity and enable the rise of modern identity and individualism. In short, Lotman's theory emphasizes the role of art as a key language that facilitates the exchange of information and expression of humanity's experiences. This exchange of information contributes to the stability and growth of culture while simultaneously fostering heterogeneity, freedom, and individuality. However, this process of diversification must be

counterbalanced by the development of meta-codes, which help maintain order and ensure that self-regulating tendencies remain intact.

The introduction of colonialism, Christianity, and formal education in the Mizo community can be conceptualized as the emergence of new languages or codes that disrupted and diversified the exchange of information within the community. These external influences brought with them new codes that provided greater degrees of freedom and individuality, leading to the formation of new social classes, the emergence of a literate elite, and a shift in power dynamics. However, the introduction of these new codes also threatened to disrupt the self-regulating tendencies of Mizo culture. Christianity, in particular, challenged traditional Mizo culture and ways of life by promoting individualism and introducing new forms of social organization that cut across traditional kinship ties and created new hierarchies and power structures.

The Church functioned as a meta-code, imposing limitations on the diversification of Mizo culture and preserving its collectivism. It achieved this by establishing a system of rules and conventions that guided the interpretation and production of cultural artifacts, rejecting those that did not conform to its norms. As a result, it regulated diversity by distinguishing between meaningful and meaningless variations in cultural expression. It embraced some of the traditional codes that had previously been rejected while rejecting most others. Furthermore, the Church served a crucial function in upholding Mizo collectivism by fostering a shared identity and a sense of community. It accomplished this by providing a platform for collective worship, socialization, and community activities, which ensured order and cohesion in the Mizo social and cultural system.

The infusion of modernity into Mizo society was catalyzed by the British colonial encounter and the consequential impact of Christianity. Zikpuii Pa eloquently encapsulates this external influence in his essay “Tun Kum Za Chhunga Mizo Fate” (The Mizos in the Last One Hundred Years), where he notes the contrasting perspectives of the British colonial officers, for whom their interaction with the Mizos represented a minor addition to the British empire, and the Mizos, for

whom the encounter wrought a profound upheaval of their world. This encounter engendered a range of changes and reforms, including a shift in Mizo culture from an oral tradition to a written one.

The extent to which post-colonial Mizo society has experienced cultural and identity displacement remains a matter of debate. The introduction of Christianity, modernity, and written culture, all associated with individualism, have challenged the traditional collectivist nature of Mizo culture. Despite this, scholars like Fente and Lalkhawngaihi contend that Mizo society remains largely collectivistic, a defining characteristic of the pre-colonial era (205-206). This raises the question of whether colonialism has had a substantial impact on the cultural and identity displacement of post-colonial Mizo society.

In this connection, Lalsangkima Pachuau's analysis posits that the process of indigenization of Christianity in Mizoram was catalyzed by a series of Christian revival movements that took place between 1913-1915 (the second revival), 1919-1923 (the third revival), and 1930 onwards (the fourth revival). These movements enabled a profound coalescence of Mizo culture with Christianity, allowing for the reintegration of previously proscribed cultural semiotics by early Christian converts and foreign missionaries. This reintegration included the incorporation of the traditional gong/drum, native Christian hymns set to indigenous melodies, and dancing into Christian worship practices. Furthermore, the emergence of Puma Zai, a "song type of simple and catchy rhythm highly potent of emotional excitement," significantly contributed to the proliferation of Christianity within Mizoram (131).

According to Pachuau, the Christian religion was able to penetrate the Mizo community mostly through the occurrence of these revival movements. He argues that the revival movement served as a channel through which Christianity permeated the cultural domain and value system of the Mizos, instigating a profound transformation in the society. With the widespread adoption of Christianity across the community, the new religion gradually assumed a central role in shaping the normative structure of Mizo society. Consequently, the social norms and cultural values of the Mizos have been significantly influenced by their adherence to

Christianity. It is crucial to note that this process of influence was not unidirectional. In the dynamic interaction between Christianity and the Mizo cultural ethos, the religion itself underwent a process of indigenization (173).

Pachuau argues that the influence of Christianity in effecting modernization within the Mizo society was significant. Additionally, he asserts that Christianity played a critical role in the conservation of the Mizo identity during the shift to modernity. He argues that the organic assimilation of the Gospel facilitated by the revival movements played a pivotal role in enabling the people to preserve their distinct identity in the face of modernity's challenges. Consequently, Christianity not only facilitated a seamless transition but also harmoniously integrated the traditions of the people with the currents of modernity (173).

The acculturation of Christianity with the Mizo cultural ethos enabled a seamless integration of Mizo culture with modernity. However, the lack of individualism in these transformations is conspicuous, given that modernity, whether political, sociological, historical, or literary, typically features individualism as a central tenet. Consequently, instead of Christianity integrating the Mizos with modernity, both Christianity and modernity have been assimilated to the collectivistic Mizo cultural paradigm. This assimilation has enabled Christianity to become the integral element shaping the normative fabric of society (Pachuau 174).

Pachuau's account of the indigenous integration of Christianity through the Christian revival movements attains a vital significance in this regard. The Mizo traditional culture was initially incommensurate with Christianity, which rejected many of its socio-cultural semiotics - semiotics that form an intrinsic component of the Mizo self-identity. However, the Christian revival movements implemented a homeostatic process of reincorporating these traditional socio-cultural semiotics within the Christian fold. This process ensured that stability in Mizo society/culture was maintained, even in the face of an overwhelming external influence. By reintegrating these socio-cultural semiotics within Christianity, the Mizo people were able to prevent the emergence of disruptive dynamics that could have engendered new codes and languages, leading to cultural diversification and individualisation.

Instead, Christianity became assimilated with the same repetitive semiotic codes and language, leaving little room for any degree of freedom to manifest in Mizo society/culture. Thus, rather than engendering new semiotic codes/languages and a distinct individualised Mizo identity, Christianity and modernity became the foundation upon which the collectivistic nature of contemporary Mizo society/culture rests.

As such, the question of whether post-colonial Mizo society is a precise replica of its pre-colonial counterpart can be answered affirmatively and negatively. While the Mizo collectivistic cultural identity remains fundamentally unchanged, the qualitative modifications brought about by the colonial dynamics are significantly noteworthy. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity provides an useful framework to understand this ambivalence between change and continuity. According to Bhabha, cultural identity is an ongoing process of negotiation and exchange that results in the constant emergence of new hybrid cultural forms. This ongoing dialogue between different cultures involves the sharing and transformation of ideas, symbols, and practices, which often results in the formation of new hybrid cultural forms that are neither purely one culture nor the other (Huddart 4).

This notion of cultural hybridity holds significant relevance in the context of the post-colonial Mizo, whose cultural identity embodies a nuanced and fluid amalgamation of pre-colonial Mizo traditions and the pervasive influence of Christianity and modernity. The postcolonial Mizo's cultural identity thus emerges as a hybrid construct, blending the essential elements of their pre-colonial cultural identity such as collectivism, with the cultural paradigms that have evolved during the colonial encounter. This intricate fusion of cultural elements serves as a hallmark of the post-colonial Mizo's cultural identity, which can be viewed as a dynamic and multifaceted embodiment of diverse cultural influences.

Bhabha argues that the process of colonization involves the dominant culture imposing its own beliefs, values, and language upon the colonized. In turn, they react to this domination by engaging in the process of "mimicry", which, he argues, is not a straightforward imitation but rather a intricate and dynamic interplay of

perspectives and influences (Huddart 39-40). The colonized use mimicry as a way of adapting and surviving in the new cultural environment that is being imposed upon them. However, the process of mimicry also generates a sense of "ambivalence" in the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer (Bhabha 122).

Bhabha defines ambivalence as the coexistence of conflicting feelings and attitudes towards cultural identity and difference, which arises from the experience of the constant negotiation of culture and identity (Aschroft et el. 10 -11). He reiterates that ambivalence arises from the fact that cultural identities are static or essential but are always being constructed and reconstructed through cultural practices and discourses. This creates a sense of uncertainty and instability as individuals and communities navigate the complexities of cultural differences and negotiate their sense of identity in conjunction to others. The colonized not only adopt and imitate the culture of the colonizer but also subvert and resist it, and this creates a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity in the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, which opens up the possibility of resistance and subversion. This ambivalence is a direct consequence of the process of mimicry, and it becomes a site of political and cultural contestations.

These contestations and negotiations between the colonizer and the colonized give rise to a hybrid culture which Bhabha also refers to as the "third space", that is neither solely that of the colonizer nor of the colonized. Instead, it is a culture that is defined by its fluidity. Bhabha posits that hybridity goes beyond a mere blending of cultures; instead, it represents a nuanced process involving negotiation and resistance. This intricate dynamic includes the subversion of prevailing cultural norms and the emergence of alternative cultural practices. It is a strategy of cultural survival and resistance that enables the colonized to adapt to and transform the dominant culture, and to create new cultural identities that reflect their experiences of colonialism and cultural encounter. Bhabha, as mentioned before, further posits that this hybrid culture, or "the third space", exists in an "in-between" space created by the interaction between the two cultures. In this third space, cultural identities are not fixed, and the negotiation and contestations of identities result in a novel forms of authority and fresh political endeavors (as qtd. in Huddart 85) that that questions the

binary distinctions between modernity and tradition, self and other, colonizer and colonized (165). Bhabha refers to being in this state as "liminality," which is characterized by a sense of disorientation, ambiguity and instability. He argues that the experience of this hybridity can generate a sense of disorientation, uncertainty, and instability, which he refers to as the "unhomely". This is a feeling of dislocation and lack of belongingness, a sense of unfamiliarity that arises from the tension between different cultural influences and experiences. Hybrid culture, on account of its fluidity, is marked by both feelings of the homely and the unhomely:

> Culture is heimlich, with its disciplinary generalizations, its mimetic narratives, its homologous empty time, its seriality, its progress, its customs and coherence. But cultural authority is also unheimlich, for to be distinctive, significa-tory, influential and identifiable, it has to be translated, disseminated, differentiated, interdisciplinary, intertextual, international, inter-racial. (Bhabha 195)

Culture, in this sense, performs a dual role. Firstly, it provides a sense of home and stability for those who identify with it. On the other hand, it undergoes a continual process of transformation and reinterpretation by outsiders who may not share the same identity, resulting in a sense of being unhomely. As a consequence, culture cannot be fully contained or entirely coherent, and its narratives frequently intersect with those of other cultures, texts, and disciplines. This ambivalence in cultural identity means that it is forever in a state of flux and vulnerable to external influences, requiring a constant negotiation of meaning and identity.

In other words, culture is not a static or immutable entity. Rather, it is a dynamic and evolving construct and is subject to diverse and often contradictory influences. The ambivalence of cultural identity arises from its dual nature, providing both stability and familiarity to those who associate with it, while also undergoing continual transformation and reinterpretation by outsiders. This inherent ambivalence in culture necessitates an ongoing negotiation of meaning and identity, making cultural identity a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. According to Bhabha, this in-between space is where cultural hybridity and innovation occurs, as it provides

opportunities for new meanings, values, and practices to emerge. Liminality is seen as a productive space, where cultural differences can be negotiated, contested, and transformed (207).

In other words, the cultural interaction between two cultures through the process of mimicry and ambivalence creates a hybridization that results in the emergence of new cultural forms. This hybridization process involves both cultures being influenced and transformed by their interactions with each other. The colonizer culture, for instance, not only imposes its own customs and practices on the colonized people but also adopts certain beliefs, customs, or practices from the colonized culture. Conversely, the colonized culture may adopt certain customs, beliefs, or practices from the colonizer culture. This two-way process of interaction and exchange can manifest in various forms and result in the emergence of a hybrid cultural forms that are a combination of different cultural influences (Huddart 4). Therefore, the process of cultural hybridization is a two-way process where both cultures undergo changes. The Mizo cultural revival movements, which reintroduced traditional Mizo semiotics within the fold of Christianity, can be best understood within this framework of analysis.

Cultural hybridization represents an unceasing process that exerts a profound influence on the formation and articulation of cultural identities by individuals and groups. Within the context of the post-colonial Mizo community, this process is molded by a range of complex factors, comprising the enduring effects of colonialism, globalization, mass media and web 2.0. As a consequence of these diverse interplays and transactions, the post-colonial Mizo cultural identity is typified by its dynamic fluidity, which defies any tendency to be confined within a static, immutable form; this dynamic and fluid nature of the post-colonial Mizo cultural identity is a manifestation of the concept of the "third space," as theorized by Homi Bhabha. This hybrid cultural space exists in the interstices between dominant and subaltern cultures, and in the post-colonial Mizo context, it is characterized by liminality, or a state of in-betweenness. The post-colonial Mizo cultural identity is situated within this liminal space, as it is neither purely pre-colonial nor purely colonial, neither purely indigenous nor purely Western. Rather, it is a complex and

dynamic fusion of diverse cultural influences, including pre-colonial Mizo traditions, Christian beliefs, and modernity. The third space is a site of ambivalence and contradiction, where the post-colonial Mizo community both mimics and resists the cultural influences of the colonizers, resulting in a parodic and exaggerated version of the dominant culture. Thus, the post-colonial Mizo cultural identity is located in a "third space" that embodies the contradictions and complexities of their hybrid culture and identity, which are in constant flux due to ongoing negotiations and interactions with diverse cultural influences.

The process of cultural hybridization is exemplified by the reemergence of traditional Mizo semiotics within the framework of Christianity and the retention of a collectivistic cultural identity in contemporary Mizo society. This process is a product of the interplay of cultures, their respective symbols, practices, and values, resulting in a unique hybrid cultural identity that embodies the ongoing process of cultural interaction and exchange. The integration of Mizo traditional symbols into Christian practices creates a novel space of cultural expression, which reflects the hybridization of these two cultures. This hybrid cultural identity is characterized by a complex and dynamic mixture of the two cultures, and it is neither purely Mizo nor purely Christian but rather a combination of the two. This phenomenon underscores the fluidity of cultural identity in the post-colonial era, and highlights the dynamic nature of cultural hybridization as a transformative process of cultural interaction and exchange.

This reemergence of traditional Mizo symbols and practices within the context of Christianity exemplifies the dynamic process of cultural hybridization while also reflecting the enduring pre-colonial collectivistic cultural identity of the Mizo people. The latter, grounded in the social organization of pre-colonial Mizo society, accentuates the importance of community values and collective identity. The preservation of this cultural identity in the post-colonial era attests to a sense of cultural continuity despite the transformative impact of colonialism and Christianity. The resultant hybrid cultural identity is simultaneously modern and collectivistic, thereby embodying the intricacy and progression of cultural identity in a rapidly

evolving world. By conserving this cultural legacy, the post-colonial Mizo identity remains relatively stable, avoiding the perils of being "unhomed" *a la* Bhabha.

Moreover, this hybrid post-colonial Mizo cultural identity parallels Derrida's notion of the pharmakon, which refers to a substance or practice that is both a remedy and a poison. Derrida uses the term pharmakon to describe a paradoxical situation where something can simultaneously be a cure and a poison. It is a philosophical concept that explores the relationship between the inside and outside, and the good and evil. Derrida argues that the idea of the pharmakon undermines the traditional binary oppositions between concepts such as good/evil, inside/outside, and pure/impure. The pharmakon reveals that these oppositions are not mutually exclusive but are instead interdependent and reliant on each other. For example, the concept of "evil" cannot exist without the idea of "good," and the "inside" cannot exist without the "outside" (Kakoliris 227). Like the pharmakon, the hybrid nature of the post-colonial Mizo cultural identity is both positive and negative, embodying the potential for cultural renewal and enrichment while also posing challenges to the conservation of traditional cultural practices and values.

In this sense, the concept of cultural dislocation in the post-colonial Mizo context can be understood as a state of ambivalence that arises from being situated in luminal space. This condition is an inherent aspect of cultural hybridity, where different cultures intersect and intermingle to create new forms of expression and identity. In this context, individuals and communities may experience a sense of displacement as they navigate the complex terrain of cultural negotiation and adaptation. However, have found a way to navigate this cultural terrain without experiencing the uncanny. They have achieved this by retaining elements of their pre-colonial cultural identity, such as their traditional music, dance, dress, and customs, along with their. These cultural practices have become an integral part of their contemporary identity, allowing them to maintain a connection to their roots and a sense of continuity with their past.

Through the retention of their cultural heritage, the Mizos have created a unique hybrid culture that blends traditional and modern elements in a harmonious

way. This cultural hybridity has allowed them to adapt to the changing social and economic conditions of the contemporary world while preserving their distinct cultural identity. In this sense, the Mizos serve as an example of how cultural dislocation can be overcome through the process of cultural hybridization and the retention of cultural heritage. In this sense, by retaining their cultural heritage, the Mizos have successfully created a unique hybrid culture that blends traditional and modern elements in a harmonious manner. This cultural hybridity has enabled them to adapt to the rapidly changing social and economic conditions of the contemporary world while simultaneously preserving their distinct cultural identity. By defying the binaric logic of modernity, the Mizos serve as an exemplar of how cultural dislocation can be overcome through the process of cultural hybridization and the retention of cultural heritage.

The hybrid cultural identity of the post-colonial Mizo is both a poison and a cure, as it comprises many contrasting elements. On the one hand, the Mizos experience a sense of ambivalence and liminality due to their cultural dislocation resulting from living in the third space. On the other hand, their hybrid cultural identity, with its distinct blend of traditional and modern elements, has provided them with the ability to navigate contemporary culture with ease, without experiencing the uncanny. Overall, this cultural hybridity has allowed them to create a unique and dynamic identity that defies simple categorization. While it comprises multiple contrasting elements, the retention of their cultural heritage has enabled them to navigate the complexities of contemporary culture with confidence and resilience, providing them with both a poison and a cure.

In conclusion, the post-colonial Mizo cultural identity serves as a compelling example of hybridity, which has arisen from the fusion of Mizo traditional culture and Christian culture. This hybrid cultural identity is neither wholly Mizo nor Christian but instead embodies a complex and dynamic fusion of the two. Its hybridity can be likened to Derrida's concept of the pharmakon, where the hybridity holds both remedial and poisonous potentials, and its ambivalent nature mirrors the "in-betweenness" or liminality of post-colonial cultural identities. Thus, the post-colonial Mizo cultural identity is a testament to the continuous process of cultural

exchange and interaction, illustrating how the exchange of cultural symbols, practices, and values generates new forms of cultural expression and identity.

This ongoing process of cultural hybridization has transformed the post-colonial Mizo cultural identity into a modernist yet collectivistic embodiment of cultural interaction and exchange, whereby Christianity have been assimilated into the Mizo traditional symbols. Despite its modernization through colonialism and Christianity, this cultural identity has retained its collectivist essence, showcasing the dynamic nature of cultural identity. Rather than signaling moral decline or cultural degradation, this hybridity can be understood as a remedial element, preserving the cultural continuity of the post-colonial Mizo identity and mitigating the risk of being unhomed and experiencing the uncanny.

The post-colonial Mizo cultural identity offers a compelling example of cultural hybridity that subverts the rigid dichotomies of tradition and modernity, self and other, and colonizer and colonized. Its hybrid nature, akin to Derrida's concept of the Pharmakon, embodies both presence and absence, revealing the intricate and multifaceted character of post-colonial cultural identities. Such a hybrid cultural identity reflects the dynamic process of cultural interaction and exchange, challenging essentialist notions of culture and highlighting the fluidity of identity in a globalized world. Thus, the Mizo cultural identity serves as a critical reminder of the complexities and the challenges of cultural transformation and adjustment emerge prominently.

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Chapter Five

Conclusion

The Mizos in Mizoram of India have navigated significant historical transformations. Their pre-colonial animistic-polytheistic traditions prevailed until the 19th-century colonial influence, leading to full British control by 1890. The arrival of Christianity in 1894 which is now embraced by 87.17% of the population triggered profound societal changes. The post-colonial dispensation saw their integration into a statist discourse. This prompted the construction of the Mizo national identity as a political imperative, resulting in the establishment of the Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1961. The ensuing struggle, marked by insurgency in the 1960s-1980s, culminated in political recognition. It achieved a Union Territory status in 1972 and attained full statehood in 1987. All these modernist projects prompted a vibrant discourse on and construction of their identity.

Identity is a complex and dynamic concept that defies a singular definition. It is a lens through which one perceives his/her self and others in the world. It goes beyond mere individual constructs, encompassing both the personal and the social dimensions. This research has delved into the intricacies of identity, examining its dynamic nature, social affiliations and negotiation processes. At its core, the concept encapsulates an individual's evolving sense of self. This encompasses a rich tapestry of personal characteristics, memories, experiences, values, beliefs, and goals. It is not a static entity but a dynamic force continually shaped by interactions with the world and the people. It extends beyond the individual, entwining with various social roles and memberships. Affiliations with family, community, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds contribute to the multifaceted nature of this identity. These group memberships provide shared experiences, expectations, and values that influence self-perception. This social dimension of identity serves as a testament to the interconnectedness between the individual and the collective aspects (Appiah 72).

This embeddedness in social dynamics accentuates the pivotal role of external acknowledgment and affirmation in shaping identity, challenging the notion of an individualistic self anchored in an autonomous, authentic core that stands apart from societal influences (Taylor 29). By underscoring the profound influence of communities and traditions in identity formation, this investigation recognizes the diverse nature of identities, sculpted by variables such as nationality, religion, and gender. The overarching perspective seamlessly integrates relational and dynamic components, positioning identity within a broader social and cultural milieu. This comprehensive approach yields a nuanced understanding that surpasses individual introspection, acknowledging the intricate interplay between personal identity and the societal fabric in which it is interwoven. Consequently, it enhances our grasp of identity as a sophisticated and perpetually evolving interconnection between individual selves and the broader human experience.

Thus, identity manifests in a myriad of forms. This intricate interplay results in the plurality of identity. Consequently, this research has categorized identity into two overarching paradigms: individualism and collectivism. The subsequent investigation delves into the intricate logic governing the construction of these identities with emphasis placed on the latter. Subsequently, these conceptual deliberations are applied in the examination of the pre-colonial identity, offering an comprehension of the underlying dynamics within the historical context.

The thesis underscores identity as an emergent property driven by the logic of functional utility. It materializes through the intricate interplay between the individual and the prevailing realities of their historical context. This interaction finds expression in the ‘roles’ individuals assume, guided by the ‘expectations’ that continually surveil and shape their actions. Roles, in this context, function as discursive practices actively involved in the production of identity. The formation of identity, therefore, adheres to the dictates of dominant realities or discourses that govern the social and historical milieu. This principle underscores the dynamic, context-dependent nature of identity, highlighting its responsiveness to broader societal and historical forces.

Simply put, identity originates as a biological organism, undergoing socialization that aligns its innate characteristics with socially oriented 'roles'. The active assumption and embodiment of these 'roles' lead to stable subjectivity, forming the "person". This personhood entails a semiotically unified identity influenced by dynamic engagement with multifaceted social 'roles' and 'expectations'. Here, roles serves not just as a form of "discursive practice", shaping meaningful conceptions of the subject, but as discourses that embody knowledge and truth that dictates the production and the nature of individual identity. 'Expectations' compelling the adoption of roles represent sociological aspects of the panoptic process of 'self-discipline' and 'surveillance'.

Roles here represent sets of behavioral expectations from others, defining anticipated conduct patterns in various contexts. Individuals assume multiple roles across social, professional, and personal spheres, integrating their behavior with others. The term "person" refers to the amalgamation of internalized social roles within an individual, collectively embodying these roles (Gerth and Mills 83).

The expectations of others act as a catalyst for constructing a unified self-image or identity. Gerth and Mills identify three variants of these expectations: the 'significant other', shaping a person's self-image through feedback; the 'authoritative other', guiding behavior in alignment with societal norms; and the 'generalized other', integrating assessments from significant and authoritative figures into collective norms and values (95-97). This internalization serves as a panoptic process that leads to self-disciplining, resulting in a fully realized identity, or 'docile bodies'. The semiotically unified self is not static; it undergoes dynamic transformations, lacking an inherent, unchanging essence. Instead, the self-image evolves in response to social interactions and the expectations and evaluations imposed by 'others'. With maturity, individuals gain the capacity to adopt self-models of their own volition, selecting from a repertoire of socially accessible models.

In societies with diverse expectations, individuals may cultivate conflicting self-images, selectively presenting themselves to different groups. In collectivist societies like the pre-colonial Mizo society, marked by stereotypical roles,

individuals are more likely to conform to predefined roles, minimizing differences between self-perception and external perceptions. Such societies prioritize group harmony over individual self-expression, leading to less emphasis on self-image. Career-related changes in self-images are predictable in these settings, with well-established age-specific roles adhering to traditional norms, limiting divergence from stereotypical expectations (Gerth and Mills 95).

Social realities derived from role enactment are crucial for societal function. These social facts *a la* Durkheim hold coercive power, influencing thoughts, actions, and a sense of belonging (36). Talcott Parsons, too, underscores the essential role of institutions in maintaining societal stability. He introduces the concept of "functional differentiation", highlighting how specialized functions of institutions contribute to overall societal functioning (154). Both Durkheim and Parsons emphasize the non-arbitrary, functional nature of social facts and systems, providing a structured framework that influences behavior for societal stability and well-being.

Roles, expectations, identities, institutions, and societies are not arbitrary constructs; instead, they emerge out of functional necessity, serving specific social needs. These elements play crucial roles in ensuring the smooth functioning and continuity of social systems. Roles provide a framework for individuals to contribute to society, guided by expectations that maintain order and cohesion. Identities, shaped by roles and societal expectations, contribute to the sense of self and communal belonging. Institutions, organized structures of roles, are essential for the coordination and governance of societal functions. Societies, encompassing interconnected roles and institutions, represent the larger collective relying on these elements for stability and progression. In essence, these components are interwoven threads essential for the fabric of social systems, designed not by chance but by the inherent needs of human societies.

Thus, identity, whether in a collectivistic or individualistic context, evolves through the dynamic interplay of individuals and discursive practices, influenced by historical factors like institutions and collective consciousness. This relationship, contingent on historical elements, varies in impact. In traditional collectivistic

societies, a specific identity is functionally imperative for societal continuity and hormony. However, identity is not static; it adapts over time, inherently shaped by historical contexts. This synthesis provides a heuristic for understanding the pre-colonial Mizo identity, unraveling its intricate historical complexities.

Within the framework of these theoretical deliberations, the thesis scrutinizes the pre-colonial Mizo identity by exploring the 'roles' and the associated discourses that govern their nature and imposition on individuals. Geography and immigrations played a pivotal role in shaping the pre-colonial Mizo identity, social institutions and political landscape. The hilly terrain of their settlements hindered large-scale settlement, fostering spatial dispersal and limited intercommunication among clan-based villages. This isolation led to diverse developmental trajectories. This resulted in inter-clan/village conflicts and tribal wars, scattering kin groups and exacerbating clan-based tribalism. These conflicts were also frequently rooted in land disputes which were exacerbated by the geographical demands of Jhum cultivation. The lack of a cohesive political structure and persistent tribal rivalries hindered their unification, impeding recognition by neighboring communities. This also led to the establishment of the village as the default socio-governance framework.

Thus, survival imperatives dictated the need for cooperation and collective harmony within villages. The challenging geographical context made collectivism not just a social ideal but a practical strategy for navigating environmental intricacies. The interdependence of individuals within villages became a vital necessity rather than a mere abstract construct. Recognizing that well-being, both individually and collectively, was linked to collective efforts, the Mizos embraced this collective ethos. In times of scarcity and conflicts, the community's ability to unite, share resources, and collectively address challenges became a cornerstone of their socio-political life—an enduring foundation for collective existence.

A Proppian analysis of Mizo folklore underscores the prevalence of this collective ethos in pre-colonial Mizo society. This is evident in the recurring theme of collectivistic stratification, where individual identity is consistently subordinated to communal norms. The narratives reflect shared values, a collective identity, and

the suppression of individual agency in favor of the overarching community narrative. “Duhmanga leh Dardini”, the tragic love story, unfolds within the constraints of societal norms, and collective duties demanded of the characters, emphasizing the overwhelming force of collectivistic stratification. Similarly, in “Chalkunga leh Thanghniangi”, romantic challenges highlight the negation of Chalkunga’s individual agency and entrenched traditional norms. These narratives consistently depict how the rigid social structure systematically stifles individual agency, emphasizing the enduring theme of collectivistic stratification in Mizo folklore.

As discussed earlier, individual identity is intricately shaped by the various roles a person undertakes, and the choice of these roles is fundamentally guided by societal expectations (Gerth and Mills 35). This process of identity formation involves a dynamic interplay between an individual and their social environment. The roles a person assumes play a crucial role in this ongoing construction of identity, both influencing and being influenced by societal norms, cultural expectations, and interpersonal relationships. As individuals navigate through these roles, they participate in a continuous dialogue with their surroundings, contributing to the evolving narrative of their identity.

In traditional collectivistic societies, these roles, and consequently, the identity itself, are imposed on individuals rather than being chosen autonomously. This process is dictated by the expectations set by significant, authoritative, and generalized others, prioritizing collective welfare and functional utility over individual expressions. The resulting identities tend to be more homogeneous within such cultural contexts. Changes in one’s identity are facilitated through the adoption of socially prescribed roles that are guided by the dictates of collective interest. In this context, expectations underscore the unassailable nature of the General Will *a la* Rousseau (30), as it is based on the principle of functional necessity, leaving little room for divergent identities.

The experience of children and childhood, among other things, exhibits a striking manifestation of these conceptual deliberations. They were assigned roles

based on their age and gender in alignment with functional imperatives of the society, and they were closely observed by significant others to ensure they conformed to the "expectations" of the generalized others. They were delegated roles/tasks based on their approximate age. For instance, when adults worked in the fields, older children and other adults assumed caretaker roles. The coollective nature of the village made child care and education a collective responsibility, with children learning gender roles and collective values at home. Growing up under the watchful eye/expectations of the adult community (significant others), children developed a natural respect for elders, recognizing the potential to learn various skills and knowledge from them (Zama 90).

Thus, the allocation of 'roles' based on gender and age served a crucial function in maintaining operational efficiency of the society. This division ensured that agricultural work could proceed smoothly, as able-bodied workers were not encumbered by childcare responsibilities. Guided by the expectations and watchful eyes of significant others, this division of roles emerged from functional necessity, contributing to optimal productivity and societal coherence. Furthermore, it instilled a cultural reverence for maturity and old age, intertwining the passage of time with the assumption of specific roles and identities. In such societies, the progression of age is intricately tied to the acquisition of societal respect and status through the fulfillment of designated roles.

In collectivist cultures, individuals perceive their identity as integral to larger social collectives such as family, community, or nation. This perspective prioritizes group goals and values over personal ambitions, emphasizing harmony and conformity with established social norms. The interconnectedness of individual identity with relational networks underscores a preference for unified thoughts and actions within the group, promoting comfort in like-minded interactions. The collectivist ethos of the pre-colonial Mizos profoundly influenced all aspects of socio-cultural life, shaping thought processes, social interactions, and decision-making mechanisms.

In fact, societal differentiations that existed were rooted in *tlawmngaihna,* an ethico-moral code that shaped the collectivist structure of the society. This framework emphasized sacrificing personal interests for the well-being of the community. It is a behavioral code that demanded a profound commitment from individuals, particularly males, who were not only expected but also prepared to make profound sacrifices, including their lives, without hesitation, for the betterment of their fellow community members and the society as a whole. Central to this ethos was the principle that individuals were obligated to place the interests of others and the society above their personal interests. Adherence to *tlawmngaihna* was essential for social advancement, leaving limited room for individual identity and fostering uniformity for the functional stability of the society. The status of chiefs, whether inherited or earned, primarily conferred symbolic rather than economic privileges. Even within this privileged class, adherence to tradition and the moral principles of *tlawmngaihna* remained paramount, highlighting the pervasive influence of collectivist values.

Thus, 'recognition' within the pre-colonial Mizo society necessitated direct and outstanding contributions to the community through roles already predetermined by traditional normativity. And this stratification based on functional prowess, previously discussed, operated as an open system, enabling anyone to attain socially privileged positions through dedicated service to the community. In this context, *tlawmngaihna* emerged as the foundational moral principle that constituted the core of the pre-colonial Mizo collectivism.

Even the Chief and affluent members in the The pre-colonial Mizo society followed tradition and the moral code of *tlawmngaihna,* emphasizing active support for the less privileged. The Chief, exemplifying this commitment, allocated resources to the socioeconomically disadvantaged, thereby mitigating societal divisions. A similar collective spirit was evident in hunting expeditions led by the *pasaltha,* ensuring equitable distribution of the game among the community. This inclusive practice allowed widows and households without male members to participate in occasional meat consumption.

Consequently, the pre-colonial Mizo society featured a cohesive pattern of resource sharing, collaboration, and recognition of contributions. Importantly, this collaborative ethos did not emanate from a centralized political authority but arose organically from an ethico-moral system dictated by functional necessity and the collective stratification it fostered. In this way, the traditional Mizo social stratification promoted harmonious coexistence over individual desires, rendering it functionally necessary for the stability and continuity of the society.

This prevailing value system centered around *tlawmngaihna* and the corresponding collectivist stratification, emerged from a dynamic negotiation involving the subject, the collective entity, the natural environment, and the realm of the supernatural. The polytheistic belief system, which included both malevolent and benevolent spirits, resulted in the establishment of a network of taboos that significantly shaped daily lives. Rooted in the fear of spirits, these taboos played a crucial role in influencing and regulating behavior and social norms. They functioned as a precautionary measure against potential harm from malevolent spirits. Adherence to these taboos served as a form of protection for both individuals and the community, contributing to the collectivistic social stratification and establishing norms that included the formulation of daily behavioral codes.

This negotiation in the pre-colonial Mizo society is evident in the socio-behavioral norms surrounding traditional Mizo couples. Despite their affection for spouses, men maintained a demeanor devoid of apparent affection. This practice stemmed from the belief that overt displays of love could invoke the jealousy of *Khuanu*, a supernatural entity, potentially leading to separation and demise. As a precautionary measure, men adopted sternness to avoid such a fate. This example illustrates how the sacred realm profoundly influenced daily existence in Mizo society, where every facet of behavioral norms and cognitive processes was dictated by the collective negotiation with the natural and supernatural realms. The coexistence of the sacred and the secular domains in Mizo society reflects the intricate interplay between the societal and the metaphysical dimensions (Zongte 36).

Thus, the unyielding emphasis on community well-being in pre-colonial Mizo society resulted in the complete suppression of individual desires and experiences. The notion of private life was detrimental, as it had the potential to foster personal values and patterns conflicting with the collective's priorities. This suppression extended to the depths of individual consciousness, with religious beliefs and rituals serving as tools to enforce conformity and prevent deviations from the collective ideal. Consequently, every aspect of daily behavioral norms and cognitive processes was influenced and dictated by the collective to which each individual belonged. This collective engagement was in continual negotiation with the natural world, often imbued with supernatural connotations. The negotiation with nature was intrinsically intertwined with negotiation with the supernatural realm. In Mizo society, the sacred and secular domains coexisted harmoniously, reflecting the intricate interplay between societal and metaphysical dimensions.

Such metaphysical conception of collectivism in the pre-colonial Mizo society meant that deviating from this system carried severe consequences, not just in the form of an unhomely effect, but also in terms of one's mortality. Breaching such norms had potentially fatal consequences. As a result, this conception endowed the collectivistic order not only with functional but also with existential and ontological necessity. This endowment granted social institutions considerable authority, marked by unyielding norms rather than legal constructs enforced by political authorities.

The conception of the afterlife as embodied in *Mitthi Khua* and *Pialral* significantly influenced Mizo societal values and social stratification. The socially privileged position of *Thangchhuah* was intricately tied to the concept of *Pialral*—a paradise. Two categories of *Thangchhuah* existed namely, i*n lama Thangchhuah* and *ram lama Thangchhuah*. In the pursuit of *in lama Thangchhuah*, economic affluence takes center stage, necessitating a grand display of wealth. Achieving this esteemed position involves hosting the *Khuangchawi* feast for the entire village, spanning at least seven days. This elaborate celebration includes the sacrifice of at least two mithuns and a pig for the village, along with an ample supply of *zu* (rice beer). The individual must also perform the *Sechhun* ritual, involving the sacrifice of another mithun. Notably, a *Thangchhuah* is expected to host three *Khuangchawi* feasts in

their lifetime. Upon reaching this status, the individual gains the privilege of wearing a special turban and opening a unique window in their dwelling (Baveja 30).

On the other hand, *ram lama Thangchhuah* signifies a status achieved through acts of courage and bravery. To ascend to this position, an individual must accomplish noteworthy feats, including hunting and capturing specific wildlife species such as a bear, a barking deer, a sele (wild mithun), a stag, a wild boar, a muvanlai (hawk), and a rulngan (viper) (Baveja 30-32).

This *Thangchhuah* institution in Mizo society represents a convergence of social privilege and religious beliefs. Attaining *Thangchhuah* status not only signified personal success but was also deeply intertwined with the aspiration for a favorable afterlife in *Pialral*. This status was achieved, more or less, by serving the welfare of the whole society, reflecting a fusion of individual achievement and collective well-being within the context of their metaphysical beliefs. Thus, the position held implications beyond social prestige, representing a privilege attained through collective benefit rather than to the detriment of others or the community.

The pre-colonial Mizo identity prominently featured collectivism, shaped by the moral code of *tlawmngaihna*, which arose out of functional necessity rather than individual rationality. The assembly of taboos and moral-ethical principles forming the foundation of this collective identity can be understood as a morphostasis—a cohesive force maintaining cultural equilibrium and ensuring the society's uninterrupted continuation. This equilibrium results from the harmonious fusion of metaphysical beliefs and socio-ethical norms (*tlawmngaihna*), working in concert to establish a functional, balanced, and enduring commonwealth structure. The collective stratification and the embedded moral-ethical constructs function as interdependent elements that mutually sustain the overarching cultural fabric, safeguarding tradition, and propelling collective existence forward.

Current postcolonial discourses on Mizo identity exhibit a tendency for cultural disruption, attributed to the impact of colonialism and the introduction of Christianity, creating a divide between the pre and post-colonial Mizo. It is an undeniable fact that Christianity has rejected various elements of Mizo cultural

symbols based on the belief that these aspects are associated with the pre-colonial pagan era and are considered incompatible with Christianity. Zongte contends that the rejection of these traditional practices amounts to a repudiation of the core essence of Mizo identity, creating a noticeable incongruity between Mizo traditional culture/identity and the Christian faith. Consequently, the advent of Christianity has introduced a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular (which is emblematic to the Western belief system), contrary to the integral nature of pre-colonial Mizo religious beliefs that permeated all aspects of life. This shift has confined the Mizos' religious outlook to a narrow segment of their existence, diminishing religion's impact on daily life and thereby eroding the community's moral foundation, contributing to ethical decay (101). This, in turn, has led to the breakdown of once-regulated social structures. The resulting pervasive moral decline poses challenges to cultural identity and future progress (106-107).

However, these discourses on identity and culture often overlooks the foundational pre-colonial Mizo identity, which serves as the precursor to the postcolonial identity. This thesis challenges this omission, asserting that the pre-colonial Mizo society exhibited a collectivist character, consequently shaping a corresponding collectivist identity. By scrutinizing the postcolonial argument on cultural displacement through this collectivist lens, its validity is questioned. This analysis underscores that, despite significant upheavals during the colonial period, the Mizo community has retained its collectivist identity. Hence, it becomes imperative to incorporate the pre-colonial Mizo identity as a crucial element in examining the post-colonial Mizo identity.

Francis Fukuyama posits that the roots of contemporary Western individualism can be traced back to the 16th-century Reformation Movement, notably influenced by the theological perspectives of Martin Luther. Luther's prioritisation of the personal and private nature of an individual's connection with God challenged the established hierarchical structures of the Church, placing importance on individual agency and personal convictions over collective norms. According to Fukuyama, Luther's focus on faith as a private relationship between individuals and God played a pivotal role in shaping the foundations of

individualistic values in the Western world. This Christian conception of individualism underwent a secular transformation, evolving into its present-day form through the contributions of influential thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. (29-39). Thus, Christianity has served a foundational role in dictating the birth of individualism and its subsequent cultural and social implications in the West.

In the Mizo community, despite Christianity often being perceived as a driver of modernization, there has not been a shift from collectivist to individualistic norms. Instead, the collectivistic ethos inherent in the pre-colonial Mizo cultural identity persists strongly in contemporary post-colonial society. Although younger generations may exhibit a slightly diminished collectivistic orientation, cultural norms remain resilient. Notably, older adults tend to adhere more steadfastly to collectivistic values. This collectivist perspective finds expression in various community-based organizations (CBOs) that every individual in the Mizo community participates in, such as the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), the Young Mizo Associations (YMA), Mizo Upa Pawl (MUP). These organizations embody the collective attitudes and values of the community at large (Lalkhawngaihi and Fente 205-206).

Community-based organizations, particularly those affiliated with the churches, exert a significant influence on members' behavior, social interactions, and the reinforcement of collective identity (Lalkhawngaihi and Fente 206). These organizations play a pivotal role in preserving and disseminating the collectivist ethos inherent in Mizo culture, emphasizing the society's unwavering commitment to collective values and norms. In contrast to assertions of cultural rupture in post-colonial Mizo society, the enduring collectivistic ethos traced back to the pre-colonial era challenges the assumed correlation between perceived cultural dislocation and moral decline. Despite the introduction of the sacred and the secular dichotomy under Christianity, Mizo society remains predominantly collectivistic, distinct from Western individualism associated with the Reformation Movement.

The resilience of Mizo cultural identity against external influences exemplifies the intricate interplay between morphogenic and morphostatic processes. Morphogenesis involves processes fostering change and growth, while morphostasis encompasses mechanisms that maintain a system's present conditions. These processes work synergistically to sustain social systems, allowing for adaptation while preserving essential features (Olsen 26).

External forces such as colonialism, Christianity, and formal education trigger morphogenic processes challenging cultural norms. Christianity, in particular, contests traditional Mizo culture by advocating individualism and introducing novel forms of social organizations that transcend traditional kinship ties, establishing new hierarchies and power structures. Despite these challenges, inherent morphostatic forces within societal structures reinforce established norms, ensuring cultural stability. Noteworthy among these morphostatic forces are the physical churches, serving as platforms for collective worship, socialization, and community activities, thereby maintaining order and cohesion within Mizo society. Another morphostatic process involves the indigenization of Christianity, facilitated by the various Christian spiritual revival movements. These revivals facilitate the fusion of Mizo culture with Christianity, allowing the reintroduction of previously prohibited cultural symbols. This includes the incorporation of traditional gongs/drums, indigenous melodies in Christian hymns, and dancing into worship practices. The emergence of *Puma Zai* (Song) also significantly contributes to the propagation of Christianity in Mizoram (Pachuau 131):

The revival movement played a crucial role in integrating Christianity into the cultural fabric and value system of the Mizos, triggering a profound societal transformation. With the whole community embracing Christianity, the religion gradually evolved into a defining element in shaping the normative structure of their society. As a result, the social norms and cultural values of the Mizos have been markedly shaped by the tenets of their newfound faith. Notably, this influence has been mutual. In the ongoing interplay between Christianity and the Mizo cultural ethos, the religion itself underwent a process of indigenization. (173)

He further the organic assimilation of the Gospel during the revival movements provided a spontaneous mechanism for preserving the people's sense of self amidst the challenges posed by modernity. In this context, Christianity serves not only to ease the transition but also to harmoniously integrate the traditional heritage of the community with the contemporary currents of modernity. (173). Thus, the Christian revival movements played a crucial role in integrating Christianity into Mizo culture. Initially incompatible, these movements strategically reincorporated traditional socio-cultural semiotics into Christianity, preserving Mizo cultural stability amid external influences. This prevented disruptive dynamics that might lead to cultural diversification and individualization. Instead, Christianity assimilated with existing semiotic codes, reinforcing the collectivistic nature of contemporary Mizo society/culture. In essence, rather than fostering individualized identity, Christianity and modernity became foundational elements supporting Mizo collectivism.

The characterization of post-colonial Mizo society as an exact replica of its pre-colonial counterpart can be both affirmed and negated. While the fundamental core of Mizo collectivistic cultural identity endures, there are substantial qualitative shifts induced by colonial influences. Homi Bhabha's concept of "hybridity" provides a valuable framework for navigating this ambivalence. According to Bhabha, cultural identity is an ongoing process of negotiation and exchange, leading to the continual emergence of hybrid cultural forms. This perpetual dialogue involves the sharing and transformation of ideas, symbols, and practices, often resulting in the creation of hybrid cultural forms that are neither purely one culture nor the other (Huddart 4). He contends that navigating the experience of hybridity can give rise to a sense of disorientation, uncertainty, and instability, coined as the "unhomely". This denotes a feeling of dislocation and a lack of belonging, emerging from the tension between various cultural influences and experiences. Hybrid culture, characterized by its fluidity, encompasses both a sense of belonging (the homely) and unbelonging (the unhomely)

Culture, as per Bhabha, possesses a dual nature, encompassing both the familiar (*heimlich*) and the uncanny (*unheimlich*). In its *heimlich* aspect, culture

manifests through disciplinary generalizations, mimetic narratives, homologous empty time, seriality, progress, customs, and coherence. However, cultural authority also exhibits an *unheimlich* character, requiring translation, dissemination, differentiation, interdisciplinary engagement, intertextuality, internationalization, and inter-racial influences to be distinctive, significatory, influential, and identifiable. This duality highlights the complexity and dynamism inherent in cultural dynamics, emphasizing the interplay between the familiar and the unfamiliar in the multifaceted realm of cultural authority. (195)

Thus, the concept of cultural hybridity emerges as pivotal in comprehending the post-colonial Mizo identity, seamlessly integrating pre-colonial traditions with the influences of Christianity and modernity. The resultant identity embodies a nuanced amalgamation of diverse cultural forces, embracing both the pre-colonial collectivism and the evolving paradigms of the colonial and post-colonial eras. This post-colonial Mizo identity is multifaceted, encapsulating an "ambivalence" and "liminality" characteristic of hybridity (Bhabha 140). Rather than being interpreted solely as a moral and identity crisis, it serves as a Derridian *pharmakon*—a simultaneous poison and remedy. In navigating the complexities of contemporary culture, this *pharmakonic* identity defies simplistic categorization and transcends the binary logic inherent in modernity. Hence, the pre-colonial identity continues to constitute a significant core within the post-colonial Mizo identity, rather than being displaced.

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ABSTRACT

MAPPING IDENTITY: INVESTIGATING THE PRE-COLONIAL MIZO

An abstract submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The contemporary global political landscape is increasingly characterized by the prominence of identity politics, a phenomenon that underscores the formation, negotiation, and assertion of diverse identities in response to sociopolitical dynamics (Fukuyama). This trend is observable across both the Global North and South, where communities grapple with questions of belonging, recognition, and autonomy. In regions like Northeast India, the interplay of identity and politics shapes the entire trajectories of communities. These communities, often subsumed within larger statist frameworks, seek to assert their distinct national identities as a response to said subsumption. Identity, thus, emerges as a central component of their political discourse and aspirations.

Identity, in this context, serves as both a strategy of resistance and a mechanism for rearticulating collective identity. It reflects a negotiation with historical legacies, cultural memory, and contemporary sociopolitical realities. Mizoram exemplifies this dynamic, where identity politics intersects with local traditions, postcolonial critique, and external influences such as Christianity and modernity, producing a complex and evolving discourse on identity.

This thesis examines Mizo identity by interrogating the pre-colonial Mizo identity, and the perceived disjuncture between it and contemporary post-colonial identity. It elucidates the continuities and ruptures that have shaped the Mizo experience within the broader discourse of identity politics.

Chapter One - Introduction: Problematics of Mizo Identity

The First chapter, titled “Introduction: Problematics of Mizo Identity”, provides a brief overview of contemporary discourses surrounding Mizo identity. Despite the increasing prominence of intersectional identities in contemporary discourse, particularly among younger generations, national and cultural identity remain central themes among the Mizos. The incorporation of postcolonial theoretical frameworks, which critically interrogate the enduring impact of colonialism on Mizo identity, introduces an additional layer of complexity to these debates. The convergence of national identity, often associated with rightist political ideologies, and

postcolonial critique, typically grounded in leftist paradigms, generates a multifaceted and intellectually challenging discursive terrain.

This acquires particular salience within the contemporary theological and cultural discourses, which try to reconcile a primordial national identity with that of Christianity, a faith that, while initially embraced as a transformative spiritual doctrine, is increasingly critiqued as a cultural hegemony that displaced traditional Mizo cultural symbols. Siamkima Khawlhring's analysis illustrates this cultural dislocation, notably through the symbolic replacement of the *Rih Dil*—a sacred lake integral to Mizo cosmology and identity—with the River Jordan, emblematic of Christian theology and Western culture. Despite this transformation, Khawlhring emphasizes that the enduring significance of the *Rih Dil* lake in Mizo identity renders its exclusion from cultural memory a potential existential threat to the community (16-17). In a similar vein, Lalhmingchhuanga Zongte attributes the spiritual and ethical decline in post-colonial Mizoram to the incongruous introduction of Christianity, which he argues alienated the Mizo from their indigenous traditions. This disjunction, according to Zongte, has precipitated a rejection of native identity in favour of external religious paradigms, further complicating the community's cultural and spiritual cohesion (79).

Despite all these politico-cultural diagnosis, a significant gap persists in the discourse on identity and the politics of disjuncture: the lack of critical examination of the primordial pre-colonial Mizo identity from which the contemporary identity is perceived to have diverged. While scholars have extensively explored the schism between old and new Mizo identities—highlighting cultural and moral decay and proposing pathways for their reconciliation—there remains a conspicuous absence of a thorough account of the primordial pre-colonial Mizo identity. This thesis addresses this gap by undertaking a critical investigation of the pre-colonial Mizo identity and conducting a re-evaluation of the 'disjuncture' thesis highlighted.

Chapter Two – Theorizing Identity

The second chapter, "Theorizing Identity", explores the concept of identity formation through an interdisciplinary lens, incorporating perspectives from sociology, psychology, and literary theory. Stuart Hall reconceptualizes identity as

fluid, fragmented, and historically contingent, directly challenging traditional essentialist notions. He argues that identity arises through the interaction between subjects, discursive practices, and specific historical and institutional contexts. He frames identity as a "point of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (5), emphasizing its transient and historically situated character.

This process unfolds within distinct discursive formations shaped by enunciative strategies and the politics of exclusion that define subjectification (Hall 2). By linking identity formation to the interplay between individuals, historical contexts, and discursive practices, Hall presents identity as an evolving construct, continuously shaped by the sociopolitical frameworks in which it is embedded.

To understand the formation of a 'particular' identity, it is essential to analyse the interaction between subjects, their socio-historical context, and the discursive practices in vogue. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills provide a robust framework for this analysis through their concept of "character structure" elucidating how identity emerges from the interplay of biological, psychological, and social dimensions. The "character structure" comprises the 'organism', the 'psychic structure', and the 'person'. The organism, grounded in biology, shapes basic behaviour, while the psychic structure translates biological impulses into socially meaningful actions by internalizing the "expectations" of others within the framework of social "roles" (Gerth and Mills 20).

Social roles, as internalized expectations, transcend mere functionality within social structures to become discursive practices in the Foucauldian sense, shaping both identity and power relations. Roles embody the anticipated behaviours prescribed by one's social environment, integrating individual actions into broader social conduct (Gerth and Mills 83). The "person," as a semiotically unified subject, emerges from the synthesis of biological foundations and socially oriented behaviours enacted through these roles.

This unified self, however, remains inherently dynamic and devoid of an immutable essence, continuously shaped by the expectations of others. Through

maturation, individuals select self-models from socially available frameworks, cultivating a personalized sense of self. The stability of this self-concept is reinforced through “cumulative confirmation”, wherein consistent self-image validation fosters equilibrium and discourages engagement with situations that challenge the valued self-image (85). This model effectively situates identity at the nexus of individual agency, social expectations, and discursive practices, offering a nuanced understanding of its fluid and context-dependent nature.

Thus, the construction of a unified self-image or identity is catalysed by the “expectations” of others, which manifest in three primary forms: the significant other, the authoritative other, and the generalized other. The significant other provides immediate and intimate feedback, shaping self-perception by facilitating the internalization of social norms. The authoritative other, equipped with the capacity to enforce these norms, directs individual behaviour to align with broader social expectations. Finally, the generalized other synthesizes the perspectives of significant and authoritative others into a cohesive framework of collective norms and values, enabling the formation of a shared social identity (Gerth and Mills 95–97). This process of internalization leads to self-regulation and the realization of a coherent identity or “person.”

In pluralistic societies, diverse expectations from significant others often create conflicting self-images, fostering individualized and diversified identities. Conversely, collectivist societies prioritize group harmony and shared values, emphasizing rigid social roles and limiting divergence between internal self-perception and external evaluations. These societies favour linear social trajectories, with career and life transitions adhering to traditional norms, aligning aspirations with established patterns (Gerth and Mills 90). This contrast highlights how social structures mediate the balance between individuality and conformity, shaping identity through the interplay of social roles and collective expectations.

Identity is thus shaped by historical and social forces. It emerges through the enactment of social roles, which anchor individuals within broader social structures. These roles are not merely functional but foundational, establishing norms that govern

essential components of systemic order. By continuously performing these roles, individuals reinforce institutional stability, with roles and institutions mutually influencing each other to sustain social coherence.

The enactment of roles, according to Emile Durkheim, underscores the functional necessity of social realities in shaping both individual identities and the broader social framework. Durkheim's concept of "social facts" illustrates how these realities, arising from role enactment, exert a coercive influence that shapes thoughts, actions, and a shared sense of belonging. These facts are not arbitrary but emerge from the collective need to maintain social cohesion. They align individual behaviours with the normative structures essential for social integration and continuity (36). Talcott Parsons extends this argument through his theory of "functional differentiation," where institutions evolve specialized roles to fulfill distinct social functions. This differentiation ensures systemic stability by distributing responsibilities across institutional frameworks, enabling individuals to internalize norms and align their behaviour with collective expectations. The process of socialization within these institutions fosters identities that reflect their functional roles, integrating personal agency into the structural demands of society (54).

Functional necessity creates a reciprocal relationship between identity and social structure. Roles shaped by institutional demands produce specific types of identities that, in turn, reinforce the social systems they inhabit. This dynamic ensures that the individual's sense of self is both an expression of personal agency and a reflection of the broader, structured framework necessary for social stability and well-being.

Role, thus, serves as the origin of identity and defines the relationship between the person (subject) and the social structure. Here, Gerth and Mills' concept of "role" serves as discursive practice and it aligns with Hall's notion of the "relationship" between the subject and its historical context in *Cultural Identity*. These roles and relationships emerge based on functional necessity within society.

Chapter Three - The Emergence of the Pre-Colonial Mizo Collective

Chapter three delves into the formation of the pre-colonial Mizo collective identity, examining the historical and cultural factors that shaped this identity. Drawing on the theoretical insights from the previous chapter, this section explores the interplay between individual agency and broader social forces in the construction of collective identity.

An examination of Mizo folklore through Proppian heuristics reveals a prevailing collective ethos in the pre-colonial Mizo society. The recurring presence of collectivistic stratification, along with the negation of individual identity conflicting with this stratification, is a foundational aspect in numerous tales. The narrative structures of these folkloric expressions distinctly mirrors the society's collective disposition, emphasizing shared values, collective identity, and the subordination of individual agency to the overarching collective narrative. Essentially, Propp's concept of the *fabula* in Mizo folklore encapsulates a nuanced portrayal of collectivism, presenting a comprehensive depiction where social roles, relationships, and conflicts converge to underscore the paramount significance of the community over the individualistic paradigm.

The stories of "Duhmanga leh Dardini" and "Chalkunga leh Thanghniangi" exemplify the pervasive influence of collectivistic values in Mizo society. In the former, the protagonists' love is overshadowed by Duhmanga's obligations as a *pasaltha*, which prioritize collective service over personal desires. This allegiance to collective expectations, enforced by the authoritative and generalized others, ultimately leads to Dardini's demise, underscoring the futility of resisting deeply entrenched social norms. Similarly, in the latter, social norms and collective values refuse to recognize Chalkunga's individuality, presenting his union with Thanghniangi as possible only through a complete upheaval of the existing social order.

Both stories illustrate how social roles, upheld by collective expectations, dictate individual behaviour, often to the detriment of personal agency. The narratives highlight a common theme: the struggle for individuality against the unyielding constraints of social norms and the overarching collective, emphasizing the enduring power of collectivistic stratification in shaping identity and agency in Mizo society.

The pre-colonial Mizo society was thus characterized by a strong collectivist ethos, prioritizing collective well-being over individual interests. As exemplified by the adage "it is better to war against seven villages than to have a conflict with a neighbour," the village served as the primary unit of social organization. This collectivist orientation limited individual autonomy and placed significant constraints on the authority of even village chiefs.

Their politico-administrative structure, rooted in autonomous village systems, vested sovereign authority in the chiefs. However, despite their theoretical absolute power, this authority was constrained by longstanding traditions and customs that functioned as a rule of law, preventing power centralisation (Khai 142). Real authority resided within social institutions, which mediated political and social affairs through customary precedents.

Here, the traditional Mizo society demonstrates functional parallels with Rousseau's concept of the general will, though it diverges in critical aspects. Rousseau's general will represents a collective rational agreement that balances individual autonomy with social cohesion. While individuals are compelled to conform, they actively shape the general will through consent, fostering a dynamic interplay between individual and collective interests. However, Rousseau also underscores the absoluteness of the general will, asserting that its primacy over individual interests is essential for social stability, even if it necessitates coercion to ensure compliance (30).

In contrast, the traditional Mizo society epitomized collectivism, where identity was strictly defined by predetermined roles aligned with collective objectives. Deviations from collective norms were rare and met with collective enforcement, such as the punitive actions of the *Zawlbuk* dormitory against nonconforming behaviour, as in the case of when a maiden showed favouritism or neglected hospitality toward a suitor, it led to collective actions, such as dismantling her residence by the young men in the *Zawlbuk* dormitory. Here, the *Zawlbuk* served as an authoritative other that enforced the expectations of the community i.e. the significant and the generalised others. This cultural framework prioritized group harmony and uniformity, anchoring

personal identity firmly within the collective as homogeneity is crucial for the survival of the community (Triandis 43-44). Unlike Rousseau's vision, which integrates individual agency in the form of consent into the collective fabric, Mizo collectivism subordinated personal aspirations entirely to social norms, emphasizing conformity as essential for survival.

Roles, and consequently identities, were collectively imposed in traditional Mizo society, adhering to established patterns dictated by collective functional utility. This imposition operated through the logic of 'expectations'—the 'significant', 'authoritative', and 'generalized' others. Social statuses were earned through notable achievements in community-serving roles, with exceptional proficiency in activities such as crop cultivation, hunting, or demonstrating valour against adversaries leading to elevated positions. Substantial recognition required outstanding contributions within assigned roles (Thomas 10). This stratification, grounded in functional merit, avoided rigid hereditary determinism, except in the case of chieftainship (Rokhum 30).

In fact, social differentiations in pre-colonial Mizo society were rooted in *tlawmngaihna*, an ethico-moral code that prioritized collective well-being over personal interests and individual identity. Compliance with *tlawmngaihna* was essential for social ascent, limiting individual diversity and plurality to ensure social stability. Chiefly status, whether inherited or earned, conferred primarily symbolic privileges rather than economic ones, with adherence to *tlawmngaihna* remaining paramount even among the elites. Chiefs demonstrated this commitment by allocating resources to the socioeconomically disadvantaged, thus reducing social divisions.

Similarly, hunting expeditions led by the *pasaltha* exemplified this collective ethos, ensuring equitable distribution of game, allowing widows and disadvantaged households occasional access to meat. This cohesive pattern of resource sharing and collaboration was not enforced by any centralized political authority but emerged from the ethico-moral system and the collectivist stratification it shaped. The resulting social order prioritized harmonious coexistence over personal ambitions, making collective stratification functionally indispensable for social stability and continuity.

This value system centered on *tlawmngaihna* and collectivist stratification in traditional Mizo society emerged from a complex negotiation involving individuals, the collective socio-historical context, the natural environment, and the supernatural realm. Their animistic belief system, encompassing malevolent and benevolent spirits, gave rise to a network of taboos that fully penetrated and regulated thoughts, behaviours and social norms as protective measures against harm from malevolent spirits. These taboos reinforced collectivist stratification by establishing daily behavioural codes and fostering community cohesion.

One manifestation of this negotiation is evident in the relational dynamics of traditional Mizo couples. Men, despite their affection for spouses, avoided overt displays of love to prevent evoking the jealousy of *Khuanu*, a supernatural entity believed to cause separation or death. This belief system (discourse) and its consequent behavioural norm (discursive practices) reflect the profound influence of the sacred realm on daily life, where social conduct and cognitive frameworks were deeply intertwined with metaphysical beliefs. This coexistence of sacred and secular domains exemplifies the intricate interplay between social norms and natural and supernatural considerations in shaping Mizo social structures (Zongte 36).

The Mizo conception of the afterlife, exemplified through *Mitthi Khua* and *Pialral*, significantly influenced social values and social stratification. The *Thangchhuah* status, achieved through either economic affluence (marked by elaborate feasts) or acts of bravery and hunting prowess, represented a socially privileged position tied to the promise of *Pialral*, a paradisiacal afterlife. This status conferred social privileges and shaped the hierarchy within the Mizo community (Baveja 30–32).

The *Thangchhuah* institution represented a convergence of social privilege, religious beliefs, and collective identity. Beyond personal success, achieving *Thangchhuah* status symbolized a commitment to collective well-being, as it was accomplished through contributions that benefited the entire society. This fusion of individual achievement with collective welfare underscores the integration of

metaphysical beliefs with social practices, where privilege was earned through service to the collective rather than at its expense.

The emergence of pre-colonial Mizo collectivist identity and its moral code, *tlawmngaihna*, can, thus, be understood as a response to functional necessity, prioritizing social cohesion over individual rationality. The network of taboos and socio-ethical tenets underpinning this collective identity functioned as morphostasis, maintaining cultural equilibrium and ensuring social continuity. This balance resulted from the integration of metaphysical beliefs (discourse) and *tlawmngaihna* (role - discursive practice), enforced through the "expectations" of others, collectively forming a functional and enduring commonwealth. This collective stratification and moral-ethical constructs operated as interdependent elements, sustaining the cultural fabric, preserving tradition, and reinforcing collective existence.

Chatpter Four - The Precolonial in the Post-Colonial

Chapter Four, titled "The Precolonial in the Post-Colonial" positions the pre-colonial Mizo identity within the post-colonial context and undertakes an analysis of the disjuncture thesis mentioned in chapter one.

It is a truism that Christianity has repudiated various elements of traditional Mizo cultural semiotics owing to their pre-colonial pagan origin and deemed incompatible with Christianity. Lalhmingchhuanga Zongte contends that this repudiation undermines the essence of Mizo identity, creating an incongruity between Mizo traditional culture/identity and the Christian faith. This creates a dichotomy between the sacred and secular that contrasts sharply with the integrative nature of pre-colonial Mizo religious beliefs, which permeated all aspects of life. This shift has confined religion to a narrower domain, weakening its influence on daily life and eroding the community's moral foundation, leading to ethical decay and the collapse of once-regulated social structures. This moral decline challenges cultural identity and impedes social progress (Zongte 101–107). He proposes a reinterpretation of Christianity through an indigenous lens, aiming to reconcile it with Mizo cultural values and traditions (182).

The discourse on post-colonial Mizo identity, however, often neglects the foundational pre-colonial collectivist identity that has been supposedly displaced during the colonial era. This chapter addresses this oversight, positing that the pre-colonial Mizo society's collectivist nature shaped a corresponding collectivist identity that persisted despite colonial disruptions. Re-examining postcolonial arguments of cultural displacement through a collectivist lens highlights the resilience of the Mizo collectivist identity, emphasizing the necessity of integrating the pre-colonial identity into analyses of post-colonial Mizo cultural identity.

Francis Fukuyama traces the origins of modern Western individualism to the Reformation, particularly the theological doctrins of Martin Luther. Luther's emphasis on the personal and private relationship between individuals and God challenged the hierarchical structures of the Church, prioritizing personal agency and convictions over traditional collective norms. Fukuyama argues that this theological framework laid the foundation for individualistic values in the West, which were later secularized and refined by thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant (Fukuyama, Identity 29–39). Christianity, therefore, played a pivotal role in shaping the concept of individualism and its broader cultural and social ramifications.

The emergence of individualism as a hallmark of modernity profoundly influences personal identity and cultural dynamics. Geert Hofstede highlights modernity's defining traits, including the prominence of the nuclear family and the transition from "tradition-directed" to "inner-directed" types, emphasizing individualistic goals in societies undergoing growth. Modernity also involves a shift from *Gemeinschaft* (community-oriented) to *Gesellschaft* (society-oriented) entities, prioritizing instrumental goals over shared beliefs. This transition, driven by factors such as state formation, scientific progress, and commercialization, reflects a broader social movement from collectivism to individualism (210–211).

Individualism and collectivism, as cultural syndromes, shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. Collectivist cultures discourage critical-thinking, emphasize interdependence, prioritizing group goals over individual interests and fostering harmony through adherence to social norms. Identity is derived from group

affiliations, with conflict resolution viewed positively. In contrast, individualistic cultures prioritize autonomy and self-expression, encouraging critical inquiry and questioning social norms, with individuals perceiving themselves as distinct from collective identities (Triandis 43–44).

Contrary to the notion of cultural homogenization, modernity does not uniformly replace traditional values with standardized ones. Societies often retain unique identities despite economic and technological advancements. While modernity generally shifts social orders from collectivism to individualism, this transition is not universally fixed but influenced by cultural, historical, and economic factors. Societies may preserve collective values, blend traditional and modern elements, or navigate a spectrum between the two. These orientations profoundly shape social norms, individual self-concepts, and the dynamics of identity and interaction (Triandis 210).

In the Mizo community, Christianity, often regarded as a catalyst for modernization, has not precipitated a shift from collectivist to individualistic norms. The collectivist ethos of pre-colonial Mizo identity, prioritizing the collective over the individual, remains deeply embedded in post-colonial society. While younger generations may exhibit slightly less collectivistic tendencies, cultural norms remain robust, particularly among older adults. This enduring collectivist orientation is reflected in the widespread participation in community-based organizations (CBOs) such as the Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo Upa Pawl (MUP), and Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), which embody and perpetuate collective values and attitudes (Lalkhawngaihi and Fente 205–206).

Church-based groups and other CBOs significantly shape individual behaviour and social life, reinforcing the collectivist identity and cultural ethos of Mizo society. These organizations underscore the community's commitment to collective norms, shaping both its social fabric and individual conduct. Contrary to assertions of cultural rupture in post-colonial Mizo society, the persistent collectivist ethos from the pre-colonial era challenges the perceived link between cultural dislocation and moral decay. Despite adopting the Christian demarcation of the sacred and the secular, Mizo

society remains predominantly collectivistic, distinctly separate from the individualism associated with the Western Reformation Movement and modernity.

External forces such as colonialism, Christianity, and formal education initially initiated morphogenic processes that disrupted traditional Mizo cultural norms. Christianity, in particular, initially promoted individualism and new social structures that bypassed traditional kinship ties, creating new hierarchies and power dynamics. Yet, morphostatic forces within Mizo society ensured cultural stability. Physical churches became centers of collective worship, socialization, and community activities, reinforcing social cohesion. Additionally, Christianity underwent indigenization through Christian spiritual revival movements in 1913–1915, 1919–1923, and the 1930s onward, which integrated Mizo cultural elements into Christian practices. This included the use of traditional gongs, indigenous melodies in hymns, and dancing during worship. The *Puma Zai* movement further supported Christianity's spread in Mizoram (Pachuau 131).

According to Lalsangkima Pachuau, Christianity penetrated the Mizo community primarily through revival movements, which simultaneously indigenized the faith. He observes that these movements allowed Christianity to reshape Mizo cultural norms and values, transforming it into a defining element of the society's normative structure. However, this process was reciprocal; Christianity itself adapted to the Mizo cultural ethos, becoming indigenized (173). He further asserts that "the spontaneous inculturation of the Gospel through the revival movements helped the people to maintain their selfhood in the face of modernity's onslaught. Hence, Christianity not only smoothes out the transition but also integrated the people's tradition with modernity" (173).

Thus, the Christian revival movements were pivotal in integrating Christianity into Mizo culture. These movements strategically reconciled previously incompatible elements by reincorporating traditional socio-cultural symbols into Christian practices, thereby preserving cultural stability amid external influences. This process mitigated the risk of cultural fragmentation and individualisation, instead aligning Christianity with existing semiotic codes to reinforce the collectivistic ethos of Mizo society.

Consequently, rather than promoting individualised identity, Christianity and modernity became integral supports for the Mizo collectivist identity.

Therefore, the extent to which the post-colonial Mizo identity is distinct from its pre-colonial roots is inherently ambivalent. While Mizo collectivistic cultural identity persists as a core feature, colonial influences, particularly through the introduction of Christianity and modernity, have catalysed significant qualitative transformations. In this sense, the post-colonial Mizo cultural identity becomes a process of negotiation, exchange, and reconstitution; a hybrid identity that disrupts the purity of cultural boundaries, producing forms that are neither fully rooted in traditional nor colonial paradigms but exist within a liminal space where elements of both coalesce and transform.

This liminality reflects a state of "ambivalence", a term that Homi Bhabha employs to describe the coexistence of contradiction and fluidity in cultural identity (Huddart 4). For the Mizos, this ambivalence manifests in the seamless integration of pre-colonial elements of Mizo identity with the sociopolitical and religious structures introduced during colonial and post-colonial periods. These hybrid forms are not static; they are dynamic reconfigurations that continually navigate between collectivist traditions and the individualised ethos associated with modernity.

The resultant identity resists binary oppositions, such as traditional versus modern, and embraces a complex, fluid configuration. While this hybridity is diagnosed as a disruptive crisis, it functions as a Derridian *pharmakon*— "a dual poison and remedy" (Kakoliris 225). This very hybridity acts as a stabilising force, allowing the Mizos to adapt to the demands of modernity while preserving cultural cohesion. Thus, defying simplistic categorisation, this *pharmakonic* identity transcends the binary logic of modernity, navigating the complexities of contemporary culture.

Chapter Five - Conclusion

Chapter Five, titled "Conclusion" sums up the findings of the previous chapters. Identity is shaped through the dynamic interplay of individuals and discursive practices within specific spatiotemporal contexts, often influenced by

functional necessities. The Mizo community's ethno-symbolic configuration predominantly embodies a collective identity, evident in its intricate folkloric traditions. Rooted in *tlawmngaihna*, an ethico-moral framework prioritizing collective well-being, this collective ethos is a functional outcome of their metaphysical outlook. This pre-colonial collective identity not only endures but also transforms in the post-colonial era, seamlessly integrating Christianity and modernity through morphostatic processes. As a result, the Mizo identity emerges as a nuanced hybrid, blending traditional pre-colonial and contemporary elements into a coherent whole.

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