

States in Waiting_ Professor L...onization and Untold Histories

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SPEAKERS

David Staley, Eva Dale, Lydia Walker

L Lydia Walker 00:04

But I am really sort of trained as kind of a conventional, one might say, sort of old school historian in terms of, you know, where are the documents, as much as I'm as attentive as possible to think about the documents that aren't available, and why that might be so. But, what drew me to history, I think, was really the source material, and that chance to kind of go digging. From the heart of the Ohio State University on the Oval, this is Voices of Excellence from the College of Arts and Sciences, with your host, David Staley. Voices focuses on the innovative work being done by faculty and staff in the College of Arts and Sciences at The Ohio State University. From departments as wide ranging as art, astronomy, chemistry and biochemistry, physics, emergent materials, mathematics and languages, among many others, the college always has something great happening. Join us to find out what's new now.

D David Staley 01:03

I'm delighted to be joined today in the ASC Tech Studios by my colleague Lydia Walker, Assistant Professor and Seth Andre Myers Chair in Global Military History, the Ohio State University College of the Arts and Sciences. She is an historian of 20th century global decolonization, and has broad interests in the international history of South Asia, Southern Africa, military intervention, and insurgent resistance. Welcome to Voices, Dr. Walker.

L Lydia Walker 01:32

Thank you so much for having me, David. I really appreciate it.

D David Staley 01:35

Well, I'm very interested to learn about your manuscript, soon to be published by University of Cambridge Press, called "States in Waiting". So, tell us broadly about what this research is about.

L Lydia Walker 01:47

So, my book, which is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press is titled, "States-in-Waiting: Global Decolonization and its Discontents", and I focus on groups that tried to become independent and weren't able to, especially with a real focus on the 1960s sort of moment of seeming possibility. 1960s, 17 countries became independent, so it was a moment where independent seemed viable for a lot of groups and a lot of places. But, the peoples I focus on didn't receive independence; in particular, I focus on Nagas in Northeast India. So, the Indian Northeast is the piece of India that hangs over what's now Bangladesh and borders what's now Myanmar, and it's full of groups that would like to be independent, that have very little connect... or, have have contested connection to the Indian state, and Nagas were the first to declare their independence, actually, the day before Indian independence in their kind of national narrative making. But they did not become independent, they did not become independent in 1947, and they also did not become independent in 1960. And in that way, a state in waiting is a nationalist movement that wants to become a state and is waiting, sort of hanging there, waiting. It's my own term, but it's a term my interlocutors, who are members of these communities, find appropriate, and I really appreciate that. So, it's not an actor's category, as historians like to say, an actor's category refers to the categories used by the people you study at the time that you study them. So, states in waiting is my category, but it is a category that adopts, to the best of my ability, the perspectives of my interlocutors.

D David Staley 03:40

Bring us back to the 1960s, you say there were, I think you said, 17 states that became independent - why... what was happening in the 1960s?

L Lydia Walker 03:49

So, I guess it's December 1960, the United Nations issued a declaration on the granting of independence. It's important to me that it's on the granting of independence, it's not a declaration of independence. So, it's about external recognition rather than, sort of, really kind of supporting these movements from the grassroots up. But, most of the countries that become independent in 1960 are on the African continent. The window of possibility is open there; it's no longer open in Asian context. So, when Nagas - specifically the Naga nationalist leader, Angami Zapu Phizo - when he arrives in London in the summer of 1960, he attempts to plug himself into a network of unofficial advocates who support anti-apartheid in South Africa and anti-colonial nationalism more broadly on the African continent. And he presents a problem for them, because they are very supportive of anti-colonial nationalism, but they rely on their friendships with Indian Civil Society leaders and even connections to Indian politicians to enter international politics. So, if you're a people after 1945, you don't get to go into the United Nations, any committee, unless you're brought forward by a national delegation. And there are certain groups that get observer status like the Palestinian Liberation Organization, like eventually the Southwest African Peoples Organization, but that's pretty much it, there are very

few that get observer status. So, you need that national delegation to bring you into international politics, and if you're a nationalist movement, you rely on advocates who are an array of sort of often very strange individuals with a host of sort of allegiances and influences and interests, but who are connected to government, but not of government. And those are the people who bring anti-colonial nationalists into international politics, and Nagas try to plug themselves into that network. They're not terribly successful, and that's why the subtitle of my book is decolonization and its discontents, because it's about the limits of this process and who it excludes.

D David Staley 06:17

You've already taken us there in some way - why do some groups get independence in states and others don't get states or they are states in waiting? What explains that dynamic?

L Lydia Walker 06:30

Well, so literally explaining it is not that difficult. It often has to deal with whether you have a neighbor who's going to support you with asylum and weapons and a safe base, whether either the U.S. or the Soviet Union want to support your claim in a significant fashion in international politics. There's a reason why Outer Mongolia becomes Mongolia, and that's because of the Soviet Union. What really is quite interesting about Nagas is how little aid they received from both Pakistan and China, who of course are India's geopolitical foes during this period and even ongoing, and that's because, especially in that region, upland Southeast Asia, the area of what used to be East Pakistan, that then becomes Bangladesh, becomes its own country...

D David Staley 07:23

In 1971?

L Lydia Walker 07:24

Yes. In that region, they are scared of their own minority nationalisms, so there's kind of a solidarity of statehood that can make it quite difficult for these groups to become independent, barring real significant external support.

D David Staley 07:43

Tell us more who the Naga are. I'll confess, I was unaware of this group until I knew I was going to be interviewing you.

L Lydia Walker 07:51

So, they are a tribal people in Northeast India. Tribal in an Indian context is a constitutional category, so it doesn't have the same sort of connotations that it would have in a North

American or African context. So, in India, it defines your relationship with the central government in terms of land ownership, also certain kinds of representational rights. They're in a region that is barely connected to the rest of India in terms of roads and other infrastructure, in some ways, purposefully underdeveloped for strategic reasons. During the Second World War, when the Japanese advanced into India, they were halted in Imphal, in neighbouring Manipur, and at Kohima, which is the Naga capital. And so, Nagas really experienced kind of the height of total war during the Second World War. And I might argue, that really kind of internationalized them in terms of seeing themselves as part of a global conflict and seeing themselves as being ground zero in a global conflict. It's also a region of significant missionary activity, Nagas are very Christian. It's hard to have up to date figures because there hasn't been an Indian census for quite some time, I think not since 2011. But, that census had Nagas as 75% Baptist. For comparison, the U.S. state of Mississippi in the, I think, early... in sort of mid-2000s, which was the figure I found, I think, in a colleague's book "Freedom Time", the figure then was, like, 34%.

D David Staley 09:39
In Mississippi?

L Lydia Walker 09:40
In Mississippi. So, not... these specific percentages are... probably don't hold for the current moment, but I think they have real meaning as proportions, and just sort of to get a sense of how important Baptist Christianity is in the region. And the missionaries who convert them were American Baptists, so there's... they're also kind of plugged into global networks through religious conversion.

D David Staley 10:06
When's that occurring, roughly?

L Lydia Walker 10:09
It begins, really, in the 1880s, but it's not till after the Second World War that it really takes off. This is my own argument, but I think it is significantly impacted by the experience of being bombed. And, in addition, after the early 1950s, the independent Indian government doesn't allow American missionaries back into the Naga hills. They are viewed as agents of pernicious American ideas of national self determination. It's not actually true; the American missionaries supported continued empire, not independence for either Nagas or Indians. But, that means that most of the conversion that occurred there was carried out by Naga missionaries, not American missionaries.

D David Staley 10:58
How do the Naga view independence, Indian independence - 1947, yes?

L Lydia Walker 11:04

They... I mean, first of all, any movement is not unified, and there you can have Nagas who feel more and more connected to the Indian state, especially with the current generation, more and more Nagas are working in what they call mainland India, especially the big cities. So, I wouldn't want to say a Naga perspective. That said, I argue that Naga nationalist claims making and Indian state making in some ways are like a call and response. Naga nationalism is occurring concurrently with the creation of the Indian state, and to a degree in reaction to it. India is full of many different peoples, and also many minority nationalisms, but Nagas are the first to declare independence, and it's very important for their nationalist narrative making that they're not a secessionist movement because they declared independence the day before Indian independence.

D David Staley 12:08

Legalistically. What about Naga nationalism, say, during the British Raj, during the time the British had empire over India? Martial, like military?

L Lydia Walker 12:16

So, here at Ohio State, I teach an undergraduate lecture class on wars of empire and decolonization, and we spend a fair amount of time on colonial soldiering, and we talk about the so-called sort of martial races, Sikhs, Punjabis, and Gurkhas - Yeah.

D David Staley 12:22

Yeah.

L Lydia Walker 12:24

And how British colonial recruitment sort of operated to, sort of, highlight and sort of reinforce ethnic and caste divisions, but many colonial soldiers served in non-combat roles in both the First and Second World War, and the British Empire recruited heavily from tribal communities, including Nagas. So, Nagas served in both the First and Second World Wars as military laborers, and when the military laborers, a group of them returned to Nagaland after the First World War, they weren't allowed to join the British Officer's Club in Kohima for racial reasons, and they decided to form the Naga Club, which... it began as a civil society organization -

D David Staley 13:29

Oh, that was the name, the Naga Club? Okay.



L Lydia Walker 13:31

Yeah. So this is, you know, interwar era, and then when the British Simon Commission came to India, I think this is around 1926 - I hope that date's right, not Googling it - so the Simon Commission, mid-1920s, when they came in, and this was one of the many attempts of the British Empire to find some kind of compromise between outright independence and continued empire that wasn't quite working the way they would have liked it to over time, costing more and more and it being more and more difficult to extract resources to justify that expense. So, the Simon Commission is one of these many attempts, and they travel around India, and they talk to a lot of people, get information from a lot of different groups, and most mainstream South Asian history correctly identifies this as the British wanting to make India look really disorganized, a collection of ethnicities that can't get along and need the British to remain in order to keep the peace. That is the mainstream narrative of the Simon Commission, and it is not inaccurate. So earlier, you mentioned the nationalist leader, the Naga nationalist leader Angami Zapu Phizo.

D David Staley 14:46

Oh.

L Lydia Walker 14:46

However, it doesn't necessarily hold everywhere. And B. R. Ambedkar, the prominent Dalit leader, petitioned the Simon Commission for support for Dalits, which are the lowest caste in the Indian caste system, and the Naga Club petitioned the Simon commission. And they asked the British Raj, the British Imperial State, to basically make sure Nagas would become independent when empire was over, to leave them alone to determine themselves, and I think that's the language they used. So, that is the, sort of, public origins of Naga nationalism in kind of the Naga nationalist accounting. Yeah.

D David Staley 15:27

Tell me more about him and his role in this whole process.

L Lydia Walker 15:39

So, he is a fascinating person. He's raised in Khonoma, which is a village outside of the Naga capital of Kohima, and Khonoma has a long history of resistance to the British Raj, and so he's sort of part of what one might call like a local aristocracy, though that's not really... the society is actually quite democratic by Western standards, so maybe that's not the best term. He's educated by American Baptist missionaries in Kohima, and then he goes to Kolkata, and he returns to the Naga hills, and he's selling life insurance and Bibles. And then, he makes his way to what was then Rangoon in Burma, and he makes contact with the Japanese during the Second World War. Now, the Japanese had a policy during the Second World War called the, sort of, Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, where they partnered with Asian anti-colonial nationalists. And yes, David just did scare quotes for the partnering because these were not equal partnerships. They were complex, because many of the anti-colonial nationalists who

worked directly with the Japanese were not necessarily stooges for Japanese empire, they were legitimately anti-colonial nationalists who saw this as their best bet, the enemy of my enemy is my friend kind of thing. And Phizo allied with the Japanese during the Second World War, and he actually joined the Indian National Army, which was a group of Indian anti-colonial nationalists who were led by Subhas Chandra Bose, and Bose allied with the Axis Powers quite deliberately, and Phizo joined him. It is not clear whether Phizo saw action during Second World War, but when he returned to the Naga Hills after the war, he returned wearing his Indian National Army Uniform, and he derived a certain level of prestige and stature based on this. There were also a lot of Nagas allied with the British, probably most Nagas were allied with the British during the Second World War, and they formed partisan units, supported the British in terms of intelligence quite significantly, and probably played a key role in the Allied victory at the Battle of Kohima. So, it's not so simple to say that Nagas were on one side or the other. I can continue with Phizo, because he holds a controversial plebiscite in 1951, that... where, I think, Nagas vote like 99% for independence, and the Indian government throws this out and violence ensues in the region. Phizo and his allies are not equipped to fight the Indian Army, and the Indian Army engages in the classic sort of counterinsurgency operations, moving people from their villages to other locations, like we'd see in Malaya and also in Vietnam. And eventually, in the sort of mid 1950s, Phizo walks to East Pakistan, and he spends a couple years there, and at some point, he's able to fly to Switzerland, and he's traveling on a fake El Salvadorian passport. And in Switzerland, his contacts connect him up to these sort of Western advocates who work on behalf of anti-colonial nationalists, and they get him into the U.K. And he ends up spending the rest of his life in the U.K. in exile, because he's not able to get the Naga claim directly to the United Nations and he can't go home to face that failure. The Naga claim does reach the United Nations, but only decades later as a humanitarian issue and then, eventually, now as an indigenous rights concern.

D

David Staley 19:52

What does he do in exile? Was he an intellectual, was he a public face for the Naga?

L

Lydia Walker 19:57

He's a public face, he has almost like a... a sort of an informal embassy in exile and everybody who, you know, Nagas who travel - not... it's rather difficult for them to do so during this period of time, because the Indian government is not so... it's not so easy for them to get visas and passports - but any Nagas who travel will basically visit him, and Western advocates who are interested in the issue come to visit him. So yeah, he very much is this kind of grand, sort of, eventually, old man sort of holding court for those who are interested in the struggle.

D

David Staley 20:39

And he never returns, when does he... when does he die?

L

Lydia Walker 20:42

He dies in 1990 and his body is returned.

D David Staley 20:45

Oh, but he never returns. So, you've already maybe started talking a little bit about this, so the Naga, they don't get independence, 1960s, they don't get independence. So, what do they do after that? Are they agitating or do they continually push for independence? What do they do after the 1960s?

L Lydia Walker 21:03

Yeah, I mean, so... I'm always hesitant to talk in sort of depth about Naga factionalization, because that justification can be used by sort of an Indian status perspective to undermine the legitimacy that there is a Naga nationalist claim. But, there are various peace agreements with the Indian government. Whenever there's a peace agreement... once one element of the party that agrees and signs the treaty disagrees, and then the nationalist movement fractures, so it just keeps fracturing over each of these agreements. And the other issue to remember is Nagaland is ruled under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which is a piece of legislation that also covers Kashmir and other areas of -

D David Staley 21:52

A disputed territory, yeah.

L Lydia Walker 21:54

Other areas of the Indian Northeast, it's a form of martial law, and it means, basically, that the military has immunity. And, you know, it's a tremendous civil liberties problem and means that people who live in the region don't have sort of full rights as citizens. And that began, that was first brought over Nagaland in 1958, and remains. So, to a degree, not much has changed. There has definitely been much less violence since the 1990s, which was why I was able to do my research, but it is sort of a cold peace.

D David Staley 22:34

Tell us about your research process. Are you consulting documents? You had mentioned that you work with the Naga sort of directly, your interlocutors, you call them. Tell us about your research process.

L Lydia Walker 22:45

So, if you're a nationalist movement who doesn't become independent, you don't get a state archive. So, where are the archives of a state in waiting is actually a really interesting methodological and logistical question. And those collections are with the individuals who made up the movements who were able to keep them, and that usually that's not as many as you'd

like, and more of them are in the hands of the organizations and advocates who supported the movement. So, I ended up focusing to a degree on advocacy networks, because that was where the papers were, and as I went sort of through them. But there are a lot in Nagaland itself, it really surprised me; in church libraries, and also in the hands of retired Naga nationalist insurgents. Few of them kept records, and more than a few, because they really wanted the... they want the story known and told, and records and the maintenance of records is a really important way to do so. I have a chapter that focuses on a peace mission between the Indian central government and Naga nationalists that's brokered by several international civil society leaders who are central characters in "States-in-Waiting". One is Reverend Michael Scott, who's a prominent British anti-apartheid activist, not the character in "The Office", and the other is Jayaprakash Narayan, who's a Sarvodaya, which is a Gandhian civil society activism in India after Gandhi, so he's a Sarvodaya leader, most famous later on as Indira Gandhi's great opponent during the Indian Emergency. So, they helped broker this peace agreement, and the thing about a peace agreement is it generates records, as both sides sort of goal to the members of the peace mission with their documentation of the atrocities that are happening in violation, and it's kind of a moment where you get to see not necessarily literally what's happening on the ground, but what both sides are reporting is happening on the ground. And when I first presented this sort of fresh off coming back from the Northeast at a think tank in New Delhi, and there were a couple of retired Indian politicians who showed up, and one of them had actually been the Indian Minister of Home Affairs. Now, Nagaland had been governed through the Ministry of External Affairs until 1972; that shows you how India was actually conceptualizing it bureaucratically, even as they kept calling it a domestic concern. But after 1972, those records migrated to the Home Ministry. So, this retired Home Minister said, you know, okay, everything you're saying, it's fine, it makes sense, it jives with the records I've seen on this in the particular foreign minister, you're sort of quoting a bunch, yeah, this drives with everything he's saying. But, you know, in the records from the Ministry of External Affairs, there is the minister's - this is Y. D. Gundevia, who is the Minister at the time - he has all his, you know, asides where he's commenting on all this stuff, and I think it would really add, it would be really great if you used that. And I said, please let me, I would love to have access to that kind of documentation. I don't, and if I don't have access to this kind of records, of the perspective of the Indian state, then the Indian state is not going to feature as this primary actor in these negotiations. Then I'm going to spend time with the civil society advocates, on the Baptist Church, on these other actors who left records. So, government cens - yeah, government censorship shapes the kinds of histories that get written, and I think sometimes in ways governments themselves might not be thinking about when they decide what is available and what's not.

D

David Staley 26:56

What drew you to history, as opposed to some other discipline? Why are you a historian?

L

Lydia Walker 27:02

Because I like documents and I like narrative. The kinds of questions I specifically ask - what's a legitimate nationalist claim - could be asked in political science, but methodologically, I'm a historian. Now, as I've started to use more and more personal collections, I started interviewing people. This wasn't something I actively sought out; this was more something that arose naturally as people were being so generous and hospitable with their time and documents. So, I

still kind of fell into oral history, but I am really sort of trained as kind of a conventional, one might say, sort of old school historian in terms of, you know, where are the documents, as much as I'm as attentive as possible to think about the documents that aren't available, and why that might be so. But, what drew me to history, I think, was really the source material, and that chance to kind of go digging.

D David Staley 28:03

Did you know since the time you were a small child that you were going to be an historian?

L Lydia Walker 28:07

Actually yes, but this is quite funny. I used to be a professional ballet dancer, but I actually wanted to be a historian before I became a ballet dancer. And then after I was done dancing, I went back to school and became a trained historian. So usually, people want to be an astronaut or a ballet dancer as a small child, and then they sort of go to the more perceived as established grown up job, but in some ways, for me, it was the opposite order.

D David Staley 28:36

We're gonna have to do another interview, I think, to learn more about your career as a professional ballet dancer. Tell us what's next for your research? What questions are you asking now?

L Lydia Walker 28:45

I'm really interested in the lens of international observation. With the Nagas and other groups like them, they're constantly sort of skirting around institutions of international order, and it's so difficult for them to get inside. But these institutions, the United Nations and its sort of organs, you know, set up during the Second World War, are themselves engaged on a host of these issues, and they have operations to handle them. Now, many of these places never get a UN intervention. There were a lot of protests in Myanmar several years ago where they were actually holding placards asking for a UN intervention. At the same time, these UN interventions can be quite colonial or imperial in sort of the framework of outsiders coming in to help govern people or region that seems, for a variety of reasons, not capable of allegedly governing themselves. So, I'm interested in that lens, and specifically on early UN observer missions, and there are two, in Palestine and Kashmir, that began in the late 40s and remain ongoing, they haven't ended. And they're very small, just a handful of guys, and it involves kind of walking around and talking to people, collecting information, understanding sort of what's going on. And I'm quite interested in sort of the sociology of that mission, of those missions. What do these observers think they're doing? Why do they think they're there? What are they seeing - seeing not necessarily in terms of whether an allegation that occurred on a certain day actually happened, but seeing in terms of what do they see their role? What are they looking for? And also, Ralph Bunche, who worked for the United Nations very important member -

D David Staley 30:41
African American, yes?

L Lydia Walker 30:42
Yes, African American intellectual, international civil servant, headed up the, I think, the Trusteeship Council at the UN for quite some time, but was in charge of - or, one of the small group in charge of UN peacekeeping in the early decades of the United Nations. He would say that Kashmir was the UN's most successful peacekeeping mission because no one outside of the UN and Kashmir knew what was happening. So, it was an observer mission that wasn't observed, and that's something I want to tease out and think much more with. What is the lens of international observation, and how does it work when you're under the kind of spotlight, say, they were and are in Palestine, and aren't as in Kashmir?

D David Staley 31:31
Lydia Walker, thank you.

E Eva Dale 31:34
Voices of Excellence is produced and recorded at The Ohio State University College of Arts and Sciences Technology Services Studio. More information about guests on voices of excellence can be found at go.osu.edu/voices. Produced by Doug Dangler. I'm Eva Dale.