Security Perceptions and Practices of the Indigenous People of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper illustrates the insecurity perceptions and security practices of the Paharis, an indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh. It adopts an interpretive ethnographic approach in which it posits, based on fieldwork experiences, that the security perceptions of the CHT indigenous people are primarily formed by the experiences of marginalisation. Marginalisation has resulted mainly from the assimilationist nation-building policies and ill-conceived development projects pursued by first Pakistan and later Bangladesh, which have not only threatened the Paharis' group identity but have also generated threats of violence in their everyday lives. The macro-level threat to identity and the micro-level threat of violence in everyday life operate in parallel and in an intertwined fashion. To cope with these threats, the Paharis have employed an array of different strategies at both macro and micro levels, which are analysed in this paper.

Keywords: Paharis, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, indigenous people, critical security studies

Introduction

Indigenous communities throughout the world confront diverse sets of threats in their collective and individual lives, but traditional International Relations (IR) scholarship has not paid much attention to their insecurities. The security threats to indigenous communities only began to receive attention when critical security studies (CSS) took an "ethnographic turn" (Salter / Mutlu 2013) and Social Sciences a "practice turn" (Schatzki et al. 2001). CSS has now turned its research agenda toward the intertwined structure of "security discourses, security practices and everyday security" (Lemon 2018: 2), which is a significant advance in its research programme, but the scope remains broad and the focus on the security practices of indigenous communities is sketchy. Placed in such a context, this article illustrates the insecurity perceptions and

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security practices of the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh, who are commonly known as the Paharis or, more recently, as Jummas.[1] It seeks to address two key research questions: (1) What informs the insecurity perceptions of the Paharis? Or, to put it differently, how do the Paharis perceive security threats? and (2) How do they cope with these threats?

Theory and Method

Given that "security" is a contested concept (Buzan 2016) with no "fixed meaning" and is constantly redefined and experienced in varying ways by different actors (Zedner 2009), it is important to clarify the way the concept is used in this paper and the theoretical and methodological approaches applied. The paper is positioned within the framework of the "ethnographic turn" of critical security studies and adopts an interpretive ethnographic method to illustrate the Pahari insecurity perceptions and their coping strategies. Cai Wilkinson defines the ethnographic approach as "qualitative data generation techniques that are naturalistic, meaning that they involve studying people or phenomena in their 'natural' setting or context, and produce accounts of research that are experience-near, meaning that they are based on people's experiences of events, actions and phenomena in the setting or context" (Wilkinson 2013: 129).

The interpretive ethnographic approach is based on fieldwork in which the researcher's participation, experiences and observations generate data and "uncover emic (insider) perspectives on political and social life and/or ground-level processes involved therein" (Bayard de Volo / Schatz 2004: 267). Although ethnography was originally developed in Anthropology, it has been successfully introduced as a viable research tool in CSS. Indeed, the ethnographic approach and CSS are a "complementary and potentially powerful pairing" (Wilkinson 2013: 131).

To illustrate the construction of Pahari security perceptions, the most useful concept is that of "securitisation", developed by Buzan et al., who define it as a "self-referential practice because it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue – not necessarily because a real existential threat exists" (Buzan et al. 1998: 24). Security threats are, therefore, embedded in social relations and they are inter-subjectively constituted within discourses (Krause

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1   The term "Pahari" means "hill dweller" and the literal meaning of "Jumma" is someone who is engaged in *jum* or "slash and burn" cultivation. The term "Jumma" is a political "invention", to use Van Schendel's term (Van Schendel 1992), which came into use in the context of serving as a symbol of collective resistance against the assimilationist policy of the Bangladesh government.

/ Williams 1996). The paper will thus illuminate how the Paharis imagine and securitise threats, thereby creating their insecurity discourses.

A security practice is a socially meaningful action that an actor or a group of actors undertakes to protect itself from dangers. Indeed, security practices involve a "highly diverse and heterogeneous spectrum of shared imaginations and everyday practices that all people necessarily partake in when responding to the existential contingencies of life" (Von Boemcken et al. 2016). In other words, insecurity discourses and security practices are inextricably linked. Any study of security, Ken Booth maintains, "should begin in the experiences, imagines, analyses and fears of those living with insecurity" (Booth 2007: 152) and form the basis of socially meaningful actions in everyday life.

This paper is based on cumulative fieldwork experiences in the CHT over several decades and continuous contact with people on the ground. Frequent visits to the CHT (the most recent in 2016) and immersion with the people there have facilitated a reflexive interpretation of the Pahari insecurity perceptions and security practices.

The indigenous people of the CHT

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), comprising three hill districts – Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban[2] – in the southeastern corner of the country form a distinct region of Bangladesh in terms of geography, topography, the politico-economic-administrative system and the ethno-national identity, culture and religious beliefs of its people (Ahsan / Chakma 1989). The area has historically been inhabited by 11 indigenous communities, who are, as noted above, collectively known as the Paharis. They are of Sino-Tibetan descent, belonging to the Mongoloid group. They closely resemble the people of northeast India, Myanmar, Cambodia and Thailand rather than the people of the alluvial plains of Bangladesh (Bengalis). Each community speaks its own dialect or language but all share a common and rich cultural heritage. In the religious context too, they present a clear contrast to the Bengalis of the plains. All indigenous communities are non-Muslims and practise either Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity or animism. Their social norms, such as rituals at birth, death and marriage, as well as their dietary habits and method of agriculture, differ markedly from those of the Bengalis.

Historically, the CHT had a distinct administrative system, unlike that in the rest of Bengal, with its own social and political processes (Mey 1981). Before being conquered by external powers, the region was an independent

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2   The British colonial administration delimited the boundaries of the CHT as an administrative unit in 1860. In 1947, it became a part of Pakistan as a district, and in 1971 a part of Bangladesh. In the 1980s, the CHT was divided into three separate districts.

Chakma kingdom. A war between the British and the Chakma king – Jan Box Khan – from 1777–1788 paved the way for British control over the area. The British colonial administration delimited the boundary of the CHT as a district in 1860 and in 1881 divided it into three circles: the Chakma, the Mong and the Bohmang. Beginning in 1860 the CHT was administered separately from the areas of Assam and East Bengal by a representative of the Governor General-in-Council of India and except for this representative, the administrative staff, including the police force, were locally recruited from among the Paharis. The collection of revenue and dispensation of traditional justice in social courts were performed by the three circle chiefs.

The British colonial administration allowed the hill people as much self-rule as possible, which was strengthened by the adoption of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation in 1900 (popularly known as the Hill Tracts Manual). The Manual placed stringent measures against the settlement of outsiders in the district. This was prompted by the environmental and economic logic that the CHT possessed limited cultivable lands, being mostly a land of hills and forests (Mohsin 2003: 31). In 1920 the Manual was amended and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Amendment) Regulation of 1920 declared the CHT an "excluded area", independent of general administration. In the 1935 Government of India Act, the Chittagong Hill Tracts were declared a "totally excluded area".

Marginalisation of the Paharis: Historical background

In 1947, the British left the subcontinent after about two hundred years of colonial rule. Two independent states – India and Pakistan – were created upon the British withdrawal. Although Pakistan was created based on the so-called "two-nation theory" separating Hindus and Muslims, intriguingly the CHT, an overwhelmingly non-Muslim area (97.2%), was awarded to Pakistan against the will of the local population (Chakma 1986). The emergence of the Pakistani "nation-state" at the end of colonial rule set off a process of marginalisation of the Paharis.

Following decolonisation, the Pakistan government introduced sweeping changes in the administration of the CHT in order to bring the distinct region within the framework of the "nation-state". The process created a condition that Michael Hechter has termed "internal colonialism" (Hechter 1975). As part of the "nation-state" building project, the Pakistan government constructed the Kaptai Dam (1957–62) on the Karnafuli river, which left a devastating impact on the livelihood of the Paharis and in later years generated conflict in the CHT. The dam inundated an area of over 1,000 square kilo-

metres, including 54,000 acres of cultivable land (40 per cent of the district's arable land) and uprooted 10,000 farming and 8,000 jhumiya (shifting cultivation) families, totalling about 100,000 people (27 per cent of the district's total population) (Islam 1978). Memories of displacement and economic hardship still haunt the Paharis, as expressed in a Pahari song that vividly describes the pain the people still feel. A few lines from the song are as follows:

Oi degasni Chenge doar, jiyat aghe resav bazar	Do you see the confluence of the Chengi [river], where there is the Reserve bazar [market]?
Ta pugendi gangya parat alo mo adam	East of that on the river bank was my village
Sekke na el pani, na el godagan	The water was not there at that time, neither the dam,
Gangya parat ami tedhong milijhuli	We lived harmoniously on the river bank.

The Pakistan government did not undertake adequate measures to rehabilitate the displaced people nor did it pay adequate compensation to the Paharis to help them rebuild their lives (Ali / Tsuchiya: 2002). The project not only produced internally displaced people, but many Paharis crossed international borders and took refuge in India. Naturally, this led to strong resentment against the state in the CHT.

The process of marginalisation of the Paharis accelerated after East Pakistan seceded from Pakistan and emerged as the independent state of Bangladesh in 1971. The vision of the ruling elites of Bangladesh regarding the nature of the state following independence from Pakistan has been one of a typical "nation-state" (Mohsin 1999). The state was thus organised in such a way that diversities were subsumed to create homogeneity and the state failed to "accord any recognition to the minorities" in the CHT or elsewhere in the country (Mohsin 1997: 1).[3] This set off an accelerated process of marginalisation of the Paharis from the national mainstream.

Against the backdrop of the fear of losing identity, the Paharis organised an armed resistance in the late 1970s, which led to armed conflict between the Bangladesh armed forces and the resistance group Shanti Bahini (SB, "Peace Force"). The Bangladesh government mobilised its armed forces and the CHT soon turned into "a vast military camp" (Barua 2001: 70). By the 1980s, the Bangladesh government had deployed 115,000 military personnel in the CHT –

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3   It is noteworthy that the 15th amendment of the Bangladesh constitution in 2011 defined the indigenous communities as *khudro nrigosti* ("small ethnic groups"), notwithstanding their demand to be known by the term "indigenous".

one soldier for every five to six hill people (Levene 1999: 354). In conjunction with massive military deployment, the Bangladesh government also adopted a policy of transmigration of Bengalis from the plains to the CHT. The government had three key objectives in pursuing this policy: (1) to outnumber the local population (a policy known locally as "demographic invasion") and "Bengalise" the CHT; (2) to enable the Bangladesh military to counter the Pahari guerrilla forces by building "strategic hamlets" similar to those of the ill-fated American strategy in Vietnam;[4] (3) to pursue a policy of what came to be known as "We want the land and not the people"[5] which aimed to drive the indigenous people away and grab their land.

This transmigration[6] began in the late 1970s (Anti-Slavery Society 1984: 71–73) and 400,000 Bengalis were settled in the CHT between 1978 and 1985 (The CHT Commission 1994: 26). Consequently, the Bengali population in the CHT increased sharply, from 9% in 1951 to about 50% in 1991 (Adnan 2004: 15). After 1991, the Bangladesh government manipulated the population data of the indigenous people in what one scholar has called "statistical politics" (Barkat 2016).

The consequences of the militarisation and settlement of Bengalis are multi-faceted. They led to the dispossession of the Paharis' land, rendering conflicts over land more frequent and acute (Adnan / Dastidar 2011). The research for this paper revealed multiple cases of land dispossession, as documented in fieldnotes. More seriously, the militarisation and transmigration led to large-scale massacres of the indigenous people. The first massacre took place in Mubachari on 15 October 1979, and involved both the armed forces and the Bengali settlers (Samad 1980, Hussain 1986). In the following years, massacres became more systematic (Amnesty International 1986, The CHT Commission 1989). Mark Levene asserts that the massacres of the 1970s and 1980s crossed the line from a "genocidal process" to "active genocide" (Levene 1999: 359).

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4   Ziauddin Choudhury, the Former Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong district, has provided an inside account of the Bengali settlement programme. He opposed the programme because he thought that it would have a disastrous impact on the indigenous communities (Choudhury 2010). The author also had an opportunity to discuss the issue with Choudhury in Washington, DC in 2010.

5   The statement was made by the GOC (General Officer Commanding) of the Chittagong Division of the Bangladesh armed forces, Major-General Abul Manzur on 26 March 1977 at a public meeting (quoted in Mohsin 1999: 111). This policy can be traced back to the initial years of independent Bangladesh. In 1972, Prime Minister Mujibar Rahman threatened a delegation from the CHT with the warning that if they did not abandon their demand for regional autonomy, the government would eliminate them by settling thousands of Bengalis in the CHT (Van Schendel 1992: 117, footnote 80).

6   The term is originally derived from the Dutch word *transmigratie*, which was used by the Dutch colonial rulers and later taken up by the Indonesian government as *transmigrasi*, and means the government-sponsored settlement of people from one place of the country to the other. Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing this to my notice.

Insecurity perceptions of the Paharis

As the discussion in the preceding section highlights, there is a causal link between the policies that produced the marginalisation of the Paharis and the rise of their insecurity. Pahari security threats should be understood in two dimensions – the threat to group identity at the macro level and the constant threat of violence in daily life at micro level – but the two levels operate simultaneously in an intertwined fashion. A caveat, however, should be noted here; differentiation should be made on the level and dimensions of threats in everyday life (micro level) on the basis of ethnicity, gender, age, economic status, etc. Nonetheless, the two categories represent the general patterns of Pahari insecurity discourses.

The discourse on the macro-level threat to group identity is formed by the policies of the state toward the Paharis. In particular, they suspect that the key aim of the transmigration policy is "ethnic cleansing" by uprooting them from their lands (Chakma 2006). The policy is a "political migration" (Ahsan / Chakma 1989) and the programme is universally viewed as "demographic invasion".[7] The change in demographic composition has reinforced this fear. In line with the increase in the Bengali population in the CHT noted above, the area had become a Bengali-majority region by the end of the 20th century.

The Bengali settlers have now begun to replace the traditional names of places in the CHT with Bengali-Muslim names (Tripura 2017). Furthermore, the transmigration of Bengalis in the CHT has been accompanied by a process of Islamisation of the region (Mohsin 1999). These trends, Paharis perceive, do not bode well for their future.

The transmigration of Bengalis in the CHT may be explained as "settler colonialism" (Wolfe 2006). The concept was coined in the context of white settlements in America, Australia, New Zealand, etc. in which settlement took place following the extermination of native communities. A similar process can be observed in Palestine, where Israelis are creating settlements on Palestinian land by expelling the local population (Nebulsi 2017).

Land conflicts between the Paharis and the newly arrived Bengalis have massively increased as a consequence of the transmigration programme (Chakma 2010). Arguably, land conflict was inevitable when Bengali settlement began. For one thing, the region is a land of hills and forests with limited cultivable land. It is noteworthy that at the beginning of the 20th century, when the population of the CHT was less than 200,000, various surveys concluded

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7   This issue was mentioned by many Paharis in my interviews during fieldwork over the years. Two interviews are particularly noteworthy here. The first was an interview on 26 June 1988 in Rangamati with the late Mr Nandit Roy, a member of the Chakma Raj family, who first introduced me to the idea. The second was an interview on 11 March 2016 in Dhaka with Mr S.S. Chakma, a leading Pahari intellectual, who explained to me the evolution of this policy.

that the population of the district should ideally be kept to that number for the region's environmental sustainability (Mohsin 2003: 31). A key aim of the Regulation of 1900, introduced by the British colonial administration, was to preserve the environmentally sustainable livelihood of the Paharis. Thus, the transmigration policy was undertaken against the established precepts of environmental sustainability in the CHT. The construction of the Kaptai Dam inundated 40 per cent of the area's agricultural land and then the transmigration programme put further stress on land distribution. Under the transmigration programme, the government had planned to settle thousands of Bengalis with the provision that each Bengali settler family would receive 5 acres of hilly land, 4 acres of mixed land and 2.5 acres of paddy land (Anti-Slavery Society 1984: 71–73). But the question was where these lands, particularly the arable land, would come from. The chief of the Chakma circle, Raja Devasish Roy, explained the problem in the following words:

> If we now look at the man to land ratio in the 1970s, i.e. before the settlers were brought in, and then look at the requirements for just the first of several batches of settlers that eventually came to the CHT, we get a very dismal picture. There simply were no paddy lands that were not already under the plough (Roy 1995: 8).

Thus, the inevitable consequence of the transmigration program was the rise of land conflict between the Bengali settlers and the Paharis.

The constant fear of violence also derives from intra-indigenous conflict. Members of the indigenous communities claim that this has resulted from the "divide and rule" policy of the military. The Paharis are divided into four major political groups, some of which the military props up in order to justify its own deployment in the CHT and to further the slow-moving process of ethnic cleansing. During my field interviews in 2016 with several members of the civil society in Khagrachari (who wished to remain anonymous for personal safety), they particularly emphasised the divisions in the United Peoples Democratic Front, allegedly instigated by the military intelligence.

Both the militarisation and the transmigration policy have led to a massive rise of violence against indigenous women in the CHT in recent decades – many cases of rape and sexual harassment were documented during field visits: "Many helpless indigenous women and girls have been raped or sexually assaulted by Bengali settlers and the security forces" (Uddin 2016: 331). The violence against indigenous women appeared systematic. This is corroborated by other researchers who found that rape and other forms of sexual violence were perpetrated as mechanisms of pressurising families and communities to leave a particular locality, in turn enabling settlers to grab their lands (Adnan / Dastidar 2011: 97).

Today, the Paharis live in constant fear of the violence perpetrated by the Bengali settlers, who are backed by the armed forces. Such fear is rooted in historical experiences and in the regular encounters with violence in the CHT.

As an ethnographer has noted, "many incidents of massacre, attack and reprisal, indiscriminate arrest, torture, judicial and extrajudicial torture, killing, rape, sexual violence, forced religious conversion, forced marriage, and abduction took place in the hills, often committed by the security forces and settler Bengalis against the indigenous people" (Uddin 2016: 321–322).

Coping strategies

Against the threat of losing group identity (macro-level) and the fear of daily violence (micro-level), the Paharis have developed an array of strategies. The threats and security-making at both levels should be understood in a composite manner because of their intertwined character.

To protect group identity, the Paharis initially pursued constitutional politics and employed political activism to preserve their status as identity groups. In the 1960s, the Pahari students formed organisations such as the Pahari Chattra Samiti ("Hill Students' Organisation") whose primary objective was to promote awareness among the indigenous students and the Paharis in general of their rights. Later, those student leaders would play a pivotal role in Pahari political activism.

In the first general elections of Pakistan in 1970, Raja Tridiv Roy, then chief of the Chakma circle, was elected to parliament as an independent candidate from the CHT constituency. Following the elections, he was invited to join the Awami League (AL), the party that won the general elections. Raja Roy told the AL leaders that he would join the party if they assured him that the cultural identity of the Paharis would be protected.[8] This signified that the preservation of the cultural identity had become important in Pahari political activism by the end of 1960s – and it would gain even greater significance in the years to come.

Following the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the Paharis initially followed a constitutional path to protect their cultural identity. When the drafting of the constitution for the newly independent state was underway in 1972, a delegation of Pahari leaders led by Manabendra Narayan Larma (a student leader of the 1960s) met with the Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibar Rahman and demanded regional autonomy and the protection of Pahari cultural identity (Mohsin / Chakma 1992).

The Prime Minister dismissed the demands of the Pahari representatives and advised them "to forget their ethnic identities" and merge with "Bengali nationalism" (Ahsan / Chakma 1989: 967). In reaction, the Pahari leaders

8   Interview by the author with Raja Tridiv Roy in June 2005, Islamabad. It is noteworthy that Raja Roy supported the unity of Pakistan in the 1971 war and that after the war, he did not return to Bangladesh but lived in Pakistan for the rest of his life.

formed a political party – Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti ("United Peoples Organisation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts" or PCJSS, popularly known as the JSS) to spearhead the movement for regional autonomy. The formation of a Pahari political party was a significant development in the Pahari struggle for identity preservation (vis-à-vis Bengali nationalism), which emerged in the form of "resistance" against the background of the "hegemonising and homogenising" policy of the Bangladesh state (Mohsin 2001).

The regional autonomy movement intensified in the ensuing years. In the first general elections of independent Bangladesh in 1973, M.N. Larma was elected as a member of parliament from the CHT constituency. In the national parliament he made a sustained argument against the assimilationist policy of the government and asserted:

> You cannot impose your national identity on others. I am a Chakma, not a Bengali. I am a citizen of Bangladesh – Bangladeshi. You are also Bangladeshi, but your national identity is Bengali [...] They [the Paharis] can never be Bengali (Bangladesh National Assembly 1974).

Larma's pursuit of regional autonomy evolved into an armed struggle after 1975. When there was a change of power in Dhaka following a series of bloody military coups in 1975, Larma went underground and organised a guerrilla force, the Shanti Bahini. Thus began a military campaign to fight for the realisation of the goal of regional autonomy for the CHT.

Armed conflict in the CHT between the Bangladesh armed forces and the SB continued from 1975 to 1997. Although it was essentially a low-level guerrilla-type conflict, hundreds of Paharis, mostly non-combatants, were killed during the decades-long violence. The high number of deaths was primarily due to the military-complicit massacres of the Paharis by the Bengali settlers (Barua 2001). After years of combat, both sides realised that a military defeat of the adversary could not be achieved. The two sides thus opted for a negotiated settlement and, after years of negotiations, a peace accord was finally signed on 2 December 1997. The accord provided for the creation of a regional council and the two sides agreed to devolve power in several subject areas to the local government bodies (Roy 2003). With the signing of the peace accord, the Paharis returned to constitutional politics and since then the implementation of the peace accord has been the main aim of Pahari political activism.

More than two decades have passed since the peace accord was signed. Although a regional council has been set up, thus fulfilling an important provision of the agreement, the government has yet to fully implement the accord (The Daily Star 2017). Three issues stand out in this context that the Paharis consider important, to maintain their cultural identity, ensure their livelihoods, tackle the fear of violence and build durable peace in the region. First,

the demilitarisation of the CHT. The SB members laid down their arms almost immediately after signing the peace accord, but the temporary camps of Bangladesh armed forces have yet to be withdrawn as was agreed in the peace accord. The Bangladesh armed forces have avoided the closure of temporary camps on the pretext of ensuring security, but the Paharis view the issue differently. They suspect that the Bangladesh military never intended to close down the military camps, primarily because their presence encourages the Bengali settlers, who were brought to the CHT under the transmigration programme, to stay, rather than to abandon the CHT because of the difficulties of living in the hills.[9] Second, a police force was supposed to be raised from the local population as per the provision of the peace accord, but thus far this has not occurred, for reasons that remain unclear.

Third, a land commission was supposed to be expeditiously constituted to resolve land disputes in the CHT. This was a key provision of the peace accord because of the centrality of land in the CHT problem. So far, no land disputes have been settled and the government has failed to take appropriate measures for this. In 2001, the Bangladesh parliament passed the Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Dispute Settlement Commission Act, but it was opposed by the Paharis because the composition of the Commission was favourable to the Bengalis and the chairperson had "excessive" power in the settlement of land disputes. The Pahari leaders suspected that such a composition of the Land Commission would pave the way to dispossessing Paharis of their land. It took another 16 years to introduce an amendment to the Act and eventually the Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Dispute Settlement Commission (Amendment) Act was passed on 9 August 2016. Since then, however, the Bangladesh government has not acted on the issue, nor has it provided any explanation for its inaction.

The land issue has become particularly complicated due to the settlement of Bengalis under the government's transmigration programme. By the 1980s, more than 59,000 Paharis had become refugees in India, but they returned following the signing of the peace accord. In the meantime, Bengali settlers had occupied the land left by the refugees. Moreover, Bengali settlers also grabbed the land of thousands of Paharis who had been internally displaced during the years of conflict. The Bengali settlers are reluctant to return the lands to the Pahari owners. Thus, the issue of land has become very complicated, also fuelling communal violence. It is not necessary, Paharis claim, to enact new laws to settle the land disputes; if the government were sincere, the disputes could be settled now within the framework of existing laws, including the Regulation of 1900, the Parbattya Zilla Parishad Act, the Parbattya Chattagram Anchalik Parishad Act, etc. (Dewan 2018).

9   This observation was made by the author during conversation with the Paharis during a visit to Bangladesh in 2016.

In addition to the formal promises made by the government in the peace accord, the JSS leaders claim that there was an unwritten understanding about the Bengali settlers in which the Bangladesh government representatives promised that the Bengali settlers, who were brought under the transmigration program to the CHT, would be resettled elsewhere following the signing of the peace accord.[10] The European Union offered financial assistance to resettle the Bengalis (Roy 2003), but the Bangladesh government did not accept the offer. Later, the Bangladesh government claimed that there was no such understanding (Chakma 2016a). The issue has created a huge controversy and the JSS leaders have complained that they were duped by the Bangladesh government negotiators into signing the agreement (Chakma 2016a).

The non-implementation of the key provisions of the peace accord has undermined the peace-building process in the CHT in the past two decades and has been a primary driver of Pahari political activism. The Paharis are frustrated over the non-implementation of the key provisions of the peace accord. A common view among the Paharis is that the Bangladesh government never meant to fully implement the peace accord although it signed the document. An observer has noted that the government signed the agreement knowing that it would not fully implement the accord (Mohsin 2003). A careful scrutiny of the government dithering of the past two decades in implementing the peace accord would tend to support the Pahari complaint. The Paharis thus view the Bangladesh military as the "spoiler" of the peace process and accuse them of continuing to maintain a policy of "ethnic cleansing", using the Bengali settlers to uproot them from their lands (observation from fieldnotes). Notwithstanding the persistence of deep frustration, Pahari political activism continues to focus on the full implementation of the peace accord because, in the view of the Paharis, the full implementation of the accord would help them in their struggle to survive as an identity group and reduce the likelihood of the violence that they confront on a daily basis.

Other than domestic political activism, the Paharis, as another coping strategy, have integrated their struggle for the preservation of identity with

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10 It is very likely that there was an unwritten agreement on the issue of resettlement of government-sponsored settler Bengalis from the CHT because the JSS leaders would otherwise never have signed the 1997 accord. They were aware of the centrality of the issue in the CHT conflict and knew that if they failed to address the issue in some way their political future would be jeopardised. Yet they agreed to keep it unwritten because GOB representatives explained to them that if it was made a written provision the government would not be able to withstand the political backlash that would result. According to Peace Campaign Group, the government representatives justified keeping the issue unwritten with the following words: "The domestic constituency does not allow the simple majority Awami League Government to openly address the issue in the agreement […] because once the issue is addressed in the agreement, the opposition parties, particularly the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), will come out in the streets with mass agitation that can even raise the question of survival of the government in power. In that situation, the possibility of an agreement between the two sides will be jeopardized. Of course, the Government understands and supports the concerns of the JSS over the issue and can include some provisions in the agreement for the gradual removal of the settlers from the CHT" (quoted in Roy 2003: 30, footnote 23). My fieldnotes also suggest the existence of such an informal understanding.

international (both inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations) and national indigenous movements. The Paharis have emphasised two issues in their international and national rights activism: the full implementation of the 1997 peace accord and the protection of indigenous rights.

At the international level, Pahari activists have presented their perspectives on the 1997 peace accord and the rights of the indigenous people in Bangladesh (particularly in the CHT) at the proceedings of various international organisations, forums and conferences. In many cases, Pahari activists have played a leading role in the international movement for indigenous rights. For example, Pahari activists have been prominently involved in the activities of the Bangkok-based "Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact" (AIPP), a network of various Asian indigenous rights groups. Pahari representatives have traditionally been active at the United Nations indigenous forums. Particularly noteworthy in this context is that Raja Devasish Roy, the chief of the Chakma circle, was one of the vice-chairpersons of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2014–2016. Raja Roy strongly highlighted the issue of the full implementation of the CHT accord and indigenous rights in general during his tenure at the UN. Also, each year Pahari activists present the views from the CHT on indigenous issues at the Geneva-based human rights bodies.

Over the years, Pahari activists have adopted international networking and developed partnerships with other indigenous organisations throughout the world. The Europe-based CHT Commission, with which other Pahari rights groups and activists collaborate, has been at the forefront of the international campaign to defend the rights of the Paharis over several decades. The Commission campaigns in Europe and elsewhere to put pressure on the government of Bangladesh to protect the cultural identity and rights of the indigenous people of the CHT. Other international humanitarian organisations with which CHT rights activists work closely include Amnesty International, Survival International, the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and others. These humanitarian organisations have not only published reports on the CHT, they have employed various strategies to put pressure on the Bangladesh government to protect the rights of the CHT indigenous communities.

Pahari diasporas in various countries lobby their home governments to put pressure on Bangladesh to fully implement the 1997 peace accord. Such Pahari activism can be found in the UK, France, the USA, Japan, Australia, Canada, South Korea, India, etc. The Pahari diaspora groups in those countries work to promote the CHT issue internationally. Furthermore, the diaspora groups have created an international coordinating body – the International Jumma Organisation – through which they actively lobby at various international organisations such as the UN, European Union, Geneva-based human rights agencies, etc.

At the national level, the Paharis have not only formed their own rights groups on various issues to promote the rights of the indigenous communities, but also closely coordinate their activism with other rights groups within Bangladesh. The JSS leader and chairperson of the CHT Regional Council, Jotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, serves as the chairperson of the Bangladesh Adibashi Forum ("Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum"). There are 56 indigenous communities in Bangladesh and the organisation works to promote the rights of all indigenous communities within the country. Similarly, Pahari Chattra Parishad ("Hill Students Association") is working to promote the rights of the indigenous students of the CHT.

The Hill Women Federation is another group that is devoted to promoting indigenous women's rights. Pahari women's groups and activists closely collaborate with national-level women's organisations. They have supported each other on various issues over the years. A prominent example in this context is the case of the abduction of Kalpana Chakma, the organising secretary of the Hill Women Federation. Kalpana was abducted in 1996, allegedly by members of the Bangladesh military (although they deny it). Since her abduction, women's groups both Pahari and national have sought justice for Kalpana Chakma (Chakma 2016b), but until today she has not been found.

Other than the above noted political activism, the Paharis also use the court system to defend the rights of the indigenous communities, occasionally in collaboration with national rights organisations. The case of Kalpana Chakma, noted above, is one in which the Pahari and national-level rights groups have collaborated. Additionally, a group of Pahari activists has lodged a petition in the Bangladesh High Court seeking a verdict on the legal status of the CHT Regulation of 1900. As previously noted, the Regulation of 1900 was introduced by the British colonial administration to protect the Paharis from the influx of Bengalis and to maintain an environmentally sustainable livelihood in the CHT. After decolonisation, the Regulation was not declared null and void by any court, although neither the Pakistan government nor the Bangladesh government applied this legal document in relation to the indigenous people of the CHT. There are many such issues for which the Paharis have sought justice through the courts.

Current trends in cultural activities also signify a strategy of promoting group identity. The observation of the year-end festival, Boi-sa-bi, is now celebrated with great fanfare. The formation of various cultural groups in recent years also highlights a trend of cultural revivalism and a return to tradition. By the same token, an emphasis on religious practices has become noticeable in the CHT. In particular, Buddhism has taken centre-stage in the life of the indigenous Buddhist communities in the region. Early signs of this can be traced back to the formation of the Parbattya Bouddha Sangha ("Hill Bud-

dhist Association") in the 1960s, and from the early 1980s onward there has been an evident emphasis on religious practices within the Buddhist indigenous communities. Particularly noteworthy in this regard was the rise of Bano Bhante, a Buddhist monk who attracted a massive following within the Buddhist communities. The underlying importance of this enthusiasm in the fields of culture and religion is the issue of identity. Parash Khisa, a doctor belonging to the Chakma community, said in an interview on 23 March 2016 that the Buddhist communities would remain very grateful to Bano Bhante for strengthening the religious identity of the Paharis.

While the various kinds of political activism discussed above are understood to protect and promote group identity, the Paharis also view them as a way of protecting themselves from the constant threat of violence. If macro-level security can be enhanced by strengthening group identity, it will have a spillover effect onto micro-level security because of their intertwined character. As noted above, the full implementation of the 1997 peace accord has taken centre stage in Pahari political activism, because its full implementation would not only promote group identity, it would also mean a reduction of violence in their daily lives. For example, if the provision for creating a Pahari police force is implemented, the Paharis will be better protected from communal attack by the Bengali settlers.

The Paharis have organised themselves in various political groups that are not only involved in political activism to promote indigenous rights, but also serve as platforms to protect the Paharis from communal violence. If there is any sign of communal tension anywhere, mobile phones are used to warn group members and the network is used to organise the group to protect itself collectively. For example, when Bengali settlers attacked Pahari villages on 19 February 2010 in Baghaichari, members of Pahari Chattra Parishad immediately alerted group members in Dighinala and Khagrachari to undertake precautionary measures against possible communal tension in their areas (fieldnotes from February 2012).

"Self-surveillance"[11] appears to be the key strategy for dealing with the constant fear of violence. This means remaining self-consciously vigilant to protect oneself from the danger of violence in everyday life. For example, the Paharis generally check with relatives and friends by mobile phone to ascertain whether there is any communal tension before travelling. Also, if Paharis become aware of any communal tension anywhere, they immediately inform others so that they can avoid the trouble. Sometimes they accept material loss but still seek to avoid violence. One Pahari noted on 8 February 2012 in Kamalchari village (Khagrachari) that: "They [the Bengalis] always look for excuses to ignite communal tension; sometimes they take our crops but we can-

11 The term is borrowed from Nasreen (2017).

not do anything because the military protect them; [so] we avoid danger" (interview in February 2012). I also noted an incident in Kamalchari village in which a Pahari said that he cultivated rice on his land and one morning he found that the crop had been harvested by nearby Bengali settlers – about which there was nothing he could do, for fear of reprisal (interview on 8 February 2012). A general view among the Paharis is that they should not do anything that could ignite communal violence, even if it means accepting a material loss.

Another strategy the Paharis employ is to move to urban centres or remote hills to escape violence. They move to urban centres because the likelihood of violence is lesser there compared to rural villages. This is particularly evident when communal attacks take place against the indigenous people. For example, many families moved to Khagrachari and Rangamati following the 2010 Baghaichari attacks on Pahari villages by the Bengali settlers.

Another threat that Pahari women are confronted with is sexual violence perpetrated by Bengali settlers, for which Paharis adopt both macro- and micro-level measures to protect their women. There are no systematic statistics on sexual violence against indigenous women in the CHT, but The Daily Star reported that in the first six and a half months of 2018, 15 indigenous girls and women were raped (including several gang-rapes) by Bengali settlers: "No one has yet been punished in the CHT for rape, gang-rape or murder of Adivasis under the women and children repression prevention act 2000" (Devnath 2018). It is noteworthy that the vast majority of cases of sexual violence against indigenous women are perpetrated by Bengali settlers, and Survival International stated in its report submitted in October 2017 to the 30th session of the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review: "Physical and sexual violence against indigenous women is used as a tool of fear and coercion to facilitate eviction and land-grabbing" (Devnath 2018). To tackle sexual violence, Paharis pursue political activism at a national and international level in order to put pressure on the Bangladesh government to undertake measures to prevent such violence. At the micro level, indigenous women adopt "self-surveillance" to protect themselves from rape and sexual harassment by the Bengali settlers and the members of the armed forces. An incident in one of the fieldwork locations – Kamalchari village – is perhaps instructive: Protima Chakma, an indigenous woman, was raped and murdered by Bengali settlers on 1 October 2011 when she went to the Chengi River to fetch water. Since then, "we either go to the river when there are people around or go in a group" (interview with a woman in Kamalchari, 8 February 2012).[12] This pattern of self-surveillance can be evidenced in other places as well.

12 The author also visited two villages near Kamalchari, namely Gorgyazyachari and Thakurchara, on 9 and 10 February 2012 and found similar patterns of self-surveillance among women, prompted by reports of the incident in Kamalchari.

Conclusion

This paper has illustrated, by applying an interpretive ethnographic approach, how the perceptions of insecurity and the security practices of the CHT indigenous people are primarily formed by their experiences of marginalisation,[13] first in the state of Pakistan and later, from 1971 onward, in the state of Bangladesh. Marginalisation has occurred mainly due to the assimilationist nation-building policies and ill-conceived development projects pursued by the two states. Specifically, the marginalisation of the Paharis in the Bangladesh nation-state occurred in the vortex of three interactive processes: (1) the nation-building and development policies of the Bangladesh state; (2) the struggle for autonomy by the Paharis in order to prevent the threat of loss of identity; and (3) the "military-focussed" and the politically-motivated transmigration policy of the Bangladesh government to counter the autonomy movement by the Paharis in the CHT. The policies of the two states not only threatened Pahari group identity but also generated constant threat of violence in their daily lives. The macro-level fear of losing identity and the micro-level fear of facing violence in everyday life are intertwined and operate in parallel: an increase in the degree of threat at one level affects the degree of threat at the other. As explained in this paper, the transmigration programme of the Bangladesh government has not only threatened the group identity (macro-level threat), it has concomitantly increased violence against the Paharis in the form of communal attacks, land grabbing, sexual violence against women, etc. (micro-level threats). Arguably, if macro-level security can be enhanced, for example by implementing the 1997 Peace Accord or reversing the transmigration programme, this will reduce the likelihood of violence in the everyday lives of the Paharis.

This paper has presented an array of Pahari coping strategies to deal with the challenges of protecting group identity and the constant possibility of violence. To protect identity, the Paharis initially pursued constitutional politics, which failed to yield the intended result. They then took a non-constitutional approach and began an armed struggle that continued for two decades, until a peace accord was signed in 1997. A peace-building process began after the conclusion of the accord, and Pahari political activism since 1997 has centred around peace building and the full implementation of the peace accord. When the accord was signed, the universal belief in the hills was that it would safeguard Pahari cultural identity and reduce the threat of violence in everyday life.

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13 While the concept of marginalisation has different contextual meanings, it is used here to mean the phenomenon of pushing the CHT indigenous communities to the edge by taking away or preventing them from exercising an active voice, identity or place within the mainstream Bangladesh polity.

However, although more than two decades have passed since the accord was signed, the government has yet to fully implement the accord. Several key provisions of the accord have not been implemented which, the Paharis believe, are crucial to building durable peace in the hills. These include: the withdrawal of the temporary military camps, the settlement of land disputes, the rehabilitation of Pahari refugees and the formation of an indigenous police force. Pahari political activism is now geared toward putting pressure on the government to honour the promises that it made in the peace accord.

The Paharis have also adopted networking at the international and national level to protect and promote their rights as indigenous people. Their activities at the United Nations are particularly noteworthy in this regard. They have built strong networks with various indigenous organisations in other countries as well as with other rights groups within Bangladesh. They coordinate their programmes and actions with them on various issues ranging from the environment to women's rights. Additionally, Pahari leaders have played a leading role in national activism on indigenous rights.

To deal with insecurities in everyday life, the Paharis have primarily relied on "self-surveillance" strategies both at group level and individually. Group political activism and vigilance at the personal level are employed to counter the dangers in everyday life.

The analysis of the security perceptions of the Paharis shows that security is local rather than "national" and that in the context of indigenous people it involves group identity and the threat of violence in their everyday lives. From such a standpoint, this is a critique of the realist-positivist security framework, which defines security holistically as "national security" whose central purpose is to defend the State from external threats. While CSS is appropriate for analysing security perceptions of groups such as the Paharis, it arguably needs to move beyond such issues. Security is not only about "securitisation" or the construction of security discourses, it is also about coping strategies or the collective security making by identity groups at the macro level and individually in everyday life at the micro level. Put simply, the CSS needs to build a research programme that combines "security discourses" (perceptions) and "security making" (coping strategies).

This paper has provided further reflection on the "interpretive ethnographic method", contextualising the case of the Paharis in the CHT, thereby validating the approach as a viable research tool. At the current juncture, the Paharis face daunting challenges in their struggle to survive as distinct identity groups. Moreover, they confront enormous challenges to their safety in their everyday lives. As noted above, there is a clear connection between these two levels of threat. The dynamics of the macro- and micro-level threats to Pahari insecurity and how they cope with them will be an interesting area of research for future researchers.

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