CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUALIZING SPACE AND CRITICAL GEOGRAPHY

The present chapter explores the idea of space and the production of colonial space. The chapter is organized into four sections. Section I is exclusively given to elaborating the idea of space. An attempt is made to trace out the manifold and important ways space has been understood since the time of Aristotle onwards with an awareness of contemporary understandings of space as a social and political construct. The section navigates through views and positions, considered to be crucial in developing the understanding of space as an intellectual and cultural concept. Section II explores the idea of colonial space. To this end, this section brings together perspectives, observations, and arguments which do not always display obvious links with the politics and production of colonial space per se. However, these observations offer vital critical perspectives to investigate the politics and production of colonial space. Section III offers a brief history of the Empire in the northeast and highlights the changing dynamics of the administrative organization of space. Section IV discusses key metaphors or tropes that went into the transformation of the historical northeast into the colonial northeast.

I

Theorizing Space

Space has been conventionally viewed as a mathematical concept and the term usually evokes the idea of an "empty area" (Lefebvre 1). Within the Aristotelian tradition, it was viewed as "a category; a tool to name, classify and order" sensory evidence (1). The Renaissance thinker Rene Descartes is often viewed as an important figure in the development of the idea of space. Especially it is the notion of space as an "absolute", free-standing entity that Descartes is associated with (1). The Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant considers space as a "tool of knowledge belonging to the *a priori* realm of consciousness" (2).

Another important window to the concept of space is through the distinction between absolute and relative space. Absolute space is defined as independent, fixed, empty, homogenous, uniform, natural and given. As suggested by Barney Warf (2010), absolute space is also designated as Euclidian space as Euclidean geometry is believed to be founded on the assumption of a uniform, continuous space (3). It is possible to trace back the concept of absolute space to Classical Greek thoughts. For instance, Plato defines time as an imperfect mirror of eternal forms embedded in space (See Warf 3). Time is derived from a change in space, a perception realized through spatial difference. In other

words, Plato seems to view space as a fixed order not only preexisting but also generating the experience of time. In contrast to the concept of absolute space, a relative approach to space views it as a social construct, comprehensible only in terms of specific frames of interpretation. Speaking historically, the most explicit debate between both the positions is reflected in the debate between Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz (see Warf 4).

An absolutist approach could be seen to underline the Cartesian view of space. The Cartesian view of space reduces it to an abstract concept and orders it to legible frames. As suggested by Barney Warf, by transforming space into a measurable, reproducible, and uniform object, Cartesian imagination robbed space of its social context (5). Cartesian space is also an objectified space. It is the Cartesian view of space as an object existing independent of the perceiving subject which inspired almost all modes of Renaissance knowledge, thereby playing an instrumental role in the commencement and furtherance of colonial projects (See Warf 4). For instance, geography and its epistemological twin cartography, directly aided colonization by rendering an increased visibility on those spaces of the world, which were formerly unknown to Europe. In other words, Cartesian, Euclidean or absolute space facilitates the colonization of space by reducing space to measurement, abstraction, and instrumental use (See Sharp 45).

In twentieth-century critical theory, French thinker Henri Lefebvre is often credited with the development of the idea of space. *The Production of Space* (1974), by Lefebvre, is an interesting critique of the hegemonic tendency within Western knowledge systems to approach space almost always as an abstraction. Interestingly, Lefebvre draws attention to the systematic reduction of space to an abstract or mental entity and the tendency to overlook space as a lived reality within the central currents of Western thought. He mentions that within these traditions "the connection, between mental and social, between the space of the philosophers and the space of people is never conceptualized" (4). Lefebvre highlights the need to view space as "physical (nature), mental (mental abstractions) and social or the space of social practice" (12). He writes:

> Social space is not a thing or a product: rather it subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their co-existence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/ disorder…Social space is what permits fresh actions to occur while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others. (73)

Lefebvre also explores the historical changes in ways of production of space in the West: "Since each mode of production has its own particular space; the shift from one mode to another must entail the production of a new space" (46). He argues that space is made up of three interrelated and complementary layers. First, there are "spatial practices" that consist of concrete processes, flows, and movement which can be perceived in the realm of the everyday as movements, migrations, routines and other journeys through and in space (33). Spatial practices embraces production and reproduction, and the locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation (*33*). Second, there are "representations of space" which serve to represent and make sense of space. Representations of space are best viewed as conceptualized spaces which are regularly implicated in the relations of production and which regularly serve to endorse the political order these relations impose (33). Third, there are "spaces of representation" or "representational spaces" which are spaces lived and felt by people as an everyday experience. Lefebvre argues that it is primarily through spatial practices and representations of space that social space is proposed, produced, institutionalized and eventually mastered (38).

Insofar as the present study, the three most important hypotheses derived from Lefebvre are: (a) that changes in modes of production necessarily give rise to the production of new spaces (46); (b) that social space is always politically produced (84) and; (c) that space is almost alway implicated in structures of domination as a "vital means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (27). In other words, space is always implicated in projects of control (7, 26). Social space is defined by Lefebvre as "actual and potential spaces with foundations at once material and formal" (192). Lefebvre also mentions that it is the forces and relations of production that determine the production of space (210).

It is suggested by Lefebvre that social space is produced primarily by appropriating natural space into ideologically determined "political codes" (17, 48). He also mentions that political space could also be viewed as "instrumental space" (27). Hegemonic powers operate primarily by transforming natural space into instrumental or political space. Lefebvre is of the opinion that the production of space not only serves hegemonic designs to dominate but is often used by agents of power as a tool to corroborate claims of authority and legitimacy (34). It is evident that the transformation of natural space into political space is a regular exercise within a hegemonic project such as colonialism.

As suggested earlier, it is primarily spatial practices and representations of space that determine the production of political space. Spatial practices, by definition, consist of a "projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice" (38). It is the spatial practices of a dispensation that secret that society's space. Lefebvre writes: "It propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it" (38).

Lefebvre argues that social space is often founded on a "regime of prohibition" (35). In other words, social space maintains itself through the creation of symbolic places and practices of prescription and prohibition (35). It is possible to suggest that there are important links between what Lefebvre views as the spatial regime of prescription and prohibition and what could be viewed as geographies of power. Lefebvre also offers another important thesis pertaining to the role of narratives in the construction of space. He suggests that the production of space inevitably involves representation of space which often operates as a vehicle of ideologies (41). "The producers of space have always acted in accordance with a representation, ideologically imposed upon the representational space of subjects" (43). It is possible to encapsulate Lefebvre's thesis into three cardinal points. First, space is a social construct (Lefebvre 56; also see Soja, Postmodern, 17). Second, as a social construct space often operate as a political instrument or an instrument of power (7, 26). Third, political space is constructed out of natural space through acts of ideological appropriation (48).

The view that space is a social and ideological construct is also supported by critical geographer Edward Soja. It is important to visit Soja's concept of "spatiality" as developed in his book *Postmodern Geographies* (11). As suggested above, Soja views space as a social product. He views spatiality as the process as well as politics involved in the production of space. Interestingly, Soja also highlights the role of ideologies in the construction of space. Drawing attention to the role of space as a hand-tool of ideologies, he comments: "we must be aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology"(6). What Soja highlights is the "instrumental spatialization" of society and the "power-filled" construction of geographies by hegemonic powers (7). Soja points out vital links between the construction of space and the exercise of power.

What is important to note is that both Lefebvre and Soja draws attention to the strategic use of space as an instrument of power. They also highlight the role played by ideologies in the construction of space.

<p style="text-align:center">**II**</p>

Production of Colonial Space

As suggested by Timothy Mitchell in the book *Colonizing Egypt* (1991), the very foundation of the Empire is the institution of new spatial order (57). Mitchell demonstrates how the Empire not only consolidates but also energizes itself by producing spaces in accordance with its own hegemonic and expansionist designs. What Mitchell emphasizes is the fact that as a hegemonic exercise, the Empire essentially makes a political use of the colonized space. Within colonial projects, space is used as an instrument of domination. It is obvious that the Empire not only instrumentalizes or politicizes space but also deliberately overlooks, bypasses and eventually, dissolves pre-colonial spaces. Lefebvre's discussion on the transformation of space within designs of domination offers important clues into the transformation of space in the colonial contact-zone. Lefebvre notes how natural spaces are transformed into what "juridical space" (253) or "politico-economic space" (280) within a capitalist mode of production. It is possible to view the construction of colonial space in light of Lefebvre's ideas. It is also possible to look at the transformation of colonized space brought about by the Empire as a movement from what Yi Fu Tuan terms as a "mythical" to a "pragmatic space" (16). This transformation could also be viewed as a transformation into what Dipankar Gupta in his book *Culture, Space and the Nation-state* (2000), terms as "bureaucratic space" (23).

It is clear that the Empire unavoidably functions through the production of political or instrumental space. One useful point of departure to explore the production of colonial space production is to look at the collaboration between colonial knowledge and colonial power. In other words, any discussion on colonial space production must refer to the decidedly political employment of knowledge within colonial projects. Bernard Cohn in his study *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (1997), identifies knowledge as the most important instrument of colonial designs of control and command. Similarly, JanMohamed in his essay "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" (1995), also draws attention to the embeddedness of colonial discourse in the hegemonic impulses of

'desire' and 'discipline' (12). What is important to note is the link between knowledge and power.

As suggested by Stephen Slemon in the article "The Scramble for Post-colonialism" (1995), colonial ideology reproduces itself primarily through a vast semiotic field of representation (46). For instance, in most of the colonial texts the trick of 'fetishizing' the other operates by substituting natural and generic categories for categories that are socially or ideologically determined. Colonial semiotics thereby transmutes heterogeneous specificities and difference into a "magical essence" (JanMohamed 21). For instance, in colonial writings, everything in a landscape often becomes expressions of one idea, variations of the same theme (21). In terms of the transformation of space what such acts of de-scripting entail is a regular bypassing of pre-colonial spatialities in favour of hegemonic Eurocentric spatialities. It is suggested that at the material level, the appropriation of the colonized space into new ideological frames in general, and frames of exclusive territorialities in particular, ruptures existing spatio-cultural landscapes and affiliations and thereby generates a significant amount of trauma in the colonized world (Gupta 20).

In *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India 1765-*1843 (1997), Matthew Edney suggests that the key imperative behind colonial space production is the agenda to dominate and manage the colony. It is primarily done by putting pre-colonial space, often viewed as lacking in order and coherence, into Eurocentric classificatory grids. Imperial imaginings organize the material and social spaces of the colony into "legible frames" (42). Similarly, Deborah Sutton in *Other Landscapes: Colonialism and the Predicament of Authority in Nineteenth-Century South India* (2011), highlights how spatial imaginaries of the Empire convert spaces into "governable landscapes" (1). As a textual construct, colonial space, to a large extent, is a product of colonial knowledge apparatus manifest as inventories and classifications. To this extent, colonial space is produced at colonial discursive sites such as maps, reports, gazettes, travel and expedition writing, etc. However, as noted earlier, it is the imperatives of governmentality that determine the production of colonial space.

It is important to note that the construction of colonial space often begins with the act of coding and enumerating, only to be followed by further visualization of space as

occupied territories. Through repeated claims of acquisition, pre-colonial spaces are sought to be transformed into occupiable territories. For instance, the formulation of the flora and fauna of the colonized world into distinct categories like the 'reserved forest' is one of the instances where a natural space is converted into a "juridico-political space" and eventually appropriated into the colonial "idiom of legitimacy" (Gadgil and Guha163). Similarly, Sutton discusses how the Empire transforms natural spaces into a cluster of remunerative assets like revenue villages (Sutton 5). As Sutton argues, such transformations of space blatantly violate or at least, bypass existing spatialities in favour of colonial spatial models.

It is obvious that the ultimate objective of projects of Imperial space production is the conversion of space into a commodity or asset. This view is corroborated by William Beinart and Lorie Hughes in *Environment and Empire* (2007), where they argue that the Empire is always driven by the agenda of wealth-creation. Interestingly, they also argue that such a metamorphosis of space into assets essentially involves (a) a decidedly "managerial approach" towards space (128), and, (b) the employment of particular types of "technical imagination" (213). Edney also notes how colonial technical imaginaries such as cartography transform space into manageable and maneuverable assets (34). Edney is of the view that often the territorial ambition of the Empire is concealed as scientistic and rational constructions of space (36). It is important to note that the production of colonial space often employs rhetoric of various sorts.

Bernard S. Cohn in his book *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (1997), explores the case of British Imperialism in India and offers useful clues so as to the links between modes of colonial knowledge and the politics of space. Setting off from the premise of the complicity between knowing and ruling, Cohn shows how colonial "investigative modalities" served as strategic sites of space production only to constructing space as an asset to be packaged, subsumed and ruled (9). Cohn notes how systematically designed forms of writings enframed preexisting spaces into imperial landscapes. Interestingly, Cohn also suggests that the construction of space in colonial India was largely determined by a "governing sense of relevance" and an "ordering mode of organization" (Cohn *Preface*). It is obvious that colonial spatiality transforms pre-colonial spaces into legible and maneuverable objects or capital assets.

Cohn, in fact, suggests that the key mandate of colonial investigative modalities is to "classify, categorize, and bound" the social space of India (21). It is clear that such projects transformed space into abstract and partitioned units. It goes without saying that this agenda of transforming space into imperial territories and eventually into imperial assets involved acts of dislocation. In the context of Capitalism, David Harvey refers to the production of 'empty space'. Similarly, Tim Youngs in *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces* (2006) identifies the production of blank spaces as an imperial trope. In light of these views, it is possible to suggest that colonial space production is best viewed as an exercise in 'de-scripting', and bypassing pre-colonial spatialities. Admitting the definition of space as an 'abstract expansion' and place as a concrete, named and lived space with rich textures of meaning attached, it could be argued that colonial knowledge regularly converted places into spaces and vice-versa.

It is clear that colonial space is founded on the paradigm of partitioned, determinate, and mutually exclusive. The production of colonial space involves acts of documentation, classification and marking (Cohn 4). It is possible to condense the colonial paradigm of space on the basis of the preceding discussions. First, The Empire has an inherent and almost obsessive tendency to commodify and objectify space. Second, the architects of colonial space display a powerful tendency to typologize space. The parameters of classifying space can be physical indices such as height, breath, extent or otherwise, usability, affordability, etc. It also goes beyond the physical, and impinges on the cultural, for instance, hygienic-unhygienic, cultivable-uncultivable, etc. Third, colonial space is a kind of hypothetical space. In other words, gazing at space is always accompanied by some design or wish to intervene.

In *Ideologies of the Raj* (1995), Thomas Metcalf observes that Imperial writing constructed India predominantly in terms of an ideology of difference. Metcalf's book offers an important perspective to examine the production of colonial space. For instance, Metcalf refers to the colonial practice of identifying some spaces as perilous: "From the beginning, the British conceived of India as a land of dirt, disease and sudden death" (171). In short, within colonial projects, the production of space is determined by strategic considerations such as security, sanitation, etc. Metcalf also shows how imperial narratives strategically overplayed, and overlooked, chosen aspects of colonized space such as climate and topography. The latter operate as key instruments of spatial

othering. From a postcolonial perspective, representations like these could be viewed as ideological apparatuses of the Empire to control colonized spaces. Metcalf writes:

> For the early nineteenth century Englishmen, what made India pestilential was its climate. Hot climates brought, in British thinking, an enduring degeneration of mind and body. Such explanations, which are nonetheless tropes, were mobilized to establish fictions of native lethargy. It is suggested that India's disease and dirt became markers of its enduring 'difference' and helped sustaining the larger ideology that undergirded the Raj. (173)

It is possible to suggest that colonial space is largely a product of colonial representations. This is more obvious in institutional narratives such as maps, reports, gazettes. In these writings, a sort of administrative space is produced by incorporating the colony into formulaic divisions and organizational forms. Colonialism, with its intensively instrumental spatiality, imposes models of partitioned and commodified space over pre-colonial geographies. Colonized spaces are appropriative, fragmented and hierarchical. In other words, these spaces are reductive of differences; a disjunctive space, that locates specificities into places or localities in order to control them and make them negotiable; and finally a space that is hierarchical, ranging from the abominable to the desirable, from dystopias to utopias.

It is clear that colonial space production is best viewed as a movement from visualization to production mediated through acts of realization. The same could also be said to correspond to space as landscape, space as territory and finally, space as assets. In other words, the visualization of space corresponds to landscape, the realization of space corresponds to territory and the material production of space corresponds to assets. This conceptualization also recalls what Lefebvre views as perceived, conceived and lived space or correspondingly political coding, politics of space and spaces of production.

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III

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Production of Northeast India: Real and Imagined Territories

What is viewed as the northeastern region of India witnessed a regime of continuous production and expansion of territorial space by the colonial state leading to a highly

territorialized social landscape in the region. Unlike elsewhere, the governing paradigm of colonial territoriality in the eastern frontier was ethnicity, which came to be increasingly employed as a strategic metaphor or trope to construct a political geography of desire and fear. The founding pillar of territorialization, that is, an inside-outside dichotomy came to be mobilized around the colonizing trope of civility and savagery. Many of the apparently sacrosanct and inviolable forms of political-territorial space could be traced back to erstwhile colonial territorial imagination.

It is important to map the history of the northeast becoming a colonial territory. Sanjib Baruah suggests in *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (2005), that the end of the eighteenth century saw a number of military raids by Burma in the region. The Ahom dynasty that had ruled Assam for the previous six hundred years was overthrown by the Burmese in 1822 AD. Subsequently, British help was asked for, and the first Anglo- Burmese War led to the expulsion of the Burmese invaders from Assam and Manipur. The Burmese expulsion was concretized in the form of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 whereby the Burmese renounced all claims upon the principality of Assam, its dependencies and the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jyntea (20).

In his study *Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India's North East* (2009), Subir Bhaumik argues that the annexation of Lower and Upper Assam was followed by the acquisition of the Muttock kingdom around Sadiya (now in the Assam- Arunachal Pradesh border). One of the first places to be taken over was the Khasi Hills in the year 1833 and the Jaintia kingdom in the year 1835. The Kingdom of Cachar was completely incorporated in Assam in 1850. Subsequently, the Garo Hills, nominally part of Goalpara district were taken over in 1869 and made into a district. Repeated military expeditions between 1837 and 1851 to Naga Hills as well immediately after that to the Lushai (Mizo) hills led to the formulation and occupation of these as un-administered districts within Assam. After independence, the Naga Hills district emerged as the separate Indian state of Nagaland in 1963. Subsequently, the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills came together to emerge as the state of Meghalaya in 1972. The Mizo Hills district, on the other hand, was made into a Union territory in 1972 and a full-fledged state in 1987 (Bhaumik6).The tribes occupying what is now Arunachal Pradesh also attracted colonial reprisals on several occasions on pretexts like obstructing trade, cultivating poppy and disturbing the Great Trigonometrical Survey in 1876-77 (12).

Although the validity of the term 'northeast India' is far from uncontested, it is generally agreed that the term has a colonial genealogy. The inception of the real and imagined territory of the 'northeast' India could be traced to the spatial imagination of the nineteenth-Century British Empire. For the early colonizers, it was chiefly the Brahmaputra valley that constituted Assam. The treaty of Yandaboo (1826), seems to sanction this view. It is in the treaty, executed between two foreign powers, the Burmese and the British, that the earliest mention of the principality of Assam was made. Hence, the treaty concretized the idea of Assam as an integrated territorial unit.

There is a view that the territorial identity of Assam as a determinate and bounded political territory is best traced back to nineteenth-century colonial rulers (see Hussain 15). It is important to note that the construction of political space by the colonizers did not remain confined to the Brahmaputra Valley alone. Gradually the hills also came to be imagined and marked as mutually exclusive and antagonistic ethnic territories. As scholars like Sanjib Baruah suggest, the architects of the Empire in the northeast not only initiated but also expedited the construction of ethnically defined and supposedly insular political spaces in the region. Clearly such a position would presuppose seeing the entire region as a military and economic frontier. Similarly, Manjeet Baruah in his study *Frontier Cultures: A Social History of Assamese Literature* (2012), shows how the northeast is transformed from a decidedly contiguous socio-cultural space to a series of disjointed and contesting territories under the Empire.

It is important to look at the long term repercussions of spatial arrangements made by the colonial state. Postcolonial attempts at (re)territorializing spaces of the region, as manifest in the "North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act 1971", have been mainly directed at creating ethnically defined exclusive territories. It is possible to suggest that post-independence projects of re-territorialization are, to a great extent, shaped by colonial spatial imaginaries favoured by the colonial state. One can cite Imdad Hussain's idea that the dichotomy between the hills and the plains, originally propagated by colonial administrators, continues to breed divisive territorial markers like the inner line in certain states of the northeast (20).In the colonial period, such differential geography got reproduced into the marking of spaces of the region as "backward tracts," "excluded" and "partially excluded" areas (21). The view that the dichotomy between the hills and the plains underscored colonial territorial arrangements is also supported by David Syiemlieh in his essay "The Future of the Hills of North-East India 1928-1947"

(1994).Interestingly, Syiemlieh shows how colonial rule continued to see the northeast and its hill regions as permanent military assets, a virtual 'crown-colony plan' (25).

It is important to note that the colonial state viewed the northeast primarily as a frontier. Gunnel Cederlof in his study *Founding an Empire on India's North-Eastern Frontiers 1790-1840*(2014),argues, the northeast was seen not only as a military buffer against the raiding hillmen as well as potential Chinese and Burmese aggression but also as an economic frontier(3). In other words, colonial spatial imaginaries often visualized the region as a passage or space of transit to some other destinations such as Tibet, China or Burma. It is more explicit in the framing of the hills in colonial writings. Cederlof argues that colonial discourse constructed the hills of the northeast as a kind of "non-state space" that sheltered elements challenging and absconding the colonial state (3). It is not difficult to see how colonial imaginaries facilitated or even forced projects of territorialization. In other words, the perception of the hills as an unruly space facilitated their subsequent conversion into territories.

It is suggested that the main agenda of the colonial politics of space is the conversion of space to a productive tool or asset to generate wealth. In other words, the political coding of space, as well as its realization, must be further transformed to capital assets. It could also be viewed as the transformation of space to military and civil infrastructure. It relates to the fact that the colonial interest was markedly different in the plains and the hills. Unlike the plains, the hills did not practice settled agriculture. The population was sparse and not uniformly distributed. So, unlike the plains, where a regime of regular revenue was established, tribes of the hills were made to pay in kinds. Some hill tribes were also paid regular incentives as a step towards pacification.

IV

Metaphors in the Making

Given the understanding that the space viewed as the northeast of India went through significant moments of transformation, and that these transformations, were to a great extent, shaped by colonial discursive apparatuses, it is important to examine tropes that went into these projects. It is important to note that the perspectives used to engage with the metaphors that went into the imperial transformation of the northeast as both

imagined and real geographies are developed by referring to studies that apparently are more focused on the recent ramifications of colonially imposed spatialities. However, they offer understandings of the historical-political context as well as evolving paradigms of space-production in the region under the Empire. It is important to note that these understandings often move along a juxtaposition of the colonial space with that of the pre-colonial.

Given the premise that colonial spatial imaginaries made regular attempts to construct spaces in the northeast through acts of convergence and divergence, it is important to reflect upon some aspects of pre-colonial spatialities in the region. Manjeet Baruah offers useful clues into it. Baruah approaches the issue by first revisiting instances of pre-colonial spatial imaginaries reflected in popular literary and cultural narratives in the region, and then highlights the completely different patterns assumed by imperial imaginaries. He suggests, the pre-colonial spatial imaginaries in the region were founded on the notion of a shared, inclusive and continuous social space, sustained through a shared mapping of socio-spatial relations (Baruah5). Pre-colonial literary narratives in the region offer evidence to support this view. In other words, pre-colonial imaginings of space contained shared domains wherein the different communities of the region could participate by remaining different. Rather than endorsing ideas of territoriality in the colonial sense of exclusive and disjointed spaces, spatial imaginaries in the pre-colonial northeast acted as inclusive frameworks to accommodate the co-existence of multiple identities. In short, pre-colonial social spaces in the region were not only flexible and fluid but also dialogic and inclusive.

Colonial spatial imaginaries ignored and systematically erased the continuities and linkages that characterized the pre-colonial social spaces in the northeast. Colonial discourse systematically reduced the region into a peripheral space by presenting it as an appendage to the erstwhile province of Bengal) enframed in the hegemonic trope of the frontier. It is important to note that colonial imaginings of the northeast not only traversed through what could be viewed as military and economic visualizations but also through the trajectory of metaphorics. At this moment, it is useful to recall Lefebvre's views on the appropriation of lived spaces into ideologically interpellated geographies of power by Capitalism. Referring to the contradictions between pre-colonial and colonial spatial mappings, Baruah highlights the colonial politics of reproducing social differences as inviolable conflicts:

The Brahmaputra valley had become the strategic space where the making of the frontier was carried out. The erosion of the shared domains had its impact on the dialectics of socio-spatial relations…by the late 19th century from the relation and co-existence between the shared and the different, the focus had now shifted to notions of 'order' and 'lack of order'. (6)

In light of the above discussion, it is possible to suggest that colonial knowledge apparatus reproduced or in a way reinvented the existing inter-tribal differences as a geography of inviolable, and absolute contradictions. In other words, the production of exclusive and partitioned political territories in the northeast was essentially initiated and pursued through the colonial rope of inter-ethnic contradiction. Colonial rule clearly exploited this trope to consolidate its territorial hold on the region.

The above discussion shows how the pre-colonial northeast was a contiguous cultural geography, not a geography of compartmentalized political units as it is seen today. In fact, in pre-colonial spatial imaginaries, the idea of exclusive territories seems to be alien.

Frontiers are usually seen as indeterminate and volatile social spaces. They are also spaces of possibilities in that they often push for further expansions. It is important to note that it is the supposed indeterminacy of the space that sponsors colonial claims to create determinacy by marking and partitioning spaces. However, the agenda of expansion makes it imperative that the need to containment is also reiterated. It is important to look at the production of real and imagined geographies in the colonial territories from in this light.

The colonial state attempted not only to define but also to establish discipline and order in the northeast primarily by transforming the region into a cluster of ethnic spaces. It is important to note that the colonial term to refer to the establishment of full-fledged administrative order over spaces in the region is to 'settle'. The term, in colonial situations, seems to connote ordering and disciplining of an otherwise unruly and disordered space into well-defined semantic frames. The other foremost strategy adopted by the Empire to order, classify and subsequently, territorialize spaces in the northeast is to divide the hills and valleys in the region into cartography of contradictory territories. The same could also be viewed as a transformation of the region into a series of differential geographies. In other words, in the transformation of the northeast into

landscapes, territories and assets by imperial imaginaries was primarily pursued by visualizing, realizing and finally producing a series of differential geographies.

It is important to note that the transformation of the frontier into a geography of contradictions between conflicting ethnicities as well as between the hills and the plains, was always pushed forth through acts of metaphorization. For instance, one could refer to the almost regular use of politically mobilized tropes like the myth of the savage hillman and the supporting trope of their predatory raids into the supposedly civilized social space of the valleys. It is not difficult to discern how dichotomizations such as these aided the real politic of the Empire. To be specific, it facilitated the consolidation of the empire in the region by enabling projects of co-optations. From the perspective of actual acts of territorializing, such discursive constructions shaped the actual material formulation of political territories in the region. It is important to note that the inner only materialized the differential geography, namely, that between the hills and the plains, in an otherwise open and flexible social space. In a way, colonial imaginings enticed the northeast into metaphors of otherness. If the frontier was seen in reference as the Eastern appendage of the province of Bengal, the hills in the region came to be viewed as the other to the plains. It goes without saying that it involved a regular enactment of the allegory of the self and the other, often manifest in the colonial narratives as the conflict between order and savagery.

An important instance of the material and metaphorical transformation of the northeast by the Empire is the foothills in the region. In pre-colonial spatial imaginations the hills and plains existed more as descriptive features and were not conceptually linked to the society inhabiting these forms of geographical spaces (see Baruah 19). Colonial imaginaries transformed them into a series of territorial spaces. It is also noteworthy that the foothills often had functioned as the shared space between the valleys and the hills in the pre-colonial northeast. The Empire gazed at the foothills as an intermediate space between the ordered and disciplined territories of the valleys and the unruly hills. In a way, the foothills were converted into territorial markers. The project of formulating the hills and plains as contradictory social spaces or differential geography is therefore seen to extend to the construction of landscapes and topography as well. This assumes greater importance in light of the view that the reduction of the foothills to a boundary between the two contradictory social spaces was a strategic move of the Empire (see Baruah 98).

In light of the preceding discussion, it is possible to suggest that the two most important dimensions of the politics of colonial space production in the northeast are a fascination with determinacy and the production of a series of differential geographies. Whereas pre-colonial space formations in the region is marked by fluidity and openness, space formation under the Empire often moved along notions of exclusive territorial spaces. However, it is important to not lose sight of the fact that the construction of territories also involved projects of linking. For instance, it is the Empire that incorporated what are viewed as disjointed territories in the region into the unitary frame of the frontier. What the thesis argues is that in the eagerness to expand, the Empire bypassed or overlooked existing spatial continuities as well as contacts.

Speaking chronologically, David Scott was the first to be appointed as the Principal Commissioner of the Eastern frontier. To follow up on ideas of Lefebvre, this act of naming the space as a frontier is an act of space-production. The metaphor of the 'frontier' symbolically colonized the region, converting it into an appendage to the Province of Bengal. Subsequent discourses such as the narratives of Francis Jenkins and R B Pemberton institutionalized this nomenclature. The framing of the region as a series of bureaucratic and military spaces in these writers added to the transformation of the region from a lived space to a conceived space. In colonial imaginings, pre-existing spaces in the region could be seen to undergo violent modifications and receded into the periphery.

Sanjib Baruah (2005), explores the strategic role played by stereotypical phenotypes in helping the colonial state in maintaining surveillance over social space. In other words, he repeatedly foregrounds the connections between the politics of discovering categories of essentialised ethnicities and imperatives of colonial governmentality. What comes out is the history of numerous acts of dispossession and violence through which colonial modernity unsettled the pre-capitalist social and spatial formations of the region.

To sum up, it could be argued that in the inherently multi-ethnic, heteroglossic social space of the nineteenth-century northeast, the Empire initiated and actively carried out projects of transforming space into compartmentalized ethnic territories. Colonial writings, in a way, ensure that, as a material and symbolic geography, the region is increasingly represented through a rhetoric of otherness.