Introduction

In the cold winter months of 1872, an armed group of headhunters raided a series of tribal villages along the isolated eastern foothills of the Himalayas, a region that would come to be known as the Lushai Hills District. Moving through dense jungles and looting the slain, the raiders left a trail of human carnage in their wake. Two skulls were acquired: one intact, one partly smashed. Following their traditional cultural customs, they cleaned the 'soft parts of the head whilst fresh' before removing the brains and soaking the rest.[1] The trophies would soon join the largest set of human heads in the world – 1,474 skulls – on the order of one of the headhunters' preeminent medicine men: Joseph Barnard Davis of Staffordshire.[2]

Imperial headhunting was rampant across India's northeastern political frontier. In Manipur, British forces removed skulls from villagers' homes. In southern Burma, they took heads from the skeletons of dead prisoners at Insein. In northern Burma, they robbed Karen and Shan cemeteries.[3] Poised to lead a military force into a stateless region east of Hill Tipperah, the English political officer T. H. Lewin wrote to his family in 1867:

> I am girding up my loins at this our farthest frontier post, for the war path, and should circumstances favour my enterprize [sic] I trust to provide for the Ethnological Committee of the Asiatic Society certain Loosai crania and pelves for which they are enraged at present. The fact is that about 1500 Lhoosai Kookies have entered British territory with hostile intent and I am out now on the rampage to prevent their returning – Wish me luck my dears.[4]

[1] B. C. Henderson, 'Notes on the preparation of crania in hot climates, and chiefly applicable to India', *The Medical Times: Journal of Medical Science, Literature, Criticism, and News*, 22 (1850), p. 603 ('soft parts').
[2] Joseph Barnard Davis, *Supplement to Thesaurus Craniorum: Catalogue of the Skulls of the Various Races of Man* (London: Printed for the subscribers, 1875), p. 29.
[3] See William Turner, 'Contributions to the craniology of the people of the Empire of India, part I – The hill tribes of the north-east frontier and the people of Burma', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 22 (1899), pp. 550–2.
[4] Thomas H. Lewin to 'Aunty', 10 January 1867, Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, British Library, London (hereafter BL) Mss Eur C80, p. 1. On Lewin and his writings, see John Whitehead, *Thangliena: The Life of T. H. Lewin* (Gartmore: Kiscadale, 1992).

Heads were hot commodities. A lieutenant records how the 'medicos with us [on the 1871–2 Lushai Expedition] were quite eager for Lushai skulls as any Lushai could have been for theirs; though in the interests of civilization, the Lushais' heads would have reposed in glass cases on velvet cushions probably, while those of our friends would have been elevated on poles exposed to the wind and rain'.[5]

Historians have followed harvested heads into various European and physical anthropological settings, using them to study the production of Western theories about race, the legitimation of imperial rule, and the development of craniological theories themselves.[6] But if we shift our viewpoint to see these upland skulls less as inanimate 'specimens' to be measured and more as *lu ruh* – the most spiritually potent body part of any ancestor – a different perspective on the past emerges. The colonial trade in human skulls takes on new significance when viewed through upland logics of violence.

We can only imagine how the friends, family, and fellow villagers (*khua mi*) of the highland men whose skulls were taken in 1872 came to terms with their violent encounter with these uniformed and little-known *vai* (foreigners).[7]

[5] Robert G. Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition, 1871–1872* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1873), pp. 282–3. Also see Turner, 'Contributions', p. 550. On British forces taking human heads, see Simon Harrison, *Dark Trophies: Hunting and the Enemy Body in Modern War* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), esp. pp. 59–67; and Kim A. Wagner, *The Skull of Alum Bheg: The Life and Death of a Rebel of 1857* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). British troops were even mobilized to salvage the skulls of their own war dead. When Lushais near Rangamati killed a British lieutenant and his party in 1889, a second major military expedition was ordered into the uplands, but this one to retrieve 'the skulls of the Europeans . . . and the skull of the bugler killed near Lungleh'. See John Shakespear, 'Note on the Lushai Hills, its inhabitants, and its administration since 1888', 22 March 1905, Mizoram State Archives, Aizawl, India (hereafter MSA) CB-1, Pol-3, p. 3. Also see R. S. Hutchinson to the Superintendent, South Lushai Hills, 20 February 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 89/2, p. 2; Shakespear, 'Tour diary of the superintendent of the South Lushai Hills for the week ending 2 January 1892', separately bound volume ('Tour diary of Captain John Shakespear', hereafter 'Diary'), MSA office file, p. 1.

[6] See, for example, Colin Perrin and Kay J. Anderson, 'Reframing craniometry: Human exceptionalism and the production of racial knowledge', *Social Identities*, 19.1 (2013), pp. 90–103; Kim A. Wagner, 'Confessions of a skull: Phrenology and colonial knowledge in early nineteenth-century India', *History Workshop Journal*, 69.1 (2010), pp. 27–51; and Elise Juzda, 'The rise and fall of British craniometry, 1860–1939', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2011.

[7] The Mizo term *vai* initially referred to those who lived outside of *zo ram* (meaning the 'highlands' and used here to refer to the upland region inhabited by the *zo-fate*, or children of the *zo*, a broad ethnic classification including an assemblage of subgroups). Those *vai* groups neighboring the region included Burmans and Burmese to the east (*kawlvai* – 'foreigners to the east'), Indic Indians to the west, and other agents of the British Raj. The earliest mission-educated Mizos knew Britain as *vairam* ('land of the *vai*'). As the years progressed, Mizos developed neologisms and greater precision in defining foreignness (a process explored in Chapter 4). White colonial officers came to be called *sap* (after the Hindi *saheb*, meaning 'master' or 'sir'), a term which was to be parsed further into *zosap* to denote foreign missionaries (a term denoting '*sap* of the *zo*' and signaling friendliness). Today, the term *vai* can acquire a more negative connotation, and is widely used to refer to Indic Indians alone (with *vairam*

Rumours swirled across the hills about the foreigners' provenience and intentions.[8] But we do know that the newcomers had in fact carried off a fully *animate* object; this was an act of supreme violence because the severed human skull retained after battle bound the victim's soul actively to his killers as a slave.[9]

Scientific markets for the skulls of so-called 'primitive' peoples initiated profoundly and transcendentally hostile relationships that were integral, not incidental, to the earliest highland encounters with the colonial state. This helps to explain why various uplanders retreating from battles with invading British troops in the early 1870s risked their lives to defensively cut off and carry away the heads of their own war dead.[10]

That many of India's so-called 'tribal' peoples first discovered British colonial agents as hunters of heads and enslavers of souls turns conventional narratives inside-out, just as it once surprised colonial ethnologists who, collecting crania from the Konyak Naga people, were shocked to learn that they were being branded '*white headhunters*'.[11] Upland peoples were not only discovered; they were also discoverers. They did not hail from 'unadministered hill tracts'; they administered their own lands. *The Mizo Discovery of the British Raj* is a history told from an upland perspective.

Climbing the Hills

The highlands explored in this book – a mountainous region framed by the Brahmaputra and the Irrawaddy Rivers – are usually found on the eastern margins of maps of India. Until only recently, historians of India have largely ignored this upland world and the people, animals, and insects that live there. Positioned on a cartographic seam too far east for maps of South Asia and too far west for maps of Southeast Asia, the hill tracts of Northeast India have formed a distinctive blind spot in the social sciences.[12] Rich documentary

denoting what is today also known in Mizoram as 'mainland India'), while *zo* has become especially tied up with various nationalist and independence movements in the region. Britain – and the broader 'West' – continues to be called *sapram*. In this book, I use the upland term 'zo ram' to refer roughly to a region that the British Raj knew as the Lushai Hills, as well as neighboring parts of the Chin Hills and the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

8 See, for instance, Shakespear, 'Note on the Lushai Hills', p. 7.

9 Woodthorpe, *Lushai Expedition*, p. 136; also see John Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), pp. 19, 60, 79.

10 Woodthorpe, *Lushai Expedition*, p. 215.

11 David Vumlallian Zou, 'The interaction of print culture, identity and language in Northeast India', Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, Belfast, 2007, p. 96 (emphasis Zou's). On the continuing stereotyping of northeasterners, see Duncan McDuie-Ra, *Northeast Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge and Retail* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 91–8.

12 For works pointing out this geographical lacuna, see, for instance, Joy L. K. Pachuau and Willem van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness: A Social History of Mizoram* (Delhi: Cambridge

archives found in neighbouring, more populated regions of Nepal, China, lowland India, and Myanmar have served to distract scholarly attention from a region that scholars continue to label a 'geography of ignorance'.[13] Colonial-era administrators had a different metaphor; India's northeast was a 'museum of nationalities', a phrase capturing not only the region's astonishing diversity but also the prejudice that its peoples were modern humanity's living ancestors, gallery pieces caught in a bygone age.[14]

Within the broader region of Northeast India, the modern state of Mizoram is particularly 'little-known and insufficiently understood'.[15] Indeed, two recent scholarly monographs on the region stress their 'introductory nature' as 'preliminary' forays into Mizoram's 'largely unknown' social history.[16] Until 2011, this was a politically restricted area, barred to researchers from elsewhere in India and abroad.

Mizoram's history may be obscured, but it is significant, following a unique historical pathway through a wider process that was common globally. Mizos are exceptional among India's peoples – and even worldwide – for the speed and extent of their adoption of both Christianity and the written word. In 1901, nearly all identified with disparate clan groups and what outsiders termed 'animism'. By 1961, nearly all identified as Mizos and Christians. In 1901, nearly all lived without the written word. By the mid-1930s, theirs was the most literate population in the province of Assam. And though the complete Bible was not available in Mizo translation until 1959, Mizos predominantly identified as Christian even by the 1940s. These shifts were rapid enough for newly literate and diverse uplanders to capture their own perspectives on this period of fundamental social change.

University Press, 2015); David Vumlallian Zou and M. S. Kumar, 'Mapping a colonial borderland: Objectifying the geo-body of India's Northeast', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 70.1 (2011), pp. 141–70; Erik de Maaker and Vibha Joshi, 'Introduction: The Northeast and beyond: Region and culture', *South Asia*, 30.3 (2007), pp. 381–90; and Andrew J. May, '"To lay down the frontier of an empire": Circumscribing identity in Northeast India', *Studies in History*, 32.1 (2016), pp. 5–20 (pp. 8–9).

[13] Willem van Schendel, 'Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: Jumping scale in Southeast Asia', *Environment and Planning: Part D, Society and Space*, 20 (2002), pp. 647–68; Jean Michaud, 'Zomia and beyond', *Journal of Global History*, 5.2 (2010), pp. 187–214 (p. 189).

[14] James Bampfylde Fuller, 'Introduction', in A. Playfair, *The Garos* (London: David Nutt, 1909), pp. i–xvi (p. xiii, 'museum'). The sentiment has proven remarkably durable; today, museums in South Asia continue to mistake people for time periods, representing Northeast India's 'tribal' peoples with static mannequins frozen in suspended animation behind glass.

[15] Nafis Aziz Hasan, 'Review of *The Camera as Witness: A Social History of Mizoram, Northeast India*, by Joy L. K. Pachuau and Willem van Schendel', *American Anthropologist*, 118.3 (2016), pp. 635–7 (p. 637).

[16] Pachuau and van Schendel, *The Camera*, p. 423 ('introductory', 'preliminary'); Joy L. K. Pachuau, *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging in Northeast India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 227 ('largely unknown').

Mizoram also matters because it sits at the centre of a traffic circle of imagined spaces: at the boundary of South Asia and Southeast Asia, at the international borders of India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and China, and at the geophysical boundary of Arid and Monsoon Asia. When we centre our analysis on this region, we are centring an ultimate borderland, opening up an opportunity to trespass across conventional containers of analysis and to develop new analytical frameworks.

The Mizo Discovery of the British Raj explores an upland encounter with empire and religion in Northeast India's Lushai Hills (the modern-day state of Mizoram) from the early colonial encounter in the 1890s until mass conversions to Christianity in the 1920s. It argues that existing approaches miss a fundamental question: how did Mizos discover the British Raj and Christian missionaries? Far from missionary-driven, religious change involved turbulent processes in which Mizos were caught up and helped shape: violent colonial state formation, ecological transformation and crisis, infrastructural change, and cultural healing. This book reveals how and why people belonging to a group of clans in the mountainous borderlands between India and Burma redefined themselves into Christian Mizos. It shows how Christianity in the Lushai Hills became a specifically Lushai Hills Christianity.

But it also has a wider objective. By using Indigenous concepts and logics to tell its story, this book is as much about these social transformations in the Mizo world as it is about *how* we can develop upland-centred stories about them.[17] It

[17] The word 'Indigenous' is prickly, often used and rarely defined. A 'little-i indigenous' is commonly used to recognize or even reify a given people's depth of time inhabiting a place among others. Scholars have rightly shown how this kind of usage is particularly dangerous in ethnically diverse Northeast India, often becoming bundled up with xenophobic ideas about 'exclusive rights to land', with violent agitations for 'ethnic homelands', and with political splintering. Since officially becoming a state in 1987, Mizoram ('Mizoland') has been commonly portrayed as an ethnically 'Mizo' homeland, a narrative with little room for the region's Chakma, Bru, Lai, Mara, Bengali, and other minorities. By attempting to appreciate a much fuller array of upland actors, this book employs the 'capital-I Indigenous', along with an increasing scholarly consensus across academic disciplines, to refer 'primarily to peoples who experienced colonialism at the hands of European and other modern nation-states over the past five centuries' – powers that extended their control over ancestral lands and place-based peoples 'with the aim of transforming them culturally and spiritually, as well as dominating them politically and economically'. In common with countless categories in history writing, the definition is arbitrary and practical. I reject any element of spatial exclusivity or cultural or environmental romanticism associated with the term. Europeans had no monopoly on brutality in the hills, and environmental historians have long since debunked romantic tropes of the 'ecological Aboriginal' treading only lightly on the land. On 'Indigenous' as self-identification in modern Northeast India, see David Vumlallian Zou, 'A historical study of the "Zo" struggle', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 45.14 (2010), pp. 56–63; on the dangers of the term, see Willem van Schendel, 'The dangers of belonging: Tribes, Indigenous peoples and homelands in South Asia', in Daniel J. Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta, eds., *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 19–43; Coll Thrush, 'The iceberg and the cathedral: Encounter, entanglement, and Isuma in Inuit London', *Journal of British Studies*, 53 (2014), pp. 59–79 ('primarily to peoples', p. 62); David Lindenfield and Miles Richardson,

is an endeavour to appreciate the value of thinking not just about the history of colonized peoples and concepts but also with them.

Vistas from the Hills

When I began researching the history of Christianity in Mizoram, I set out to consult the historical records of Christianity in Mizoram; I visited missionary archives in India, Wales, and England, interviewed Mizos associated with early Christianity, poked around old mission hospitals, wandered through historic mission localities, and read faded tombstones in early Christian graveyards – places where historians usually expect to find traces of religious history.

But threads kept spooling out from these places, weaving into bizarre locales beyond. I began spending more and more time trespassing into places you would not expect to find an historian of Christianity in Mizoram. I wandered into the jungle haunts of tigers and rummaged through trash piles of tin cans discarded by colonial forces. The trail led to crushed-up elephant skulls and old jail cells, then to microbes and the helices of bamboo DNA. The upshot is a history that uses missionary sources as a supplement rather than as a foundation, and one that moves beyond the imperial archive to make use of historical materials from private collections located at village level.[18]

It turns out that the information gleaned from these newly uncovered sources does not fit neatly into traditional colonial binaries (dynamic versus static, savage versus civilized, Christian versus animist, traditional versus modern,

'Introduction: Beyond conversion and syncretism', in David Lindenfield and Miles Richardson, eds., *Beyond Conversion and Syncretism: Indigenous Encounters with Missionary Christianity, 1800–2000* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), pp. 1–26 ('aim of transforming', p. 7); and James D. Rice, 'Beyond "the ecological Indian" and "virgin soil epidemics": New perspectives on Native Americans and the environment', *History Compass*, 12.9 (2014), pp. 745–57.

[18] One of the most common refrains in the study of the history of Mizoram is the paucity of primary sources. This refrain is simply untrue. For an overview of the village-level digitization project, which alone generated over 11,000 images, see the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme (hereafter BL EAP) website 'EAP454: Locating and surveying early religious and related records in Mizoram, India', British Library, https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP454. On the EAP more generally, Maja Kominko, ed., *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015). On 'decentring' hegemonic perspectives and the careful use of colonial sources, see Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Polarities, hybridities: What strategies for decentring?', in Germaine Warkentin and Carolyn Podruchney, eds., *Decentring the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500–1700* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 21–31; Toyin Falola, 'Mission and colonial documents', in John Edward Philips, ed., *Writing African History* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005), pp. 266–83 (p. 275); and Robert A. Bickers and Rosemary Seton, eds., *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996). In this book, I avoid the methods of anthropological 'upstreaming' (the application of modern interviews or ethnographies onto pasts where historical material is otherwise scarce). Though often simulating a vibrant historical nearness, such approaches can assume a too-familiar element of historical stasis. Attempts to plug up historical gaps in the evidence with the caulking of modern materials can cause any grip on chronology to slip.

reason versus superstition, connected versus isolated, or centre versus periphery). Nor does it fit into the postcolonial binaries intended to replace the earlier categories (dominators versus resisters, European versus subaltern, depicters versus depicted). The enduring dichotomies that structure the region's history writing shatter against the sources and human realities.

I was left with upland concepts. By turning to face rather than follow the Welsh and English missionaries and other colonial agents arriving in the 1890s (as well as challenging the enduring colonial and postcolonial assumptions left in their wake), the book aims to show the analytical possibilities of upland-centred sources, vocabularies, and logics.[19] A source-driven approach creates space for new kinds of theoretical interventions: more-than-human perspectives, issues of scale and space, vernacular worldviews and knowledge, and the methods of sensory history.

The book's focus narrows to roughly three decades, from 1890 to 1920 – a period that usually only prefaces the epic of Mizo Christianity's triumph in the present. Zeroing in on a more limited time period combats both teleology and presentism. It allows a period of fundamental social change to look unpredictable and open-ended, full of the gritty realities and vibrant dynamism that longstanding stereotypes about evangelical triumph in the present, or tribal stasis in the past, have made it difficult to see.[20] Although conversions to Christianity continued, the early 1920s signalled a significant shift in the regional landscape of Christianity: *kelmei*, so-called 'charms', started being surrendered *en masse*; the local hymnbook stabilized in form after fifteen edits and twenty years of alteration; culturally highland elements of dance, music, and poetry began to deeply suffuse church services; and a new era of diverse and self-confident upland Christianities emerged alongside new denominational, medical, and educational options.[21] Surveying the earlier period centres a formative era in flux.

[19] The method draws upon Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[20] In this time period, the book considers a first generation of encounters between diverse uplanders (and, secondarily, between Mara and Chin people groups in neighbouring regions), colonial government agents, and the missionaries of the Baptist and Welsh Calvinistic societies (and, secondarily, the Lakher Pioneer Mission in what is today southern Mizoram, or Maraland). In the militarized context of the Lushai Hills, European missionaries had eyes for other, numerically smaller groups, too; in 1899, for example, a Welsh missionary noticed the 500 Mountain Police and some 1,000 Indic Indians – Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims – who also called Aijal home. See David Evan Jones to J. Stephen Roose, 3 April 1899, reprinted in Hugh J. Hughes, ed., *Monthly Treasury: Organ of the Presbyterian Church of Wales* (Carnarvon: General Assembly, 1899), pp. 135–6. All quoted editions of *The Monthly Treasury* were viewed at Bangor University, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Bangor (hereafter BU).

[21] For missionary perceptions of this shift, see, for example, John Meirion Lloyd, *On Every High Hill* (Liverpool: Foreign Mission Office, 1952), p. 68, or James H. Lorrain's representatively titled report 'The ring of victory', *Annual Reports of the BMS*, 1919, Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford (hereafter ALA).

The Highlanders

What do we call the historical inhabitants of these hills? Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the mountain region that would one day be called Mizoram, 'land of the Mizos', was home to culturally and linguistically diverse groups of people who had so far managed to exist outside of state rule. Some scholars suggest the evasion was intentional – a tactic to slip away from state rule and its many drawbacks: taxation, crowd disease, labour demands, surveillance, and even literacy.[22] Altitude, rugged mountains, thick forests, malleable identities, mobile subsistence patterns, relatively egalitarian societies – according to this view, all added up to a defensive strategy of anarchism. However, longstanding trade networks had in fact long crisscrossed the hills, linking mountains to mountains and hills to valleys. In an informal process of 'bazaar diplomacy', diverse traders, travellers, and markets ensured there was never a hard divide between uplands and lowlands.[23]

At that time, political power in the hills was dispersed along complex webs that centred on individual chiefs at village level and articulated along lines of kinship, debt, reciprocity, marriage, and friendship.[24] Most influential among the upland clans at the close of the nineteenth century was a group that the British called the Lusei (later: Lushai). Highland groups such as the Lusei, Ralte, Paite, Hmar, Fanai, and others lived under the protection of a unique *sakhua* (a group's 'guardian spirit'), though clan boundaries were porous and village populations more-than-human, including diverse spirits and animals. Later, the arrival of colonial agents – Punjabi carpenters, Santali labourers, Gurkha soldiers, Bengali farmers, English officers, Canadian soldiers, Welsh missionaries – further bolstered the social diversity of the region, particularly around newly established colonial headquarters.[25]

Not long after Christian missionaries carried the technology of writing into the region, uplanders set about writing down their own pasts. In 1903, Zangena penned an article detailing histories of intervillage diplomacy and disagreement before colonial occupation.[26] Other newly literate authors recorded the pasts of specific settlements, the recent movements of chiefs and villages, or

[22] James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); also see Jangkhomang Guite, 'Colonialism and its unruly? The Colonial state and kuki raids in nineteenth century Northeast India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 48.5 (2014), pp. 1188–1232.

[23] S. Thangboi Zou, 'Riverine bazaars, trade and chiefs in the colonial Lushai Hills', *Asian Ethnicity*, 22.4 (2019), p. 6 ('bazaar diplomacy'); and Gunnel Cederlöf, *Founding an Empire on India's Northeastern Frontiers, 1790–1840: Climate, Commerce, Polity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[24] Indrani Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends: Monks, Marriages, and Memories of Northeast India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[25] Kyle Jackson, 'Globalizing an Indian borderland environment: Aijal, Mizoram, 1890–1919', *Studies in History*, 32.1 (2016), pp. 39–71.

[26] Zangena, 'Sailo lal shawi thu' ('A Sailo chief is reprimanded'), *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu* ('Mizo and [Indic] Indian Newspaper', hereafter *Mizo leh Vai*) June 1903, pp. 7–9, trans. Adam Halliday.

information about recent regional wars and ransom demands.[27] However, the base units of these early accounts were individual settlements and kinship-based clans, not the cohesive ethnicity suggested by the term 'Mizo', the collective category that a majority in the region has come to identify with today. Within the kaleidoscopically diverse and atomized social landscape at colonialism's outset, a broader 'Mizo' identity was only gradually beginning to coalesce in the early twentieth century – a complex process explored within this book.

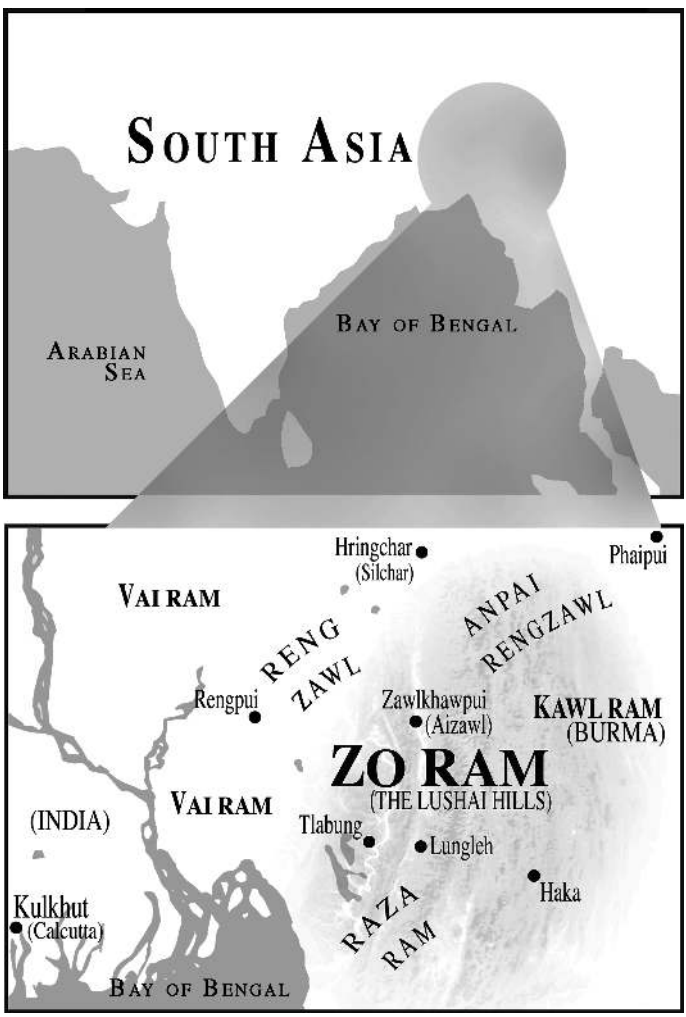
This project will not hesitate to anchor its terminology in highland usage. The potential of vernacular terms and concepts to destabilize the inherited narratives of English-language scholarship offers sufficient reason to forgive their initial cumbersomeness. To ease the transition, a robust glossary appears at the end of the book. To resist presentism, place names (like Aijal) and other terms are locked in time period rather than updated to present spellings (like Aizawl).[28] I do not italicize subsequent Mizo terms in this book. A more empathetic approach seeks to normalize, rather than mislabel, exoticize, or typographically segregate the terminology I intend to centre here.[29]

In the same way, this book treats its setting – a region roughly between the world's largest bay and the world's highest mountains – as a central zone called 'zo ram' (the 'highlands') rather than as a remote, northeastern frontier of British India (Map 0.1). This lower-case zo ram does not describe some primordial place or essential homeland, but rather an interconnected mountain landscape. Far from 'isolated' topographically, this region forms part of an aboveground segment of a vast submarine mountain ridge that links the Bay of Bengal to the Australian coastal seafloor. Human processes of religion, empire,

[27] 'Hmashang thu chang' ('Issues in the past'), *Mizo leh Vai*, June 1903, pp. 10–11, trans. Adam Halliday; 'Halkha rawt thu' ('Halkha raids'), *Mizo leh Vai*, May 1903, pp. 11–13, trans. Adam Halliday; Chhinga, 'Lalpuithanga Khawnglung run thu' ('Laipuithanga raids Khawnglung'), *Mizo leh Vai*, May 1903, pp. 4–5, trans. Adam Halliday; 'Hmanlai indo thu' ('Battles in the past'), *Mizo leh Vai*, June 1903, p. 11, trans. Adam Halliday; 'Sailova thu leh a thihna thu' ('Sailova and his *thihna* [amber bead necklace]'), *Mizo leh Vai*, June 1903, pp. 11–12, trans. Adam Halliday. Missionaries also attempted to interpret and record these pasts; see, for instance, Zosapthara [Edwin Rowlands], 'Chhim lam run thu' ('War against the South'), January 1906, *Mizo leh Vai*, pp. 3–4.

[28] I also omit diacritical marks that were only later systematized. For a brief history of the orthographical flux of the early written Lushai language, see J. H. Lorrain's 'Appeal for uniformity of orthography throughout the Lushai tribe', 15 January 1936, in the bound volume *Records and Writing of J. H. Lorrain*, Baptist Church of Mizoram Centennial Archives, Serkawn, India (hereafter BCMCA), pp. 1–4.

[29] Here I follow Kanaka Maoli historian Noenoe K. Silva who, in an effort 'to resist making the native tongue appear foreign in writing produced . . . about a native land and people', declines to italicize Hawaiian words in her *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 13. For a related example, see Thrush, 'Iceberg', p. 2.



Map 0.1 Zo ram and its surrounding regions, in historical upland terminology. By author.

migration, and state-making have connected these highlands further to the Middle East, Europe, China, and beyond.

In writing this connected history, and in distinguishing between diverse peoples and colonial occupiers, I also acknowledge my special privilege of detachment and remoteness from these often violent but never remote pasts. This book is not intended to 'give voice' to historical uplanders; they do not