Part 1
Disturbed City, Sensitive Space
Belonging

In June 2013 I was searching the laneways of Yaiskul Hiruhanba Leikai, an established Meitei neighbourhood inhabited by descendants of the royal family and the Meitei aristocracy located just south of the central area around Kangla Fort, for ‘the house with a big mandop’. It was more difficult than I expected. The houses in the neighbourhood were either behind outer cement walls or on the other side of pukhris, household or community ponds. Yaiskul is pleasant to walk around. There are few cars, there is little rubbish on the ground, kids are running around in the laneways playing ball games and firing slingshots into trees, and it’s green. Screens of tall bamboo line the edge of family compounds adjoining cement walls, and fruit trees dangle from household compounds into the narrow dirt laneways, some with a phanek, the Meitei sarong, tied around the trunk to promote fertility. Beneath one bamboo grove there were a cluster of bicycles, the standard Hero model in various stages of rust, and a few white cars parked across the width of laneway. A path led down to the mandop, a pavilion with open walls on three sides (sometimes four) and a ceiling used for rituals, theatre, music recitals, playing sports like kang, and for feeding guests during festivals and family and clan events. Mandop are found in the compounds of Brahmin families in Manipur, and remain one of the most telling visual clues as to the caste and faith of a family, and the ethnic composition of a neighbourhood (Singh, 1963). Mandops are reminders of the conversion of the Meitei population, at least part of it, to Vaishnavite Hinduism in the 18th century, during which certain communities, such as the Chapka and Loi were considered outcaste, the majority of the population were considered Kshatriya, and Brahmin priests were imported from Bengal and eventually integrated into the Meitei ethnic milieu (Singh, 2001). The indigenous Sanamahi faith never really disappeared (Parratt, 1980), and indeed since the 1990s has undergone a major revival. In the face of the Sanamahi revival, in the aftermath of communist insurgencies in the 1980s and 1990s, the continued influence of ethno-nationalist movements that reject imported faith from India, and with increased Christian conversion and settlement of Christians from the hill areas in Imphal, the social significance of Brahmins in on the wane (Parratt and Parratt, 1997: xiii). However, on this afternoon one would not known it.

In the mandop a crowd sat cross-legged in rows in front of a female performer who played a pung, a Manipuri drum, and sang a ballad about the struggle against the British. Adjacent to the performer was a scholar
of Meitei arts who asked the performer questions during intervals in the ballad about her technique, how she learned her craft, and the lineage of the particular ballad. Two camera operators with heavy-duty equipment recorded the performance and the mandop was wired with a microphone and a small technical team sat behind an audio mixing board in the rear. A local performing arts institute, Laihui, as part of an initiative to revive classical Meitei artistry, sponsored the event. Unlike the performances in the halls of the various performing arts academies and state-sponsored cultural venues, the afternoon in Yaiskul was about bringing the performance to the public, to the neighbourhood. Such public performances can be risky in the disturbed city. Though the will to revive the artistic life of the city is strong, and at times this will outweighs the risks.

The late afternoon sun made long shadows on the pounded earth floor as the performance ended. The performance had been intoxicating and the crowd shared a sense of significance. I waited around talking to some of the people I knew in the crowd: a few musicians, scholars of the arts, journalists sent to cover the performance. I met one of the organisers. He was overjoyed. People came. It was a good sign. Life, at least here in Yaiskul, was free of the usual insecurities of the disturbed city – perhaps just for today, perhaps for much longer.

A small group of us continued talking in the laneway outside recalling when we had last seen each other, in one case it was in Munirka, a neighbourhood in Delhi where many young Manipuris stay during their time in the city, in another case it was in Imphal on my previous visit. There was still an hour or two of daylight left, enough time to sit down and catch-up. In Imphal this is a problem, especially after dark. A member of our group, Ning, suggested visiting a nearby neighbourhood where we could have an alcoholic drink. Alcohol is officially banned in Imphal. It is still available: smuggled from across the border, bought from the armed forces, or carried in luggage of migrants returning from other parts of India. Locally made ‘traditional’ alcohol occupies a more ambiguous position. Not technically covered by the ban on alcohol, it still has a social stigma attached and is often policed as if banned by both the authorities and social associations. A few members of our group made polite excuses and took their leave. Another said he would meet us there after taking a circuitous route to avoid a relative’s house.

I climbed behind Ning on the back of his motorcycle and we followed Yaima and Sonia riding on another. We drove for just a few minutes over the Nambul River to Keishamthong Kabui Khul, a Kabui tribal neighbourhood. Compared to Yaiskul the houses were lower, most just a single storey with
more timber and thatch and less cement. There were few large outer walls and most houses fronted the street rather than other dwellings in the one compound. Close to where we stopped was a line of small shops operating out the front of houses selling tobacco, snack foods, and newspapers. Unlike in Yaiskul where residents had spaces in their compounds to sit in the afternoon heat, here residents sat along the side of the road in plastic chairs talking. Most of Imphal’s illicit drinking dens are in tribal neighbourhoods. Tribals have a reputation as excellent brewers of alcohol, a reputation often used against them in the form of stereotypes of drunkenness and immorality, and are less bound by the seemingly more rigid social norms and public morality of Meitei society.

We entered a nondescript house with a mix of blue cement and bamboo thatch walls. On the inside the walls were plastered with calendars, posters of snow-capped mountains, sports cars, and a European baby. We sat on low wooden stools around a very low table. The only light came from the street outside through the open doorway. There were a few other occupied tables and everyone, including the boss and the teenager serving customers, stopped to stare at us while we sat. I assumed this was because of me, a very foreign-looking foreigner, and this was part of it, but we also had a woman in our group, Sonia- a Meitei woman, and this was an uncommon sight in a drinking den.

We ordered Sekmai, a rice whiskey named after the village where the best stuff is made. We ordered meat too, as drinking dens offer a place to ignore food taboos that are an integral part of Meitei life but are not common among tribals who have the reputation for excessive meat eating and no qualms when it comes to eating a wide range of animals. Like alcohol consumption this is used against tribals to suggest simplicity and savagery (see Kikon, 2015). The clear Sekmai arrived in a re-used Indian whiskey bottle with a plastic jug of water on the side. We ate pork and beef and my companions swapped stories about social life, or the lack of it, in Imphal.

After an hour a white Maruti Suzuki with a mounted gun on the roof pulled up outside in full view through the door of the drinking den. Four members of the Manipur Commandoes alighted from the vehicle with automatic rifles slung over their shoulders. Customers took action quickly, handing bottles of Sekmai to the teenager who hurried out the back of the house with them. Drinkers either swallowed what was in the glass or poured it into the water jug. I had heard so many stories about police and soldiers entering drinking dens and taking money from the owners for selling alcohol and the customers for drinking it. I had heard a few where customers were taken away in vehicles until they could muster enough
money for their release. Being picked up in a drinking den could be a prelude for all kinds of harassment, detention, and worse.

I was expecting the soldiers to enter at any time, it seemed everyone was. But they didn’t. Their vehicle was still outside. After a while, and after consuming enough raw onion to temper the smell of alcohol, we all got up from our table and went outside to have a look. The vehicle was still there but the street was empty. There was no sign of the soldiers. The plastic chairs lining the street lay empty. The small shops had all closed. The boss ushered the other customers out of the drinking den and he closed the door. As we were getting set to leave two of the soldiers emerged from a laneway a little further down the street. They approached and asked the small group of recently evicted drinkers a few questions. They were looking for someone and wanted to know if he had been seen. The other two soldiers came from the other direction and they conferred with one another outside the vehicle and left. I was expecting the street to magically spring back to life. It didn’t. A man came outside to collect some of the plastic chairs from in front of his house. Everyone else had dispersed. We did the same. When we were stopped in traffic back on the main road Ning admitted he was very worried because he is not from that area. If anything happened his family might not ever know.

The afternoon was a telling illustration of belonging in the disturbed city. The two neighbourhoods are only 700 metres apart but look, feel, smell, and sound different. The inhabitants of the respective neighbourhoods are drawn from a particular ethnic group, and within that ethnic group a particular subset based on class (and caste in the case of Yaiskul). The different neighbourhoods have different built environments, different landscapes based on the preferences of their inhabitants, their resources, and their history. In one you can witness a public performance of high culture, a classical Meitei ballad. In the other it is acceptable to drink alcohol and eat meat – though for some residents, anonymity is a necessary requirement for such enjoyment. This could perhaps be the case in any diverse, plural city. Until the Manipur Commandoes show up and the neighbourhood shuts down. Safety can turn to insecurity very quickly. And the need to belong, to be known and seen by others in moments of insecurity, is vital.

This chapter focuses on plurality, polarity, and neighbourhoods to explore the different ways residents of Imphal maintain a sense of place in the disturbed city; in the sensitive space to draw on the concepts set out in chapter 1. The first section presents demographic information about Imphal to show that, despite being a small city, it is growing rapidly and its density keeps residents at close proximity to one another. The second section discusses ethnic politics in Manipur and the ways these are reflected in
the urban landscape of Imphal. The third section profiles the ways ethnicity and belonging aligns with neighbourhood boundaries. The final section discusses the alternative spaces of belonging, and their limitations, through which some residents transcend the exclusive politics of belonging that characterise everyday life in the disturbed city.

Small City, Growing City

The population total of Imphal municipality is 414,288 (Census of India, 2013), though this figure is based on dated city boundaries that have long since been surpassed by new settlements. It is very unlikely that the migrant population from outside the state is fully captured in this figure. Furthermore migrants from hill areas and other districts are usually counted in their home district for the census, especially if that is where they own land. Imphal occupies a relatively small area, officially 34.48 square kilometres. It is administered as 27 wards, most of which are less than 1 square kilometre (Imphal Municipal Council, 2014). There are some exceptions; the rapidly expanding Uripok Yamben Leikai and Iroishemba wards on the northwestern fringe of the city together account for around 14 km sq., but overall Imphal is divided into small, densely populated administrative units.

The municipal population doubles when considering the populations of the two districts that dissect the city and spread out to the edges of the valley. Imphal East and Imphal West districts have a combined population of 975,000 people representing 38% of Manipur’s 2.6 million people (Census of India, 2013). Across India urbanisation outside former municipal boundaries is responsible for almost a third of urban growth for the period 2001 to 2011 (Prahdan, 2012). In Imphal the agglomeration of built-up areas (the settlement agglomeration as opposed to the urban agglomeration) goes well beyond the municipal boundaries; as can be seen using satellite imagery and through a cursory glance at the names/classifications of areas outside Imphal’s 27 wards such as ‘ward of outgrowth’ (e.g. Naorem Leikai), ‘census town’ (e.g. Naoriya Pakhanglakpa), and ‘plan area’ (e.g. Porompat Plan Area). As Denis et al. (2012) argue, there are incentives for maintaining a rural classification in India, including eligibility for certain forms of government assistance, and many densely populated ‘built up’ areas that adjoin cities continue to be classified as rural areas. City-level governance is also weak in India when compared to state and district level. This is further complicated in the borderland by overlapping layers of authority – including traditional decision making bodies – over territory now part of growing cities. There is
little incentive to expand the reach municipal authority to all areas within the settlement agglomeration given it has limited power and resources. There are powerful interests that benefit from ambiguity over boundaries, especially in the south and southwest of the city where farmland is being rapidly converted into schools and hostels, discussed at length in chapter 7. Though rather than any deliberate strategy it is more likely that administrative categories are just slow to catch up with the rate of urban growth in Imphal given the general dysfunction of civilian governance.

Official figures for population density are calculated on district population figures: Imphal East has 643 persons per square kilometre and Imphal West has 998 persons per square kilometre (Census of India, 2013). As these also include peri-urban and rural areas it is likely that parts of the city have a much higher density and areas away from the city have much lower density. For perspective, the average density in Manipur is 115 persons per square kilometre, and thus population density of the valley is much higher than the hills. Decadal population growth in Imphal East was recorded at 69% and Imphal West 15% for the period 2001-11. Even based on these limited figures it is clear that Imphal is a relatively small city of between half a million and a million people, is densely populated when compared to the rest of the state, and it is growing.

Image 2.1  Central Imphal facing north
Imphal sits in a valley surrounded by the hills of the north-south Patkais running from the eastern end of the Himalayas to the meeting point of the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, forming a natural boundary between Myanmar to the east and Assam and Bengal to the west. The majority of the land in Manipur is hills. The valley, however, holds the majority of the population. This is part of Van Schendel's *Zomia* (2002), a zone of shared linguistic, cultural, and ecological traits but one that is ‘relegated to the margins of ten valley-dominated states with which it has antagonistic relationships’ (2002: 654). In *The Art of Not Being Governed*, Scott argues that as valley ‘civilisations’ spread through the expansion wet-rice cultivation and ‘enclosed’ non-state space, various peoples wishing to escape taxes, conscription, warfare, slavery, forced labour, and disease headed for the hills. These ‘shatter zones’ out of range of state authority were characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity and by relative geographic inaccessibility (2009: 24). Scott argues that the attributes labelled barbaric are not signs of pre-civilisational peoples but adaptations to life in shatter zones and the continuing imperative of hill peoples to evade assimilation and incorporation into the state. In the context of Manipur, Scott's argument has been embraced enthusiastically as it appears to narrate, and historicise, the apparent differences between hill and valley communities. Yengkhom Jilangamba is critical of both the hurried application of Scott's argument to Manipur – stemming from the ease of an 'already available template of the binary between the hill and the valley to which Scott’s theory can be easily incorporated' (2015: 10) – and the ways the seemingly ‘natural’ divide reproduces colonial systems of classification and domination. This politicisation of these categories will become apparent in later chapters of this book and is instrumental in understanding everyday life in contemporary Imphal.

Imphal is the built on the site of the former court of the Meitei Kingdom centred on the Kangla Fort, still the physical and spiritual heart of the valley polity. The *Cheitharol Kumpapa*, the court history of the Meitei Kingdom, dates the polity to 33AD. This date has been challenged by noted Manipuri historians such as Arambam Parratt (2005), Jilangamba (2010a) and Kabui (1991) who note inconsistencies in practices of recording time, the ambiguity of records before 1485, and the use of astrological calculations to arrive at the date as important factors. Challenges to the 33AD foundation year are complicated further by colonial accounts in which the “onset” of Hinduism was considered as the historical marker’ (Jilangamba, 2010a: 336).

These debates aside, the site where contemporary Imphal is now located has been settled for many centuries and the polity consolidated among particular Meitei clans, or *yeks*, marginalising others, and developing tribute
relationships with communities in the hills and with other borderland polities including present day Assam, Bengal/Bangladesh, China (Yunnan) and Myanmar (Parratt, J., 2005). Imphal also spent periods under Burmese rule, which shaped identity, internal organisation of the polity, and created a diaspora of exiles still scattered through parts of the borderland (see Parratt, 1979/2012). The British took control of the valley in 1891 following the Anglo-Manipuri War and installed the 11-year-old Chura Chand as rajah (see Kabui, 1990a). The British period saw a major reorganisation of Imphal, and the construction of new markets, water supplies, and schools evicting communities living close to the centre of British administration around Kangla Fort. Highly significant in this period – particularly for events in contemporary Manipur – was the arrival of migrants from other parts of Empire to trade and serve in the occupying armed forces.

The British replaced the lallup system of unpaid (compulsory) labour by able-bodied men with the patta system of land title and taxation, effectively replacing in-kind tribute with monetary tribute (Parratt, J., 2005: 11-12). This changed the way space was claimed and controlled in Imphal. The extent of British involvement in the hill areas of what is now Manipur was debated between advocates of intervention and isolation, as elsewhere in the borderland (see Guha, 1999). The hills were also reorganised, though less intensively. The authorities in the valley appointed Meitei lambus, or officials, who became intermediaries between the valley authorities and the hill chiefs and headmen. The lambus implemented British policies such as the ‘hut tax’ and conscription into labour corps during the First World War (Parratt, J., 2005: 14). The hut tax imposed a tax on dwelling rather than land in order to gain revenue and extend colonial authority into the hill areas where communities had limited private property regimes. As Jilangamba argues, there were other incentives to impose the tax, and ‘levying house-tax was deployed with the promise of guaranteeing protection to the villagers’ extending colonial control – a tactic that was not always successful (2010a: 257). Deploying Meiteis as tax collectors altered the ways hill and valley communities related and equated the Meitei lambus with the punitive practices of the emerging sovereign.

In the 1930s Imphal was at the heart of uprisings against colonial rule and against the monarchy. At the forefront were women’s organisations, Sanamahi revivalists, anti-feudalists, communists, Manipuri nationalists, and hill communities (Parratt and Parratt, 1995/2012; Bhadra, 1975; Longkumer, 2010; Singh, 2012). The Second World War brought violence, destruction, and demographic change to the city, but is also claimed to have ‘forcibly dragged it into the modern era’ (Parratt, J., 2005: 93). After
a brief period of autonomy between the end of colonial rule in 1947 and
the controversial Merger Agreement that bought Manipur into the Indian
Union in 1949, Imphal was a district headquarters (till 1956), the capital of
a union territory, and since 1972 the capital of the federal state of Manipur.

**Plurality and Polarity**

It is important to state at the outset that the following section is not an
attempt to describe, explain, or deconstruct ethnic politics or ethnic
categories in Manipur. This has been done with far more skill by other
authors in recent years (Hanjabam, 2008; Haokip, 2013; Kipgen, 2013; Kom,
2011; Kshetrimayum, 2009; Parratt, J., 2005; Plang, 2014; Oinam, 2003; Phanjoubam,
2005; Shimray, 2001). The focus here is the city, its pluralism, and
the ways different communities find ways of belonging in this landscape.
The politics of exclusion, constitutive of the politics of belonging, are the
focus of chapter 4. Imphal is a plural city. It is home to significant com-
munities from all of Manipur’s ethnic groups, migrants from neighbouring
countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Nepal, and from other parts
of India. Imphal’s plurality does not produce immovable divisions between
communities, but ethnicity is crucial to the ways urban space is inhabited,
governed, and contested. Imphal is a patchwork city, masquerading as a
relatively homogenous Manipuri city or Meitei city to outside observers
and in the discourses of hill-valley politics. These patches are fundamental
to belonging and exclusion.

Imphal’s plurality is relative for its size, location, and geopolitical
circumstances. A similar degree of diversity in an urban area, even a so-
called ‘small city’ would be unsurprising in many other parts of Asia and
indeed in many of the multi-ethnic borderlands of the region. However,
in the Northeast borderland it is significant because the reverse is more
common, namely ethnic exclusivity – or at least the institutionalisation of
such within federal state boundaries and the cities developed to administer
them. There are two reasons for this. First, special constitutional provisions
to protect property for Scheduled Tribes and restrictive immigration poli-
cies, most notably enforced through the ILP system has limited the number
of migrants settling in cities in the borderland, though this is not so in
Assam and Tripura where there are few restrictions, and to a lesser extent
Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya which served as a capital for the whole
region at one point and has colonial-era zoning that enables non-tribals
to own land and business in the city centre. After the Merger with India,
Indian citizens were no longer considered foreigners and faced no formal obstacles to settling in Manipur (UCM, 2005: 26). Imphal has not had a restricted entry policy for Indian nationals since 1950 and nor for Nepali migrants between 1950 and 1978, though a restriction on other foreign visitors was in place until 2011.

Second, the mass reorganisation of the Northeast borderland (1963-87) in response to violent and non-violent movements for autonomy that produced the boundaries of contemporary federal states and autonomous districts was predicated, more or less, on political units that corresponded to particular ethnic or tribal groups and the creation and/or rapid development of urban centres to administer these units (Baruah, 2003). Thus cities in the borderland, especially in the hill states, correspond to the ethnically exclusive polity in which they are situated or were created. In other words, cities within territories won or granted by the Indian state in response to secessionist movements, have been inhabited primarily by the communities for whom the territorial arrangements were devised. Imphal never quite fit this mould given its longer history of urban settlement. When the state of Manipur was formed within India in 1972, Imphal was made capital of an ethnically diverse state, as opposed to an ethnically delimited one, and the city was not created anew but inherited centuries of interethnic mixing. However, the territorialisation of Manipur’s ethnic politics in the last three and a half decades has expunged the diversity of the city’s past; at least rhetorically (Jilangamba, 2015). As divisions between valley/hill and Meitei/tribal have hardened, Imphal is re-imagined as a valley city, with a valley population, governed by valley-favouring bureaucracy.

Official statistics do not draw out the city’s plurality. With no adequate data on the urban or settlement agglomeration, in other words, no statistics that accurately depict the population of the city it is very difficult to determine the ethnic demographics of the city. The percentage of Scheduled Tribes (Naga, Kuki and the various other groups classified under the Sixth Schedule) in Manipur is 39% (Census of India, 2013). Individuals and families from the hill areas of Manipur reside in Imphal, often without owning property (and hence their relative invisibility in demographic indicators) for short periods, several years, and entire lifetimes. Some arrive as internally displaced persons, some as temporary or seasonal migrants seeking work in the city when the harvest season is over in the hills, some to attend school, to work, to take up government jobs and training, and prior to or after migration father afield – using Imphal as a hub for entry and exit. Most of these migrants still maintain a presence back in their ancestral village, whether through fields, property, relatives, or registration to vote.
In fact it is very important given the highly contentious nature of territorial politics in Manipur that various ethnic and tribal communities can demonstrate their strength in numbers and contiguous habitation over tracts of land. In short there are few incentives to transfer all aspects of one’s life to Imphal if moving there from the hills. For migrants from outside Manipur, non-Manipuris or mayangs to return to terms discussed in chapter 1, there are major incentives to be completely invisible, with the exception of well-established business families and employees of the central government and armed forces. As will be discussed in chapter 5, during activism over migration, volunteers identify and evict migrants from outside Manipur door-to-door in certain areas of Imphal.

Despite the association of Imphal with the Meitei community, migrants from the hill areas within Manipur and other parts of the borderland have established neighbourhoods, peri-urban villages, and clusters of dwellings throughout the city. There are many drivers of migration from the hills to Imphal; refuge from armed conflict whether with the armed forces or between ethnic groups – particularly the Naga-Kuki clashes of the 1990s – which has brought whole families and even whole villages to settle in Imphal, migration for education, migration to join branches of underground groups operating in the city, migration for work in the city including everything from government jobs with housing to working in hotels, markets, and brothels. Some of this migration is permanent, some is temporary, and some people from the hills have houses in Imphal and in their ancestral villages and towns. When interethnic politics experience flashpoints, such as during blockades, some members of hill communities leave the city until things calm down, especially if there are counter-protests in Imphal targeting a particular organisation and the ethnic group/s that it claims to represent. Thus it is common for families who can afford it to hold onto land in the hill areas in case they have to return there for a period of time or permanently. Though there are also tracts of land on the outskirts of the city being purchased by hill communities for the same purpose – a place to resettle if conditions in the city deteriorate for their community – the one I visited was on the road between Imphal and Ukhrul.

Meiteis from outside Imphal have also moved to the city for similar reasons of education, livelihood, and to get away from conflict. Return migrants who have been living and working elsewhere often settle in the city when they come back to Manipur rather than in their ancestral villages or in regional towns. With so many migrants from Imphal outside Manipur, especially young men and women in their 20s, there is an emerging labour vacuum in certain sectors of the economy (see McDuie-Ra, 2013). The
absence of young women from extended families means that more domestic helpers are required, and usually come from outside the city. And of course, migrants from neighbouring countries and other parts of India come to the city to start businesses, find work – often from other migrants, serve in the armed forces, take central government postings, work in NGOs and development organisations, and as sojourners, opportunists, and hustlers.

The civilian government is often seen as representing the interests of the more numerous Meitei: especially among non-Meitei inhabitants of the city who argue that the authorities pursue an ethno-nationalist platform in everything from the provision of services to the allocation of trading licences to the motifs in public architecture. However, it is also common to hear inhabitants from all communities charge that the civilian government is dysfunctional, corrupt, and predatory in ways that affect everyone aside from elites and their well-connected associates.

Neighbourhoods

Where demographics fail to capture Imphal’s plurality, the visual landscape is a compelling illustration. Neighbourhoods are perhaps the most telling features of the landscape that reveal plurality and the ‘tight spaces’ (Bollens, 2012: 13) shared by different communities. As the state and the armed forces provide little of the social fabric necessary for everyday life, neighbourhoods are where people come together and ‘the daily rituals of life are performed’; integral practices for belonging and the creation and maintenance of place (Friedmann, 2007: 272). Appadurai posits that ‘neighbourhoods are inherently what they are because they are opposed to something else and derive from other, already produced neighbourhoods’ (1996:183). In Imphal, belonging in a particular locality involves recognising the difference between that particular locality, other localities, and the city more broadly. This difference is predominately articulated in ethnic terms though within ethnic groups there are differences based on wealth, occupation (especially between those living in government quarters and the rest), between new arrivals and long-term occupants, and between titled settlements and informal settlements.

I spent the majority of my fieldwork walking around Imphal neighbourhoods, visiting residents, sharing meals, attending rituals and religious services, watching sports (and participating on occasion) and sitting on rooftops, on the roadside, and in illicit drinking and eating dens. Some neighbourhoods are inhabited by one ethnic group, such as distinctly Meitei
neighbourhoods like Bamon Leikai or distinctly Naga neighbourhoods such as Nagaram. Within an ethnic group there are neighbourhoods that house long-time residents in one part of the city, such as Haokip Veng – a Kuki neighbourhood close to the old palace, and areas that house more recent migrants such as in Iroishemba on the city’s northwestern fringe. Other neighbourhoods are ethnically mixed. Of particular note is the concentration of non-Manipuris in the commercial areas of Paona Bazaar and parts of Thangal Bazaar including those who have been in the city for generations and recent arrivals. During agitations against non-Manipuris these areas become flashpoints of violence as will be seen below.

The diversity of these neighbourhoods makes them very difficult to characterise. Cues can be taken from the visual landscape; including both what can be found in a neighbourhood and what is absent. Distinctly Meitei neighbourhoods are characterised by multiple dwellings for different branches of the same patri-local family in one compound, the remnants of traditional Meitei architecture – the yumjao – often in the oldest dwellings in a family compound, the centrality of a pukhri – though many are filled with cement to provide more room for dwellings, cremation grounds – often a raised cement platform close to a watercourse, and laishang – shrines for worship of Meitei deities that are found in households, family compounds or clusters of houses, and in neighbourhoods. There is also graffiti in support of Meitei underground groups in some neighbourhoods, though this is less common as the armed forces have gained control over more of the city in recent years. Pangal neighbourhoods like Hatta over the Imphal River from the Kangla Fort feature mosques, cemeteries, halal butchers, and small offices for Hajj committees and social associations.

Tribals have clearly demarcated neighbourhoods throughout the city. Many of these are relatively new neighbourhoods built in the 1990s when tribals moved from the hills in large numbers fleeing internecine violence to areas like New Checkon and Langol. These resemble the ‘arrival city’; a term used by Saunders (2010) to describe a transitional space between village and the city and through which linkages between rural and urban lives are maintained. There are also sites on the outskirts of the city or in pockets that have not been developed during urban expansion given their proximity to armed forces headquarters or hillocks where tribal neighbourhoods resemble villages with a cluster of low houses around a common patch of land and trees (as behind the Assam Rifles HQ at Chingmeirong), and in some locations, livestock. Tribal neighbourhoods usually feature churches ranging in size from grand cement and stained glass buildings able to house hundreds of worshippers to small house-churches. And in the
urban peripheries churches can be incomplete, just a frame of a building, a crucifix, and a name – part of a tactic of claiming land and preventing the government from evicting the community emerging in that location (see chapter 6). Tribal neighbourhoods usually don’t have pukhrs, cremation grounds, or laishang, just as Meitei neighbourhoods don’t have churches or mosques.

Established tribal neighbourhoods are also distinguished by gates at their entry and exit as would be found in villages in the hills. This can create some remarkable circumstances in demonstrating the ways space can be controlled ‘from below’. For instance, in Majorkhul, a tribal neighbourhood now in the epicentre of the very busy Thangal Bazaar, the community closed the neighbourhood gates during one of my visits to observe the funeral of a community leader. The streets of the neighbourhood were converted into a community space under a white marquee. The gates remained closed for several days. Detours were set up in the narrow streets and lanes of the bazaar. The police were even deployed to direct traffic around the neighbourhood. Though a relatively minor disturbance, there was no attempt by the authorities to intervene. This example shows the ways in which communities can exercise a modicum spatial control over ‘their’ territory from time to time. Of course, gates are not an impediment to the armed forces.

However, these characterisations only hold for neighbourhoods where there is a single or a dominant community. Other parts of the city are more internally plural; clusters of households from different ethnic groups, churches and laishang juxtaposed on opposite street corners, eating joints clandestinely serving beef and dog half a block from Hindu temples, graffiti from rival underground groups on opposite walls of a laneway. Government housing areas have uniform drab box-style dwellings but are usually very ethnically mixed.

Often plurality reflects economic imperatives and interethnic dependencies. An example is Ragailong, a Kabui Naga neighbourhood adjacent to the Khuman Lampak Sports Complex settled by tribals from neighbouring Tamenglong District prior to the 1949 merger. It presently has around 200 houses and can be easily covered on foot. The main street features a neat row of single-storey houses, some made from timber or thatch but most now made from cement, and large four- or five-storey cement houses at irregular intervals. For decades land was appointed at the behest of the headman, as it would be in a Kabui village in Tamenglong District. In the last ten years formal land title has been extended in the neighbourhood enabling Kabui residents to lease dwellings to non-Manipuri migrants, as
well as a few families from the hill areas. Thus those with some capital have extended their houses upward by adding new floors, and in some cases added additional dwellings to their plots – especially those along the roadside to provide more space to lease for migrants to run small businesses.

One evening in December 2012 I was a guest of a small neighbourhood association with a broad social and cultural mission to educate the youth of the area on their heritage, language, and indigenous religion. In their office on the ground floor of a five-storey building on the main street running through Ragailong we talked about the history of the neighbourhood. After some time the headman of the village, Gangmei, joined us. He was fascinated that someone wanted to know about a small patch of land that was now effectively a suburb of inner-Imphal in close proximity to Kangla Fort and the main highways. He traced settlement to the British era when Kabui were brought to work in a nearby cantonment, now occupied by the Assam Rifles just outside the neighbourhood gate. He believes Burmese vacated the area, but he wasn’t sure. He talked about his childhood, especially visiting the palace. Dusk came. Teenagers from nearby came to listen. Gangmei pointed to them and said they don’t know anything about their past or their traditional religion. We talked about what had changed.

For Gangmei this neighbourhood was different to many others in present day Imphal because people did not have walls around their houses or fences. They came out onto the street in the evenings and they weren’t scared. Though he admitted that there were bombings around the area sometimes as they were close to the Assam Rifles, and after a bombing the paramilitary would do combing operations through the neighbourhood. But he was right. The neighbourhood had a very different feel to many of the others in the city. The road was wide and had little traffic. It became a playground in the evening. The houses were built further back from the road giving more shared space in front of the houses where families were sitting, children were playing, and youths kicked footballs in the fading light. At one end of the neighbourhood a group of non-Manipuri tenants, all men, sat in a circle chatting. Others joined as they entered the neighbourhood after their day at work; a few of them held harnesses used on construction sites and in the market to carry heavy loads. It appeared that their place in the neighbourhood was well defined, spatially and socially.

A similar answer was common in other parts of the city when I asked about the extraordinarily large houses Gangmei answered: ‘relatives of ministers or big-shots’. This explanation was common in other neighborhoods too, along with inferences about connections to the murky world of elites, the armed forces and underground groups, as well as money sent back by
relatives working outside the state. The houses appear excessive; especially in contrast to smaller dwellings that surround them. Though in many cases there were several generations and branches of one family living in a five- or six-storey house. Many families had been building up rather than outward given the challenge of finding enough land on existing family or clan plots. In other cases spare floors are rented out to the stream of migrants entering the city looking for work or seeking refuge from insecure lives elsewhere.

The neighbourhood landscape of wildly varied dwellings reflects the dynamics of the disturbed city. As Herscher has written in the context of Kosovo, culture and violence is inscribed in architecture, its destruction and construction (2010: 4). In other words violence is not only evident in what has been lost, broken, or bulldozed, but in what is built in its place. In a city characterised by fragmented sovereignty between state, non-state, and quasi-state actors where various actors take on state like quality and agency, the urban landscape reflects these shifting – and overlapping – nodes of power. Corruption and illicit activity enrich a segment of the population, who plough their wealth almost exclusively into enormous houses and large cars. Dual connectivity is also useful for conceptualising the flows of resources into Imphal; from the west come the vast transfers of funds from the Indian Government as part of their twin development and counter-insurgency strategy along with remittances from Manipuris working outside the state, and from the east the wealth gained through smuggling, taxing, and trafficking of goods from across the border. The houses of those successful in these ways of making do stand out starkly in their respective neighbourhoods. The very processes of appropriation that enrich this class of urban resident ensure the gap between them and everyone else remains wide. Further appropriation, especially of public funds, means the services planned, or perhaps imagined, for the rest of the population are either absent, dysfunctional, or limited to those able to pay bribes or fees to access services, as with the provision of water throughout the city.

At various times during the year the municipal water supply experiences chronic shortages. The civilian authorities blame the rapid expansion of the city, often attributed to unchecked migration, and the growth of unplanned (mostly poor) settlements (Imphal Municipal Council, 2007). Some residents claim government workers sell off the water supply to private operators to manufacture scarcity and drive up prices, opening the door for illegal operators. There are other reasons too, the demise of household *pukhris* or ponds in the drive to build bigger houses, the demise of community *pukhris* in the corrupt planning process that erases public space to allow an illegal
extension or new dwelling, and the pollution of common watercourses. The government price is fixed at a reasonable rate, but when it doesn’t get delivered residents pay more for illegal supply. Illegal operators pump water from the Imphal River and other urban watercourses, often bleaching the water before selling it in neighbourhoods from trucks, portable tanks, and even cycle-operated carts. The pumping and reselling of water is easy to observe, especially in the dry season. One only need walk along the Imphal River or spend an afternoon in a neighbourhood that has not had reliable supply for a few days. Inevitably an illegal supplier will arrive, sometimes procured by a neighbourhood association or even underground groups. The persistence of the practice suggests complicity at some level of officialdom. Interestingly during the dry season, local politicians are said to arrive in neighbourhoods with government water tankers and distribute free water to residents, though I was never able to witness this. The point to note here is that regardless of how deep the complicity and corruption, there is both a general acceptance of this kind of corruption and the recognition that one needed to make do in other ways in order to be able to afford the basic public services that were otherwise denied by other people making do. Returning to the discussion of agency in chapter 1, if making do entails ‘tactics for seizing opportunities and negotiating risk’ (Pine, 2012: 10) then in the disturbed city residents often justified their own tactics of appropriating money or resources or using connections as a way of overcoming the corrupt practices of others. As one respondent put it, they needed to ask for bribes in their own job to pay the bribes everyone else was asking for.

Diaspora housing, new houses or extensive additions to old ones show another way of making do for the less well connected, namely leaving Imphal to work outside the state and sending money back to family. The physical manifestation of migration in bigger, fancier, and more modern houses perpetuates the aspiration of migration for education and to earn remittances among the population, with further consequences for the ways urban space is used and controlled, as will be discussed in chapter 7. Connectivity also has a part to play in the flow of construction materials into the city: cement, corrugated iron, and gyprock from India and other parts of the borderland, tinted glass, fancy tiles, linoleum flooring, and all manner of other construction materials from across the border, much of it produced in China. Other material is from within Manipur, timber, bamboo and clay, mostly from the hills, though timber from Myanmar also ends up in Imphal. Parts of this landscape evoke the ‘wedding cake’ architecture of Kabul as described by Feenstra that reflects a sudden influx of money, returnee migrants, ‘copy-paste architecture’ styled on
photographs of mansions from abroad, the use of building contractors rather than architects, materials of questionable durability, and inexpensive labour from outside the city all intended to ‘demonstrate power through confections that bear little reality to tradition, aesthetics or living requirements’ (2008: 36). Though I am more hesitant, and less qualified, to pass judgement on the aesthetics of the equivalent style of construction in Imphal, the social, political, and economic dynamics that produce it are comparable. Construction must also be considered with reflection on the destruction that has taken place in the city historically, and in living memory through the Second World War, occupation by the Indian state, and interethnic violence.

Living among the cottages, makeshift houses and shacks, concrete mansions, and layered multi-storey buildings featuring floors made of bricks, cement, timber and corrugated iron – often all in the same building, and amidst the lack of reliable services like water, electricity, and waste collection, not to mention the lack of street lights, public space, and drainage – contributes to a kind of shared melancholia about progress and soul searching at the social costs of development. Residents lament the loss of knowledge of traditional architectural styles, particularly the yumjao, and the alienation produced by high outer walls, watchtowers, security
guards and the disappearances of trees, ponds, and wild animals. This is challenged in the ways residents seek to make place though small-spaces and the alternative, and rebellious, uses of existing spaces that will be discussed further below.

Neighbourhoods also provide a sense of safety in contrast to the insecurity experienced in the militarised environment ‘out there’ in the rest of the city. On the one hand the capacity of neighbourhoods to provide a sense of safety is limited in a city where the armed forces can enter any household at any time. On the other hand there is a sense among residents that they are better off in a familiar place than in another part of the city where no one knows them. As with the description from my afternoon in Keishamthong Kabui Khul that began this chapter, my companions were nervous about being caught by the armed forces in a neighbourhood where they didn’t live, one where no one knew them and where no one remained on the streets to witness an act of violence, corruption or arrest. During patrols by the armed forces some residents would retreat indoors or into their compounds. In other places people just carried on with their everyday lives by socialising, drying clothes, collecting water, playing football, and shifting goods in and out of sheds. When I asked about these different responses residents pointed out that they were more cautious if there had been recent trouble in their neighbourhood or if a family member had recently been questioned. If the neighbourhood was a known place for a certain underground group and that group had recently been responsible for an attack or agitation, even outside Imphal, then there were more patrols, more questioning, and sometimes residents (usually young men) were arrested. At other times patrols were routine and people hardly seemed to notice.

Alternative Places

Residents also produce sites where these boundaries are transcended and belonging is sought, and felt, in alternative places. These are places for a different kind of belonging, one that skirts the divisiveness of the disturbed city and the ethnically demarcated distinction between neighbourhoods and reflects the social practices, and the dialectics that produce place discussed in chapter 1. Locating and analysing such places is difficult because the landscape of the city provides a lot of potential sites and a lot of false starts, as it were. For instance, the existence of a space in the city where members of different ethnic communities gather regularly and peacefully may appear as an example of such a place: such as Indira Park, Thangal Bazaar, or a
restaurant (the pan-ethnic appeal of fried chicken holds the most potential). Imphal has so few public spaces to begin with that it is tempting to latch onto such sites and celebrate apparent plurality. Yet from time spent in these spaces it is apparent that distinctions between communities can be affirmed, interactions can be instrumental, and belonging is heavily dependent on who else shares the space at a particular time. With these limitations in mind, what then would constitute transcendence? What kinds of places would qualify as meaningful examples of sites where ethnic, class, and gendered boundaries are dissolved, even if only temporarily? Where do people seek and find belonging in Imphal outside their neighbourhoods, outside ethnically defined communities?

I will propose three examples, which while far from exhaustive are perhaps the most fascinating for what they say about the city and the borderland more broadly. First is the Khuman Lampak Sports Complex. Upgraded for the 30th National Games in 1999, the complex is one of the few safe open spaces in the city. The construction of the sports complex and the village built to house the athletes was a major undertaking that transformed the landscape just to the northeast of the Kangla Fort along the Imphal River and in the northwest of the city at Lamphelpat. Hosting the games is confounding at a certain level given the poor security situation in Imphal and the rest of the state at the end of the 1990s. In the year prior to the games there were violent clashes between Kuki and Paite communities in Churachandpur District which killed over 200 people, in Imphal itself armed forces personnel were abducted by underground groups, armed forces personnel were ‘accidently’ killed by other armed forces personnel while travelling in a car, the leader of the Kangleipak Communist Party was killed by security forces leading to a five-day bandh (a general strike usually enforced by non-state actors), a large explosion targeted a former finance minister and a high-ranking official of the Manipur Rifles (his son) very close to the Khuman Lampak complex, and a ‘trial’ of the ban on Hindi cinema and music as well as the first stirring of the ‘territorial integrity’ movement which would escalate in 2001 driving a wedge between Naga and Meitei communities all shook the city. The literature on cities and major sporting events analyses the desire to appear ‘on the map’ by hosting such spectacles (Cornelissen, 2010; Klauser, 2012; Shin, 2012). Black (2008) argues that hosting of ‘second order’ sporting events is a strategic response to globalisation. Major sporting events are an opportunity to showcase modernity, attract capital, and in the case of cities recovering from conflicts or other calamities, to demonstrate stability and safety (Van der Westhuizen, 2004). They are also an opportunity to redevelop and reorder
the city, a constant theme in analysis of the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi (Bhan, 2009; Dupont, 2008). The hosting of the 1999 National Games in Imphal reflects the same dynamics albeit on a smaller scale. Hosting the games was a chance to demonstrate to the rest of India, and perhaps the region beyond, that Imphal was a modern, developed, and stable city – none of which were particularly evident then or now. It was a chance to be on the national map, instead of being considered a violent and separatist border city; Imphal was able to perform a deeply symbolic embrace of the nation, one at odds with the prevailing currents of local political life. At the same time there was the opportunity to perform Manipuri culture, defined fairly narrowly, for a national audience, to hammer home the point that Manipur is different but also a willing part of the nation. Further, bidding for and being awarded the games enabled the Manipur Government to demonstrate loyalty and use this to leverage further resources to actually build the necessary infrastructure to host the games, with large grants coming from central government bodies like the North Eastern Council (NEC) and the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDONER).

At first glance the now 15-year-old complex appears a shabby mix of construction debris, makeshift shelters, and dilapidated sections of buildings. Indeed the Manipur Planning Department has lamented the lack of central government finance to upgrade the facilities (2012: 155). Yet the complex is a hive of activity, especially in the early morning. On a cold December morning in 2012 children and young adults from Manipur’s different communities could be seen jogging, stretching, and training for various sports in the fog. Almost all wear the ubiquitous training tracksuit with ‘MANIPUR’ emblazoned on the back – in various shades. Billboards in the complex feature famous Manipuri athletes, including London Olympics Bronze Medallist Mary Kom, a boxer from the tribal Kom community. Manipur has been very successful at producing athletes and sport is increasingly discussed as a path to integrating Manipur into national fold and as evidence that the borderland can contribute to the nation; a counter to rebellion (McDuie-Ra, 2015). At the local level sport is one of the few ways that a pan-ethnic Manipuri identity is constructed. At Khuman Lampak, athletes from all over the state come to train. Many are housed in nearby dormitories and have their costs paid by the Manipur Government. Manipur sporting teams comprise of members of all the state's ethnic groups. Given the centrality of sport for the production of identity locally and for the ways Manipuris are viewed in the national fold, sport, and the spaces where sport is played transcend hardening ethnic boundaries. Residents of Imphal also come to the complex for organised
competitions and to exercise. The sheer number of people using the complex is remarkable, especially when one considers the circumstances of the disturbed city.

Respondents pointed out a number of reasons for so much interest in sport. Parents and social organisations encourage sports to try to keep young people ‘off the streets’ and away from underground groups and out of the path of the armed forces. Despite the insecurity of everyday life in the city and in villages and towns outside Imphal, children are encouraged to go out and play. There are a lot of former athletes working as coaches and running training academies that recruit children and youth to train for state teams. For such a dysfunctional city there is a surprising abundance of sporting associations at various scales. The city lacks spaces to play, hence the convergence on Khuman Lampak, though residents certainly improvise on makeshift patches of land on riverbanks, in schoolyards, and in fields on the edge of the city. Related to this, Manipur has a serious narcotics problem owing to unemployment, posttraumatic stress, and narcotics trafficking through the state (see Kermode et al., 2009). Sport is used extensively in rehabilitation from narcotics addiction by the scores of rehabilitation clinics in Imphal. Furthermore an interest in sport by children and teenagers is a way of avoiding narcotics addiction through distraction. The boom in after-school tuitions has challenged this somewhat, but sport still has a social position across class and ethnicity that is uncommon elsewhere in India. It has a social value that can even counter the wayward influences rife in the disturbed city. Finally, sport is a pathway to employment. This includes successful athletes being able to make a living but more importantly for the opportunity for recruitment into the state police and other government posts. For instance, Mary Kom has long held a post in the Manipur Police and is promoted each time she succeeds on the national and international stage. She is not actually in the police force, but it is a title and a pension that she will be able to use in her post-boxing career. This is not restricted to famous athletes and sport has become a pathway into all kinds of jobs and is encouraged as way to make things happen in a context where conventional pathways can be blocked. This is especially attractive for members of poorer families unable to send their children outside Manipur for education. At the Khuman Lampak pan-ethnic belonging is felt provided one is capable of participating in sport. This does not negate ethnic identity, but enables pan-ethnic identity to exist, even if only for a limited period.

Second are places for expressions of popular culture. Imphal youth draw heavily on cosmopolitan influences from East Asia and the West, in
part to demonstrate divergence from Indian popular culture (Bollywood, cricket etc.) and in part a result of consumption of Korean, Japanese, and American music, film, art, and street culture (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 166-76). Land connectivity to Myanmar over the last two decades has brought new flows of fashion into Imphal and many locals run fashion shops selling clothes brought across the border from China, Thailand and beyond. There are second-hand clothing stalls all over the city selling used items in similar styles. Popular culture is enacted at beauty contests, fashion shows, singing competitions, rock concerts, video halls, and more impromptu uses of urban spaces for breakdancing, skateboarding, and BMX biking. The conventional catwalk style fashion show is a staple of public events in Imphal. Yet there are notable variations including *Manhunt*, a catwalk show for male fashion, which includes a ‘traditional dress’ section and fashion shows specifically for transgender designers and models, which, to an extent, challenge the marginality of the transgender population in the city. There is also a thriving local theatre, literature and film scene. Some of these events are enacted in spaces created by the civilian government to promote distinctive Manipuri cultural activities to be performed for visiting dignitaries and the always-about-to-boom tourism sector. Others are crafted in a more impromptu way. These are places where youth gain a sense of belonging that does not rest on ethnicity. They create an alternate everyday – one based around
desires and aspirations connected to the outside world. However, while such places stand out in the urban landscape they are limited to mostly middle and upper class youth who can afford to participate. Thus, while ethnicity is transcended, issues of class remain.

Third are places for breaking alcohol and food taboos as described at the start of the chapter. These are overwhelmingly male places, yet they are places that transcend ethnic boundaries and where some urban residents escape the often-stifling atmosphere of neighbourhoods and households. Campaigns by the Meira Paibis against alcoholism and domestic violence in the 1980s led to the Manipur Liquor Prohibition Act 1991. The ban is enforced by the Meira Paibis, who will often publically identify and shame drinkers, and the state police, who tend to enforce the law to extract bribes and fines. Members of the armed forces are exempt from the ban and often re-sell alcohol to shops and connected individuals. Alcohol is also purchased at border markets and smuggled into the city. While alcohol is available in some restaurants, these are generally easy targets for enforcing the law. Though in the bowels of the main market area there are many small establishments where alcohol is easily available and openly consumed. On one occasion I even saw a table of police enjoying some whiskey on duty. To avoid both legal and social surveillance many would-be drinkers head to private houses that double as drinking dens. During fieldwork I spent time in several drinking dens in different neighbourhoods, usually as a guest of a regular at that particular establishment. In this way I was able to gain a sense of when and why people go, what they do there, and who they know. Drinking dens are common in tribal neighbourhoods where there is a more tolerance to drinking among the community and less common in Meitei neighbourhoods where surveillance is more likely. However, regardless of location the patrons will usually include men from various ethnic groups, often eating and drinking together. These drinking dens are also where members of the different communities break various food taboos they would not be able to break in their household, especially consuming meat. In certain drinking dens sex is available, but sex work (also illegal) is more common in dedicated brothels and hotels in the main market areas. Drinking dens are where bonds are forged across ethnic divisions and respondents would often identify friends they have made through drinking. These friendships can be utilised in hard times. While men engage in this kind of camaraderie women are expected to uphold traditions and cultural norms; exacerbating tensions between men and women. Thus, in these places men experience a sense of belonging garnered through
shared imbibing of alcohol and distance from the sites of responsibility and acceptable behaviour.

Conclusion

Imphal is a plural city. Its plurality is relative and needs to be understood in the context of the hill-valley binary as a dominant frame for understanding Manipur – a frame that suggests the city is a predominately Meitei city as part of the valley. Further, in other borderland polities in the Northeast, cities have tended to be created – or significantly expanded – following political agreements to create federal states and autonomous districts for particular ethnic communities. Imphal has a long history of habitation by different communities. It has a plural past often denied in analysis that reproduces the hill-valley divide. Decades of violence in Manipur have pushed more migrants from the hills and from surrounding borderland polities to the city seeking safety, work, and to attain skills. The opportunities for work in construction and trade brought on by a building boom financed through remittances, corruption, and transfers of Indian Government funds to stabilise the frontier city have also attracted migrants from other parts of India and neighbouring countries. Within this patchwork of communities living in close proximity, neighbourhoods are crucial sites for making place; for establishing a sense of belonging necessary to survive in a city where being caught by the armed forces or underground groups in an unfamiliar neighbourhood engenders deep anxiety. Neighbourhoods are commonly formed on ethnic lines, lines that dissolve at times but are enforced at others. Yet ethnicity is transcended, even if temporarily, in alternative places ranging from a sports complex to sites for performing and consuming popular culture to illicit drinking dens. In these places residents seek out belonging based on identities adjacent to, and sometimes in contradiction of, ethnicity. The following chapter analyses the ways different actors – state, non-state, and quasi-state – control parts of the city and the ways control is challenged from below.