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Bal, E.W.; Siraj, N.

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"We are the True Citizens of This Country"

Vernacularisation of Democracy and Exclusion of Minorities in the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh

Ellen Bal
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Nasrin Siraj
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Abstract

Democracy has generally been understood the best remedy to prevent societal violence, as it gives different groups a channel to voice their interests and grievances. However, in this article, that focuses on the Chittagong Hills, which for many decades has formed one of the most violent spaces in Bangladesh, we argue that, in reality, democracy and violence can be two sides of the same coin. This is not to say that in Bangladesh, where full liberal democracy is not in place, ordinary citizens have no values and idea(l)s of democracy and citizenship. On the contrary, in order to make sense of the intricate connection between democratic idea(l)s, and violent imaginations and practices, we focus in particular on the process of what we call the vernacularisation of democratic politics. We connect this process to the appropriation of citizenship and nationalism, by ordinary but radically differently-positioned people, in their daily realities. We demonstrate that widely shared imaginations of Bangladeshi-ness, as Bengali-ness or Muslim-ness, and of Bengalis/Muslims as the true nation and citizens of Bangladesh, are intimately connected with popular understandings and practices of democracy, which are based on the exclusion of the not-genuine-Bengalis, with the legitimisation and continuation of violence, and the exclusion of ethnic minorities in the Chittagong Hills.

Keywords

democracy – citizenship – nationalism – violence – the Chittagong Hills – Bangladesh – South Asia

Introduction

"Democracy, *gaṇatantra*,[1] means that the opinion, ideology, hope and desire of the common people are reflected in the ruling process, and that the rulers are elected by the common people." This is what Ansar Ali, one of our key respondents, shared with us during a conversation about what democracy means to him, while he was living in the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh.[2] We first met Ansar Ali in a tea stall, in a poor Bengali neighbourhood of a district town of the Hills. The neighbourhood was constructed by the army in 1986, to settle poor and landless Bengalis who had come to the hills as part of a huge population relocation scheme, carried out by the government between 1979 and 1985. This particular "cluster village"[3] was established in the aftermath of a coordinated armed strike against Bengali immigrants by the political-military resistance of the Hills' indigenous peoples. Like in other parts of the Hills, the Bengalis in this particular neighbourhood form a heterogeneous crowd not only because they hail from various parts of Bangladesh, but also because of their diverse socio-economic statuses and networks, differences in migration conditions and the corresponding rights to and restrictions from state services and social privileges, and variations in age and gender profiles (cf. Vertovec, 2007; see also Siraj and Bal 2017).

The tea stall, a dark and shabby place, breathing poverty, was run by a woman, whose husband was a day labourer, like most of his neighbours, who either found precarious work on construction sites, in market places, driving scooter-taxis, or pulling tricycles or rickshaw-vans. Ansar Ali, however, was among the privileged ones living in the neighbourhood. He could attend school, avoid jobs that involved heavy labour, and build networks with powerful locals, since his father was brought into the Hills with a salaried job as an Islamic religious leader of a local mosque. Ansar Ali was called on in order to respond to us by the tea-stall owner woman and her friends, who themselves

1 For helping us in transliteration and translation of Bengali terms, we thank Carmen Brandt.

2 In this article, the Chittagong Hills will be referred to as the Hills.

3 Cluster village is a state-scheme in Bangladesh utilised to control the migration of uprooted peasants, by resettling and creating employment through new agricultural resources, in areas that are classified as peripheral (e.g., a newly-emerged silt-bank [*char* in Bengali], the Hills, etc.). The programme has been undertaken since the emergence of the country in 1971. By 1988, the scheme had been implemented in almost all corners of the country, albeit without much success and resulting in violent local conflicts over land. Source: http://www.guchhogram.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=463&Itemid=482 and http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6ab2594.html. Retrieved on 16/3/2017.

were caught between feelings of anxiety and curiosity about inquisitive outsiders. We assumed they also asked him because of his involvement with the ruling party of Bangladesh, as well as his popularity as an educated person.

In this article, based on the vicissitudes of people like Ansar Ali, we focus on the intricate connections between popular notions of democracy and citizenship, and the practice of violence in the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh, which for many decades have constituted one of the most violent spaces in the country. Even though Bengali Muslims now form the majority population in the Hills, the minorities (non-Muslims and non-Bengalis) comprised the overwhelming majority in this hilly part of the country until one or two decades ago.[4] The post-colonial history of the Hills has been marked by a process identified as "creeping genocide": The slow but systemic, large-scale physical elimination of the local, indigenous population as part of the ongoing attempt by the state to bring the region under its direct control, and to monopolise resource extraction (Levene, 1999). The state enforced its grip on the Hills by the excessive deployment of military forces, resettling approximately 400,000 Bengalis in the region between 1979 and 1985, and condoning further Bengali migration into the Hills until the present day. From the mid-1970s until 1997, the armed wing of the indigenous peoples' political party (PCJSS) engaged in a low-intensity guerrilla war in response to these state violations of the region's autonomy (e.g., IWGIA, 2012). The war came to an official end in 1997, when the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord was signed by the government and the local resistance.

The accord of 1997 raised high hopes amongst many as a means to end the violence and the exclusion of the minorities in the Hills because, unlike several similar attempts in the past, this one was brokered by a democratically-elected coalition government. Yet, many Bangladeshis, and supporters and activists of nationalist and Islamist political parties in particular, have deemed the accord undemocratic and unconstitutional. They consider the Hills as an integral part of their national territory, and oppose any form of autonomy or special provisions for the Hills' indigenous population. The accord has, therefore, remained a bone of contention in both national and local politics, and political debates, and there has been little progress in its implementation (Rashiduzzaman, 1998:653–654). The participation of indigenous peoples in the administration and decision-making processes has remained negligible, the presence of the

4 Twelve relatively different cultural and linguistic groups are commonly distinguished in the Hills: Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tonchengya, Sak, Khyang, Bawm, Pangkhua, Mru, Mrung/Riang, Khumi and Lushai (van Schendel, 1992).

army in the region has continued, and murders of and incidents of bodily harm to political opposition activists have increased (Jamil and Pandey, 2008:472). Several scholars, (inter)national organisations and the media frequently report on incidents of indigenous peoples' land being snatched away in which the Bengali perpetrators (both influential elites who are non-residents of the Hills, and state-sponsored or self-driven immigrants) are often found to have manipulated deals using their alliances with administrative and political power holders, as well as implementing means of sheer force and terrorisation, in order to achieve these "land grabs" (Adnan and Dastidar, 2011; Adnan, 2004; ACHR, 2010; Amnesty International, 2013).

Bangladesh is often referred to as an "illiberal democracy" (Lewis, 2011:76), or a "fragile democracy" (D'Costa, 2011:139). These labels suggest the inability of the state to govern or provide basic law and order for its citizens, and creates the impression of the absence of a sound investment climate for national and international capital. Such a conceptualisation, however, "is one of a culture in which something is *absent*, and the study of what is *present* is neglected" (Salman: 2004:855). Among ordinary Bangladeshi citizens there is indeed a widely-shared sense that they have been either oppressed or abandoned by the government. Day-to-day reality includes recurring processes of dispossession and dislocation in favour of the state, rich landowners and large (transnational) business corporations (Adnan and Dastidar, 2011; Adnan, 2013). This *de facto* absence of a functional liberal democracy and equal citizenship rights for all Bangladeshis, however, does not mean that ordinary citizens have no idea(l)s of democracy. Rather, we presume that modern discourse, with its assumptions about humans as rational beings, often does not adequately conceptualise how local imageries of democracy mix with persuasive appeals of ethno-nationalist rhetoric, in constituting political discourses, passion and rationality, for people caught up in the everyday attempts to sustain themselves and to improve their lot (cf. Bowman, 1994).

In this article, we will show that (the legitimisation of) ongoing exclusion and violence in the Hills is not so much an expression of a lack of democratic values and ideals, but rather the result of very particular understandings of democracy and citizenship. These idea(l)s of democracy and citizenship are not merely based upon ideas that "power should be exercised by the people", but also on implicit notions that minorities are excluded from "the people" and do not count as (equal) citizens (cf. Mann, 2004; Panizza, 2005; Bowman, 1994, 2001, 2005). In order to make sense of the intricate connection between such exclusive democratic idea(l)s and violent practices, we focus in particular on "the process of vernacularisation of democratic politics", meaning "the ways in which values and practices of democracy become embedded in particular

cultural and social practices, and in the process become entrenched in the consciousness of ordinary people" (Michelutti, 2007:639; for a similar argument, see also Salman, 2004:855, 2006:164, 2015:110; Spencer, 2007). We will connect this process of vernacularisation of democracy to the vernacularisation of citizenship and nationalism. We will show that widely shared imaginations of Bangladeshi-ness, as Bengali-ness or Muslim-ness, and of Bengalis/Muslims as "the people", true nation or real citizens of Bangladesh, are intimately connected with popular understandings and practices of democracy and with the legitimisation of violence and exclusion of minorities in the Hills. Throughout the article, we will argue that in the context of Bangladesh, democracy and violence indeed constitute two sides of the same coin, as it often is imagined and articulated as democracy for *us*, but not for *all* (cf. Salman, 2015; see also Gerharz and Pfaff-Czarnecka, Feldman, Hölzle and Guhathakurta in this special issue).

The Tricky Relationship between Democracy and Violence

Many scholars of democracy and democratisation have focused on the complex relationship between democracy and violence. Some researchers have limited their investigation to Western, well-established, liberal democracies and their concomitant political challenges. In these studies, violence is assumed to constitute "the greatest enemy of democracy" (Keane, 2004:1). They approach democracy as a process, which seeks "to replace violent confrontation by debate and discussion, aspiring to the peaceful reconciliation of the conflict and difference" (Schwarzmantel, 2010:220). Scholars in this field do not problematise the practices and means of violence by democratic states, as these are considered legitimate. They expect that illegitimate violence will ultimately be eradicated all together. In this approach, violence is simply conceptualised as the "use or threat of physical force to achieve political ends", stemming not from within, but from outside of the democratic political system, by actors which might include religious groups, communist movements or fascists; i.e., individuals and groups who are excluded from the "normal" political process, and who protest against nationalist oppression (Schwarzmantel, 2011:5–6).

For the purpose of our study, we found approaches that challenge the very enigmatic nature of modern democracy more elucidating. Mouffe (1999, 2000), for instance, argues that there is no essential relation between the logics of a democratic framework and an individualistic, universalistic and rationalistic one. On the contrary, this link is only a "contingent articulation" (p. 3), which is realised "under the hegemony of neo-liberalism" (p. 5). The main shortcoming

of such a liberal conceptualisation of democracy is that it does not recognise "the political in its antagonistic dimension, and the concomitant incapacity to grasp the central role of passion in the constitution of collective identities" (Mouffe 2005:51). Such a take on democracy compels us to appreciate that liberal logics are not essential parts of democracy, on the contrary, they are evidently increasing the moralisation of political discourses (e.g., "good governance" *vs*. "evil extreme rights"). Since there is no democratic politics without an us/them discrimination, we should adopt a theoretical framework in order to comprehend all the political adversaries and their links with violence.

The democratic construction of the imagined "us", and the exclusion of the "other", encouraging violence against minorities, has been addressed by many social scientists. Mann (2004), for instance, investigates the factors causing "murderous ethnic cleansing" in many parts of the world, and warns that "democracy has always carried with it the possibility that the majority might tyrannise minorities", while pointing out that this possibility carries with it more worrying costs in situations where the majority is formed by a single ethnic group (p. 2). This is because, he elaborates, in a modern understanding of democracy as "of rule by the people", the meaning of "the people" (as referred to by the Greek term "demos"), has come to entwine with those of "nation" or an ethnic group (as referred to by another Greek term "ethnos"). Since, in modern times, the nation-state is supposed to be ruled by its nation, the organic meaning of "the people" can outweigh the kind of citizen diversity that is central to democracy. Panizza (2005) goes one step farther, and provides a tool to analyse the construction of "the people" and its "other", while emphasising that the meaning of "the people" has to be considered unfixed or inessential. He deals with populism, which according to him is a mode of identification that seeks to bridge the gap between representatives and the represented in the name of "the people", and argues that the recent emergence of populism in the modern political landscape indicates, if not a total failure, then at least a crisis of representation of "the people" in government.

In other words, collective violence could be explained as a "heightened and intensified continuation of normal politics" (Spencer, 2007:120). In our research, which focuses on the ways in which "us" and "them" are being constructed in the Hills to claim equal access to politics, violence is conceived not as mere "instrumental behaviour" (cf. Schröder and Schmidt, 2001:3), but rather as a force. It not only violates, pollutes or destroys already existing entities, but also creates integrities and identities that are consequently subjected to those forms of violence that seek victims (Bowman, 2001:27, 42). That is to say, violence plays a constitutive role in the formation of nationalist identities against perceived antagonisms, even when such antagonisms are incommen-

surate (Bowman, 2005:141–142). While following this line, in the next section we attempt to describe how idea(l)s and practices of democracy and violence together have constituted the political environment of Bangladesh since its emergence as an independent nation-state.

State against the People

The relatively short history of democracy in Bangladesh has been tumultuous and volatile. In December 1971, Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign nation-state based on the popular democratic notion of inclusion of the people in state-governing system. The bloody nine-month war of independence or liberation (from March to December 1971) was a consequence of the rejection of national election results by the Pakistani central government and the genocide of aggrieved citizens by the state army. The new state of Bangladesh declared itself a "people's republic", with a parliamentary system and adopted a constitution "that asserted that the republic was based on the principles of "nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism" (van Schendel, 2009:176). However, it soon became clear that the promises of democracy would not be delivered. The country's first President, and later Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, refused to form a national, coalition government and formed an Awami League government instead. Mujib and his party members quickly began to place their own interests before those of the state and engaged in the "politics of patronage", a practice that still characterises contemporary Bangladeshi politics (van Schendel, 2009:178). Moreover, the first democratic elections (in 1973) turned out to be somewhat less than democratic and were marked by fraud and violence. By the end of 1974, the government had declared a state of emergency and, in 1975, parliamentary democracy was turned into a single-party presidential system. A few months later, Mujib and more than 40 of his family members were assassinated during a coup by members of the military. Bangladesh's dream of democracy had been short-lived.

What followed was a series of military coups, a political system effectively dominated by military control (gradually legitimised through civilianisation, elections and party building), and the expansion and political-empowerment of the neo-bourgeois class via neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes (Kukreja, 1991, 2008; Muhammad, 2011). In 1990, after years of public protests—revealing a strong desire for citizenship rights and democracy amongst Bangladeshi citizens—the dictatorship of General Ershad was finally overturned and a parliamentary system reintroduced. Although in name a multi-party, pluralist democracy, Bangladesh's democratic quality has continued to be highly

contentious and feeble. The military have continued to occupy a privileged position (Kukreja, 2008; IWGIA, 2012), and almost all sectors in society are affected by the presence of criminal syndicates, who often link up with political forces (Muhammad, 2014). Bureaucracy promotes the agenda of politicians and the interests of political and public functionaries, and business firms are intimately connected with the army. Politicians are dependent on business houses for funding, on student and labour fronts for muscle power, and the absence of democratic processes within political parties has made them dependent on individuals and families (Barman et al., 2001).

State-Making in the Chittagong Hills

While Bangladesh has utilised both legal and illegal means to exclude "the people" from political-decision making, in the Chittagong Hills these processes of exclusion have been particularly violent. At the same time, different states have approached the Hills in different ways. Until the British annexation of the Hills in the 1860s, it was inhabited by a "bewildering variety of people speaking a wide range of languages, adhering to various creeds, and organised socially in different ways" (van Schendel, 1992:96). These hill dwellers were well connected with the wider world, through extensive networks of trade and tribute across the states of Arakan, Tripura and Bengal. The British colonial government secured the available resources in the Hills through a policy of exclusion. The Chittagong Hill Tracts regulation of 1900 and the Government of India Act of 1935 declared the Hills an excluded area, and hill and lowland dwellers who became separated as the result of this re-zoning began to develop increasingly antagonistic identities (i.e., indigenous peoples *vs*. Muslim Bengalis) (van Schendel, 1992:96).

After the independence and partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the Government of Pakistan changed its approach to the minority-inhabited regions within its national borders and secured its access to land and resources through the forceful inclusion of the "tribal lands" into the state (Chakma, 1998; Mohsin, 2002; Bal, 2007). Hegemonic notions of national identity, on the other hand, were far from inclusive. They were based on exclusive imaginations of the nation as Islamic, facilitating and legitimising the (violent) marginalisation of those citizens who did not fit into the hegemonic imaginations of the nation (Mohsin, 2002; Bleie, 2005; Bal, 2007). In 1959, the Pakistani Government officially abolished the special status of the Hills as an "excluded area" and changed it to a "tribal area" by a constitutional act, thereby ending the different protective mechanisms for so-called "tribal populations". This weakened the power of

the traditional leaders, who had been in charge of implementing the revenue-collection system at the local level. To meet the increased demand for electricity in industrial zones and urban areas, the government also embarked on the construction of a huge dam project at the Karnaphuli, commonly known as the Kaptai Hydroelectric Project, in the early 1960s. The dam created an upstream reservoir of 650 km^2, causing the inundation of almost 40% of all cultivable land in the Hills, and the subsequent large-scale displacement and exodus of approximately 100,000 people across the border to India and Burma/Myanmar (Thapa and Rasul, 2006:447; van Schendel et al., 2000:203–206; Panday and Jamil, 2009:1055).

The birth of Bangladesh in 1971, which was to constitute a secular democracy, offered a window of opportunity for safeguarding citizenship rights, including those of minorities. The constitution, however, denied the fact that Bangladesh constituted an ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse society, and embraced a homogenous notion of the nation. Article 9 stated that: "The unity and solidarity of the Bengali nation, which deriving its identity from its language and culture, attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle of the war of independence, shall be the basis for Bengali nationalism" (The Constitution of Bangladesh). Article 6 (Part I), amended in 1977, declared that "all citizens of Bangladesh should be known as Bengalis". Minorities would have no place unless assimilated, and no special attention was given to their specific requirements and needs (see also Mohsin, 2002:60).

The rejection of constitutional recognition of the inhabitants of the Hills as distinct ethnic communities and the many years of political, economic and social marginalisation led the *Śānti Bāhinī* (literally, "Peace Army"), the armed wing of the *Pārbatya Caṭṭagrām Janasaṃhati Samiti* (literally, "United People's Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts", in short PCJSS) to initiate a low-intensity guerrilla war against the Government of Bangladesh. The war began after 1975, when the founding leader of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was assassinated by military personnel, and a military regime took power in a *coup d'état*. As soon as the insurgents took up arms, the Government of Bangladesh militarised the region by deploying 115,000 militaries—one soldier for every six local residents (Levene, 1999:354). Attacks on local villages, massacres, torture and disappearances became almost routine occurrences (Chakma, 2010:20).

The war intensified during the 1980s when the Government of Bangladesh implemented another strategy to take control of the Hills. From 1979 until 1985, the state relocated approximately 400,000 Bengali (mostly Muslims) in the Hills, under a single population relocation scheme (Adnan and Dastidar, 2011:42). This Government transmigration programme was formally known as

"settlement of landless non-tribal families in CHT" (Government of Bangladesh, 1980). The settlement policy was justified on the grounds that the Hills constitutes almost 10% of the land surface of the country and yet houses just 1% of the population (Huq, 2000; Mohsin, 2002; Chaudhury, 1991).[5] Many critical commentators believe that the real motive of the government was to "colonise" the Hills, by bringing about a demographic shift (Mohsin, 2002; Dewan, 1990; Burger and Whittaker, 1984). Other state initiatives, which were undertaken in the name of development, are also said to have marginalised ethnic minorities in the Hills from their land. The benefits of any resource allocations were distributed directly to Bengali immigrants, turning local minority people into refugees, and instilling in them an acute feeling of alienation from successive Bengali ruling regimes (Mohsin, 2002; Mey, 1984).

The population relocation programme has drastically altered the demographic make-up of the Hills. In 1951, Bengalis accounted for only 9% of the population. By 1974, they constituted approximately 26%, and by 1981, their presence had increased to 41% of the entire hill population (Adnan, 2004:57). Newly-arriving Bengali migrants, commonly referred to as "settlers", allegedly became involved in large-scale illegal occupation of the lands held by the indigenous populations, whose communal land rights had been denied by the state since the British colonial enclosure. Bengali newcomers who could not be accommodated on arable lands, due to the continuing armed resistance by the PCJSS, had to be relocated in "cluster villages", usually next to a military camp where they also served as a protective shield for the military (Adnan, 2004; Adnan and Dastidar, 2011; CHTC, 1991, 1994, 1997).

Violence since the Peace Accord

The war in the Hills came to an official end when the government signed a Peace Accord in 1997 with the PCJSS, the only political party of the indigenous peoples in the Hills at that time. Although attracting criticism from various sides, the accord recognised the special status of the Hills as a "tribal inhabited area", and provided for the demilitarisation of the region, the rehabilitation of

5 Bangladesh has always been considered one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The country is ranked as the seventh or eighth most populous country in the world (van Schendel, 2007). The current population is estimated to be 160 million, amounting to 1,200 people per km^2. The Chittagong Hills, which covers one tenth of the country, is populated by 1.1% of the total population (1,598,231 people) (CHT Development Board; BBS, 2011).

former PCJSS fighters, the relocation of displaced people, the establishment of a Land Disputes Commission, and the formation of a Hills' Regional Council (RC) and a Ministry of Hills' Affairs. Yet, the non-implementation of the Accord in substantial ways, is still a major bone of contention (Roy et al., 2007:9; Rashiduzzaman, 1998). For example, since the Accord, civilian control has officially been re-established (Barman et al., 2001:52). In practice, however, army control has not ended. Although the accord stated that all temporary army camps, *Ansars* (literally, "helpers"—the paramilitary force of the state), and the Village Defence Force (VDP) would withdraw from the region, one third of all Bangladesh armed forces are still deployed in the Hills, implying a *de facto* military rule of the area (cf. IWGIA, 2012; see also Jamil and Panday, 2008:474). It is widely recognised that Bangladeshi armed forces are either directly or indirectly implicated in violent attacks against the local indigenous population and in land-grabbing activities (e.g., Chakma, 2010; Jamil and Panday, 2008:474; Adnan and Dastidar, 2011).

International, national and local human rights organisations frequently report on violations of human rights, atrocities committed against local minority populations and illegal land occupations by Bengalis. Army involvement, in one way or the other, also forms part of these reports. Moreover, the Accord has not resolved the complicated land issues that arose before and during the conflict. The framework that was provided by the Accord has not been implemented, the influence of local representatives is diminishing, and the demographic composition is in reverse. The state does not recognise collective land ownership under the control of traditional chiefs, the *rājās* (kings) and the *kārbāris* (village leaders), and has reallocated large parts of so-called *khās* land (government-owned land) to Bengali migrants.

Notwithstanding the obvious involvement of the state in local conflicts and suppression in the Hills, both media and government accounts on recent violence often frame conflicts primarily as ethnic-intrinsically grounded in the bipolar cultural constitution of the present populations (Bengali settlers *vs.* local, indigenous, hill dwellers). At the same time, however, it is clear that hegemonic discourses on democracy, citizenship and nation are indeed influencing local people's perception of self and other, feeding (on) violent encounters between Bengalis and hill-dweller ethnic minorities, and processes of exclusion, marginalisation and violence.

People against People

According to the 2011 census, the total population of the Hills is 1,598,231, constituting almost 1% of the entire population of Bangladesh. The census reveals that Bengalis constitute almost 51% of the total population in the Hills. The background of these Bengalis in the Hills is complex and multi-faceted. As pointed out before, the first mass-migration of plains people into the Hills was government-instigated, and clearly intended as an instrument for internal state-making or "colonisation" (cf. Li, 2005:367). Settlers were allotted small plots of land, small sums of money and rations. In exchange for this, so we were told, they had to clear the jungle. According to Adnan and Dastidar (2011:xxii), 30–50% of the settlers who arrived through the transmigration programme were reported to have left within a few years. They were replaced by migrants from various parts of Bangladesh, but mostly from nearby districts that adjoined the Hills.

Only after the end of military rule in Bangladesh in 1990 were independent national and international human rights advocates able to visit the Hills to investigate the violence that had occurred during the 1980s. These reports reveal evidence that during that time countless lives were lost amongst the ethnic minorities,[6] as well as Bengali immigrants,[7] although it appears as if investigators had almost no access to Bengali communities. Nevertheless, their reports made clear that ethnic minorities in the Hills had been suffering from severe acts of exclusion (from dominant imaginations of the nation and as

6 For example, in 1980, approximately 50–300 hill-people were killed by state armed forces in Betbunia police station in the Hills (CHT Commission, 1991:16). In 1981, violent outbursts in Matiranga police station resulted in the emigration of 25,000 *Pāhāŕis* to India. In 1984, another 6,000–7,000 *Pāhāŕis* took refuge in Mizoram state in India. By 1991, the total number of refugees in India was estimated at nearly 56,000 (CHT Commission, 1991:17–19).

7 During our field research, many Bengali immigrants mentioned that a total of 30,000 people were killed by *Śānti Bāhini* raids during the 1980s, but it was clear that this number is, in fact, an exaggeration aimed to manipulate researchers' emotions in favour of Bengali immigrants. We conducted a number of interviews with victims and witnesses of violence conducted by *Śānti Bāhini*. Instead of numbers, in these interviews our interlocutors emphasised more the horrible nature of the violence (e.g., indiscriminate brush fires, the slashing of throats and bellies—particularly of women and children—and setting fire to houses that had been locked from the outside). However, what we found more alarming is that instead of through raids by the rebels, many Bengali immigrants' lives were lost because of malaria and water-borne diseases; newcomers were unaware of clean water sources and deadly mosquitoes in their new neighbourhoods in the Hills. One group of respondents estimated that at least one third of their fellow immigrants had indeed died because of fever and dysentery.

equal citizens), oppression and violence carried out by state representatives such as the army, border security forces, police, *Ansar* and the VDP, resulting in a massive exodus to neighbouring countries like India and Myanmar. It has been sufficiently documented that Bengali migrants (particularly Muslim men) were indeed assisting state forces during attacks on ethnic minorities' villages (Mohsin, 2002; CHTC, 1991, 1994, 1997). The violence against Bengali migrants by the armed ethnic minorities has remained under-researched and poorly documented. We need to acknowledge the violence against poor Bengali immigrants by the armed force of PCJSS, who carried out several raids on villages of newly-arrived Bengalis in order to discourage them from settling down in the Hills and to leave out of fear.[8] Such acknowledgement is an essential element in a critical approach of the (otherwise too simplistic) framing of the conflict in the Hills as a conflict between ethnic minorities/passive victims and Bengali migrants/aggressive perpetrators. Our research shows that many of the contemporary confrontations between Bengalis and ethnic minorities have their roots in the violent encounters that took place in the 1980s, which have led to the further articulation of ethnic identities and animosities.

Whose Democracy and Whose Citizenship?

In the previous sections, we demonstrated that the Bangladeshi armed forces and the civil administration have continued to play a key role in the continuation of violence (through the marginalisation and the outnumbering of the local ethnic minorities) in the Hills, as part of their long-standing state-making project. Yet, in our view, two issues in particular need to be taken into account when seeking explanations for the acceptance and legitimisation of the violence against the Hills' minorities: (1) the pervasive notions of autochthony and alterity, amongst both indigenous people and "newcomers" in the Hills, and (2) the dominant and widespread conceptualisation of democracy as majoritarian, both amongst Bengali settlers and amongst the hill people themselves.

In this section, we will illustrate, on the basis of extensive ethnographic data, our argument that in the Hills, democracy and violence are not two mutually

8 During our field work, we interviewed an ex-combatant of the *Śānti Bāhini*. He told us that the raids on Bengali immigrant villages were aimed to terrorise the residents so that they would decide to leave the Hills "spontaneously". One Chakma informant also told us that the period of "war" was better, in the sense that it made the Bengalis frightened to migrate to the Hills. According to her, the Peace Accord brought an end to the attacks by *Śānti Bāhini* and encouraged Bengalis to migrate into the Hills even more.

exclusive processes, but, in fact, sustain each other, through deeply-ingrained ideas, such as the notion that democracy is about the voice of the majority, that the nation is equivalent to Bengalis—particularly Muslims, and that minorities are secondary citizens, have no right to claim special rights or treatment, or should not be considered citizens at all.[9] During our research we encountered different explanations for the discordant relationship between Bengalis and *Pāhāṙis* (literally "hill dwellers"; mostly used synonymously with "hill-tribe"), and for the violence inflicted upon ethnic minorities. Our informants rarely mentioned democracy, or a faltering democracy, as a reason for these problematic relations. However, as soon as we touched upon democracy in our conversations, our interlocutors would demonstrate a clear and passionate understanding of what democracy entails or should entail (like Ansar Ali, whose quotation we used in the beginning of this article). The dominant perception pivots on a majoritarian notion of democracy: The majority (or ordinary people) should decide. The nation was commonly equated with Bengalis, and citizenship rights most often also with the rights of Bengalis. In the end, all discussions boiled down to a deep conviction that Bengalis are indigenous to Bangladesh, that minority claims to indigenous rights and special provisions are illegitimate, and that the Bengalis in the Hills are denied equal citizenship rights and, therefore, constitute the true victims of the ethnic conflicts in the Hills. The belief that Bengalis are entitled to equal rights, but not granted these rights, characterised nearly all understandings of self and other amongst our Bengali informants in the Hills. Some Bengalis, like Ansar Ali, would emphasise that *all* Bangladeshis should have equal rights, on the grounds that the term Bangladeshi includes the ethnic minorities. Most others, however, argued against the compensation of non-Bengali minorities in the Hills for their previous losses on the grounds that: (1) minorities had challenged the sovereignty and legitimacy of the state and should be considered traitors rather than victimised citizens; (2) minorities originated from places outside the Bangladeshi territory, and therefore constitute the real newcomers to the region; or (3) minorities constitute inferior human beings who owe their development and civilisation to the presence of civilised Bengalis and, therefore, could not be considered as equal citizens or citizens at all.

9 This section is based on ethnographic field research carried out in Khagrachari town and the surrounding areas. Between February 2012 and September 2014, Ellen and Nasrin paid two field visits together to the town. From August 2013 to September 2014, Nasrin spent one full year in the district town Khagrachari. This article is based largely on her findings.

"We all are Bangladeshis"

Ansar Ali emphasised the relatively long history of migration, and the suffering of Bengalis in the Hills, in order to highlight that here it is indeed the Bengalis and not the minorities that have been excluded. His father, who had come to the neighbourhood as the *imām* (literally "leader") of the temporary army camp's mosque, witnessed the arrival of numerous dead bodies—badly mutilated—brought in from far-away cluster villages. Unidentified, they were buried in a mass grave in this poor neighbourhood. When we asked whether any records had been kept by the mosque or the hospital, Ansar Ali replied that *Pāhāṙis* are good at keeping records and mobilising international support, but that Bengalis were unable to do this. They were illiterate, and had only very recently started building a school.

Ansar Ali underlined that ordinary Bangladeshis have a very clear understanding of democracy:

> They have access to news about the entire country at any moment … like myself … when I hear a news item, I imagine myself in the chair of the president or the prime minister, and think what I would have done if I were them … This awareness … even the observations of a rickshaw puller shows his comprehension of the issue. Now, don't they [the people in power] understand? They do not. Their mind-set, their bourgeois mind-set … the evil circle …

Ordinary citizens, in other words, are sufficiently informed about national and local events to realise that political leaders have no interest in their opinions or needs. At the same time, Ansar Ali himself engages in political activism, and believes that the conflicts in the Hills should indeed be resolved by the leaders of the influential political parties. Before the Peace Accord, local Bengalis had been involved in what Ansar Ali called "district clashes". Political alliances and patronage networks revolved around regional identities. Since the (re)introduction of democracy in 1997, however, local conflicts are being organised along political party lines, i.e., the BNP against the Awami League (the two major traditional political parties of Bangladesh). Despite being an activist for the Awami League, which has increased its support significantly in the Hills since the peace accord, he views the accord as undemocratic, as it ignored the collective interests of Bengali immigrants in the Hills:

> All Bangladeshis should have the right to live and to buy land in all parts of the country. How can *Pāhāṙi* claim an indigenous status? Even if it had been wrong to bring poor and landless Bengalis into the Hills. These same

> Bengalis have now lived in the Hills for three to four generations. They feel the same attachments to the place. Moreover, many of them are displaced people from Rangamati, where both *Pāhāŕi* and Bengalis fell victim to the construction of the Kaptai dam.

In short, Ansar Ali believed that all local inhabitants in the hills, *Pāhāŕi* and Bengalis, have histories of suffering, uprooting and belonging, which entitle all citizens in the Hills to equal citizenship rights. Although Ansar Ali did acknowledge the suffering of minorities and their loss of autonomy, he stressed that Bengalis had suffered too and could now make equal claims on the grounds of their or long-enough belonging to the Hills.

"We are the Real Indigenous People of Bangladesh"

Other interlocutors we interviewed went further in their explanations of citizenship. Not only did they articulate that Bengalis are indigenous to the entire country and that they would, therefore, deny special rights to minorities, some would deny *equal* rights to minorities, on the basis of the belief that it is the minorities who are newcomers.

When we asked our interlocutors whether they felt more secure since the signing of the Peace Accord, they emphasised that they do. They denied that they dislike or hate *Pāhāŕis*, and told us why they believe that the claims of the *Pāhāŕi* resistance movement are not legitimate. *Pāhāŕis*, they explained, are migrants from China, Burma and Tripura who opposed the independence war of 1971, and who, at the time of the India–Pakistan partition, wanted to amalgamate the Hills with India. Some went even further, borrowing from xenophobic and sexist rhetoric to express their view about excluding the minorities. One tea shop owner, for example, suggested that the *Pāhāŕi jāt* (literally a category into which somebody is born [from the Sanskrit *jan* "to be born"]; often used synonymously with "caste", "class", or "race") are descendants of British soldiers and Japanese prostitutes. *Pāhāŕis*, he continued, do not even have a language, and developed their language from the sound of leaves and wind—a view in accordance with the racist idea that Bengalis (including their language) are superior to *Pāhāŕis*.

Several other interviews and informal conversations revealed that amongst our Bengali informants there is no unequivocal understanding of who constitute the *janagaṇa* (the public; common people; the masses, or the citizens [*nāgarik*]) of Bangladesh. "Bangladeshi citizen" turned out to be a highly-contested notion in the Hills, and sometimes excluded the ethnic minorities altogether. Since the emergence of the Bangladeshi nation-state, different regimes have campaigned against the demands for self-determination or

regional autonomy of the Hills, by accusing *Pāhāŕi* activists of threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state. Many informants seem to have adopted and internalised this state-promoted rhetoric. The way in which our respondents phrased their complaints against *Pāhāŕis* included surprising resemblances to state accusations of *Pāhāŕis*, as a threat to the national state and its sovereignty.

We met Muhammad Jamal in one of the Khagrachari slums. Unlike most other slums, which are inhabited by Bengali migrants who arrived on their own account, this neighbourhood is primarily inhabited by Bengalis who arrived under the state's population relocation scheme in the early 1980s. Muhammad Jamal, however, came of his own accord, through his kin network, during the late 1990s. He started his own family by marrying a local Bengali from the same neighbourhood. Like many of the young men there, he was working as a day labourer on construction sites. Sometimes, his connections with some powerful local Bengali political leaders rewarded him with better wages or a better-paid position, such as supplier or overseer. When we asked him to explain the reported unequal treatment of ethnic minorities in the hills by the state, and the aggression of the armed forces towards them, he told us the following:

> … although we are citizens of same country, there is a huge gap between them and us … there is actually another story [behind this division] … once they (the ethnic minorities) indeed wanted to separate this [land] … these three districts Rangamati, Khagrachari, Bandarban … they wanted to turn this place into a separate country and to have a different government [than the rule of Sheikh Hasina, the then Prime Minister of Bangladesh] … They wanted to control or rule it differently … Many years ago, this [dispute] even reached the UN, but there they could not win. [Because of] this failure … they cannot get along with Bengalis … They think: "Once this land belonged to me, I ruled this kingdom. Now, from unknown places, unknown people are settling here" … meaning, they could not accept it (the arrival of Bengali outsiders), although we are accepting them as citizens … But since they are harming us [by organising resistance against the nation-state] the government is taking care of us.

Muhammad Jamal identifies the Hill people as a threat to the sovereign Bangladeshi state. In this perspective, the movement for self-determination and regional autonomy is reduced to an anti-state/terrorist organisation—a risk to the unitary and centralised nation-state of Bangladesh—and state aggression

against *Pāhāŕis* is explained as a response to anti-state hostility. Moreover, if armed state forces are viewed as the legitimate protector of state sovereignty, joining them as an extra force or "foot soldier", to eliminate the (terrorist) threat could be perceived as a heroic act.

In 1982, Abdul Gafur was recruited from an area prone to river erosion as part of the population relocation scheme. Although he complied with the scheme's regional benchmark, his economic status did not exactly fit—he was not entirely landless.[10] His land, however, was affected by river erosion and to supplement his family's income, he was running a small wholesale business in lentils, mustard seeds and wheat flour. His precarious situation encouraged him to sign up for the population relocation programme. When representatives of the local municipality began to recruit people for the programme, Abdul Gafur felt he was about to improve his own conditions, as well as that of his country. He and his fellow migrants were told that an abundance of empty land and a handful of primitive, anti-government rebels were waiting for them. They were also told that their resettlement was meant to tame these rebels. Throughout the interview he described the government (*Sarkar*) basically as the armed forces of the state, without addressing its other apparatuses.

> … the main target of their (the ethnic minorities of the Hills) movement for regional autonomy were armed forces of this country. They (the rebels) killed many army, BDR, police. Finally, [President and army general] Ziaur Rahman realised that they (the government) were not supported by the people in the Hills. The Pakistan army had never received any support from this region either. Then he (President Zia) decided: "Since we are not getting any support from them, let's eliminate them, in order to end the disturbances here." Next, he (Zia) planned to settle Bengalis here. He thought: "If the Bengalis fail to survive here, it will be impossible to maintain this part of the country."

Besides this nationalist discourse based on notions of a unitary, centralised and authoritarian state, including Bengalis (Muslims) as patriots and excluding ethnic minorities of the Hills as traitors, a racist discourse also plays a vital role in separating *us* from *them*, distinguishing proper citizens from inferior citizens or non-citizens.

10 At the time of recruitment, according to him, he had 12 *bigha* (less than 4 acres) of cultivable land, like his five brothers.

When Mohammad Jamal was asked about the basic requirements for becoming a citizen (*nāgarik*: literally "city dweller"; today mostly synonymous with "citizen") in Bangladesh, he answered:

> To become a citizen of Bangladesh, education is necessary, isn't it? You are working according to your educational qualification … the government has given you a certificate … isn't that a proof of citizenship of Bangladesh? But if you do not have a [institutional or government-provided] certificate, and you are living in the jungle like a cow or a goat,[11] is that a sign of citizen …? I don't even consider them human beings … Had the Bengalis not come here, they (the ethnic minorities) would not have met the Bengalis and learned from them. They would have stayed in the jungle. Now they know and understand what is needed to become a Bangladeshi citizen. If the Bengalis had not come here, they would have made no progress.

Mohammad Jamal identifies educational qualifications (which he himself did not possess) as an important indicator for being a citizen, or being one of "us". His identity as Bengali also automatically accounted for his Bangladeshi citizenship. For ethnic minorities, on the other hand, citizenship is continuously under scrutiny and remains ambiguous.

"Our Leaders are our Enemies"

Badshah Mia ran a tea and snack stall. Nasrin was having tea there and steered the discussion towards Bengali–*Pāhāṙi* relations. The following interview fragment also hinges on popular historical and nation-state rhetoric to denounce *Pāhāṙi* activists as traitors of the nation-state and to exclude them (as terrorists) from the imagined Bangladeshi citizens.

> Many people (ethnic minorities) tolerate [Bengalis] out of self-interest or because they do not have other options … but ultimately they envy [*hingsha*] Bengalis much more than the Bengalis envy them … actually, they are afraid of Bengalis … because they face threats from both sides [from Bengali neighbours and from local *Pāhāṙi* parties] … On the one hand, *Pāhāṙis* who want to mix with us, receive threats from the *bhetor* party (literally "the party of the interior"; the term is locally used for the regional polit-

11 The respondent purposely refers to cows and goats, and not tigers or other "heroic" jungle animals, in order to identify the primitive nature of the minorities.

> ical parties who operate from the remote Hills) … So they mix [with the Bengalis], but they carefully balance both sides. The regional *Pāhāṙi* political parties are receiving funding from foreigners (Indian and Burmese rebels). In a similar way, we collaborate with Bengali agents from our country, who tell us to contact them in times of need. They (the ethnic minorities) are controlled by foreigners. They are backed by foreign countries. Even their arms are not made by Bangladeshi government.

At a certain point during the discussion, Badshah Mia came close to including ethnic minorities in his notion of Bangladesh citizens after all, and he expressed the thought that the government also needs to take care of minorities. Then, one of his customers, Nuru Mia, started to protest. Nuru Mia, a fruit vendor and neighbour of Badshah Mia, was taking a rest in the tea shop. He argued that *Pāhāṙis* are in a privileged position and receive a much better share from state institutions than poor Bengali immigrants. Badshah Mia, on the other hand, blamed the state for creating anarchy in the Hills and he accused powerful Bengalis of having vested interests in the chaos. When Nuru Mia asked Badshah Mia about his own experiences as a political leader for the local ruling party, the Awami League, the conversation went as follows:

> **Badsha Mia**: The people who are capable of conducting violence, terror, they have a better bargaining position in the party … I am not capable of doing that. I cannot break your head to get 500 *taka* from you, who earns from selling *kāňcā māl* [fruits and vegetables]. At the most I can beg you for a cup of tea … The government is there for everybody … for Chakmas, Marmas and Santals … if you have four sons and one turns out to be bad, would you abandon him?
>
> **Nuru Mia**: I will not talk with you anymore … tell me what UNDP has given to even one Bengali …?
>
> **Badshah Mia**: The UNDP has started a *samity* [savings group] here for 40 families …
>
> **Nuru Mia**: What are you talking about? … Thousands of *taka* were given to *Pāhāṙis* and not to Bengalis … I don't want to talk with you anymore, you don't know anything.

Upon this the two men confronted Nasrin with an ongoing case concerning a place in the Hills, where Bengalis had been originally allocated land, but had lost that land during the violence in the 1980s. Recently, the court passed a verdict in favour of the Bengalis, who were to get their land back or receive

financial compensation. Nuru Mia was supposed to receive 768,000 *taka*, but received 75,000 instead.

> **Badshah Mia:** Were they (Nuru Mia and other victims) not cheated? Why are they not getting their money? They had to leave that area in 1986, out of fear for attacks by the *Shanti bahini*. Next, the Hill's Development Board occupied the land, to establish a rubber orchard. After the chaos had ended [with the CHT accord in 1997], the Bengalis returned to their land to discover that the development board had grabbed it. They filed a case against the CHTDB, to get their land back. One or two years later, the verdict came and was in favour of them. Then the development board asked the court for time to slowly pay back the money. For example, like this year the board would pay ten people, next year they would pay another ten people … But do you know what the development board did? They began by paying people who had no papers whatsoever. And these leaders made a list keeping the poor people, who did have documents [like Nuru Mia] at the very end of the list. They would be paid later, so they said. People like the Chairman collaborated with those people without papers, but who agreed to give him half of the compensation money.
>
> **Nuru Mia:** In this country, sister, there is no rest for the Bengalis …
>
> **Badshah Mia:** It is not the weakness of the government but of us (the Bengalis) …
>
> **Nuru Mia:** It is the headmen (leaders of indigenous peoples' villages) … they have all the power [and they have collaborated with the Bengali leaders] … What I wanted to say, is that all [Bengali] leaders are our (the poor Bengalis) enemies.

"We Bengalis are not Treated Equally"

Many of our interlocutors shared the above-mentioned understandings that they were deprived from fair access to even the most basic state provisions. Since 1997, many local and international organisations have started to work in the Hills. The Hills are identified as one of the most backward regions of the country, and its inhabitants—both *Pāhāŕis* and Bengalis—are in need of educational facilities, infrastructure, employment, etc. Our research reveals that many of these local development initiatives impact local power relations in unprecedented ways. Abdul Gafur, for example, explained how the CHT Accord had deprived the Bengali migrants in the Hills, or in the entire country for that matter, of equal treatment by the state.

> At the time (i.e., in 1988) I already anticipated that the Bengalis [who had been brought here under the population relocation scheme] would never get their land [that the government had reallocated from the ethnic minorities] back … Later my prediction turned out to be accurate. They (the military regime of General Ershad) told us to leave our plots, saying that the situation would linger on only for eight months … That was in 1988. Now it is 2014. We could never return. This is how our land went out of our hands. This is how Bengalis were denied their rights. All of us (Bengalis and ethnic minorities) belong to the same country, so we should have equal rights. I am also a citizen of Bangladesh. But taking away my rights … one after the other. Another example, not only in the Hills but for the whole country, is the 5% quota, reserved for the ethnic minorities. For obtaining a job [in the public sector] Bengalis need to fulfil educational qualification, intelligence and fitness requirements, but they (ethnic minorities) need not to meet all those … They only need to pass the [preliminary, or entrance] test … This is a total denial of equal rights for all the citizens of Bangladesh … if you visit the banks [in the Hills] … I request you to visit any bank or district commissioner's office … I guess you will find only five persons who are Bengali … among 126 other staff members of that office. In the bank, you will find only one or two Bengalis, the rest are hill people. In this way, approximately 8,000 jobs were provided to them. This is how Bengalis are being denied of their rights and turned into slaves [of the ethnic minorities]. This man [pointing to a Bengali by-stander] is training himself, but he definitely will not get a job … Jobs are reserved for the *upajāti* (literally "sub-nation"; often used synonymously with "tribe"). We are not talking emotionally here, we are providing you logics … Where he would go? To NGOs? He would never get a job in NGOs, because 90% of the NGOs are working for the benefits of *upajāti*. Most probably 5 to 10% of very low-graded jobs are reserved for the Bengalis and 95% jobs of the NGOs are reserved for *upajāti* … This means that even the NGOs are here for them. As well as the government and the administration (the army). Then, for you, the Bengalis, what is left? This is why I conclude that the Bengalis do not have equal rights.

To sum up, this section clearly shows that the popular notions of "we the people" in the Hills are often defined in antagonistic and mutually exclusive categories (Muslim-Bengalis *vs. Pāhāṙis*). We need to understand this process of the making of "us" and "them" through a careful contextualisation of the political environment of Bangladesh, in which a strong feeling prevails that the poor and

powerless citizens are being excluded from state care and political decision-making processes. The excerpts clearly show that the Bengali immigrants in the Hills highly value the idea(l)s of democracy as "the rule of ordinary people". Minorities are often (almost) omitted from this "ordinary us" or "the people", and this exclusion has to do with channelling, or mobilising a precise feeling, of being abandoned and excluded in a constrained political situation.

Conclusions

In Bangladesh (and its predecessor East-Pakistan), hegemonic notions of national identity have been far from inclusive. They have been based on exclusive imaginations of the nation as Bengali or as Muslim, facilitating and legitimising the (violent) marginalisation of non-Bengali minorities. In this article, we have demonstrated that contemporary and popular notions of "the people", the most important ingredient of the idea(l) of democracy, are often defined in antagonistic and mutually exclusive categories (indigenous peoples *vs*. Bengali Muslims). This inclusion/exclusion mechanism cannot be understood without a careful assessment of colonial and post-colonial state-making processes in the Chittagong Hills (or in the entire country for that matter). Moreover, ensuing practices of exclusion and violence—both discursive and physical—in the Hills need to be understood as the outcomes of particular ways of politics and political practices, often framed in terms of majority rights and grounded in notions of Bengali superiority, rather than as the inevitable confrontation between mutually exclusive and hierarchically-ordered primordial categories.

We have also shown that state rhetoric, framing minorities as anti-state and Bengalis as its protagonists, is not only part of the realm of official politics and bureaucracy, but has become deeply engrained into the mind-sets of ordinary people. In this article, we argued that notions of democracy and citizenship, and violence, are mutually constituting of one other. Widespread notions of a majoritarian democracy, based on hegemonic conceptualisations of the nation as ethnically and religiously homogenous, legitimise different forms of human rights violations and marginalisation. A racist imagination of the inferior other has further underpinned the widespread and popular notion of a (partially) exclusionary model of democracy, and allows local and national leadership to mobilise support in favour of the ongoing exploitation of the Chittagong Hills, and the continued migration of Bengalis to the Hills.

In a lawful democracy, the state monopoly of violence is only legitimate when the military and other armed forces are accountable and subordinate to

parliament and the elected government. In Bangladesh, the army and political interests are intimately connected, allowing the army to operate as a (semi-)independent force in the Hills, involving itself in violence, exploitation and the marginalisation of certain segments of society, with active or tacit support from others. In such a context, where democratic rights are fundamentally based on majoritarian rights, minorities are basically left with two options: to demand democracy *for themselves* (thereby excluding Bengalis), or to emulate state tactics and take up arms. Thus far, both strategies have not worked for the minorities in the Hills. Unless the Government of Bangladesh is ready to acknowledge the diverse and heterogeneous background of its nation-state, work towards a national ideology that is inclusive, and protect its citizens against the exploitations they are now often inflicting upon them, the situation of both minorities and Bengalis in the Hills is unlikely to improve in the near future.

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