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Appleton, CJ

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**Review: Living with Oil & Coal: Resource Politics & Militarization in Northeast  
India**

by Kikon, D.

**Reviewed by CJ Appleton**  
*Portland, Oregon, USA*

Kikon, Dolly. *Living with Oil & Coal: Resource Politics & Militarization in Northeast India*. Seattle, Washington, USA: University of Washington Press, 2019; ix+156 pp. ISBN: 9780295743950, paper, US\$30.00.

*Living with Oil & Coal: Resource Politics & Militarization in Northeast India* by Dolly Kikon is an ethnography focused on the struggle for control over resource extraction in the foothill region between the Naga villages in the hills and the Assam villages in the plains. These foothills are a resource-rich hub over which the villagers, international corporations, and the Indian state are constantly jockeying to stake legitimate claim. The Naga hill villages enjoy state-sanctioned political autonomy and rights over the resources on their lands, while the Assam people in the plains have had the Indian government remain involved due to the oil deposits that exist there. In order to maximize profits, the Indian government has opened up the Assam land to oil exploration by international corporations, which has caused friction between the state and the public. As a result of these developments, a number of insurgent groups have formed to resist the state's attempt to expand resource extraction. Consequently, the Indian state has granted the security forces who protect the resource extraction sites exemption from many national laws, even allowing them the use of deadly force on mere suspicion if they see fit. Kikon does a masterful job of illustrating the complexity of how the Naga and Assam people, who live together in the foothills, navigate the highly militarized borders created by both insurgents and security forces, develop cultural and political identities that are linked to land and resources, understand their aspiration for a better future through resource extraction, and form alliances with each other when needed to realize these aspirations.

Kikon begins with a history of the area while explaining the role that access to land and resources has in the creation of political identity for the people. Due to the foothills being

a space shared by both Naga and Assam territories, each group has an arrival story that they couple with access to land and resources to create a sense of belonging. This chapter also highlights the ways in which storytelling is used both to distinguish between Naga and Assam peoples and to bring the two together during times when they have mutual interests. Next, Kikon uses the concept of *morom* (love) to explain the complex meanings that the Assam, Nagaland, and the Indian state have for people in the region. Assam, Nagaland, and the Indian state each represent a symbolic power, with Assam being understood as the economic force, Nagaland the cultural force, and the Indian state as the military force. Kikon explains that “the language of *morom* or affection became an important lens for foothill residents to describe their experiences of the multiple sovereign entities and the power structures” (p.85). The concept of *morom* is also used to describe the *haats*, which are marketplaces in the foothills. Kikon uses the *haats* as a way to illustrate how hierarchies of power play themselves out through economic exchange. The last two chapters are dedicated to the role that resource extraction plays in the creation of networks and family ties, how it exists as a source of fantasy and aspiration for the people in the foothills, and how it alters social relations through residents’ every day experiences with the militarization of the area.

*Living with Oil & Coal* is a wonderful book that adds much-needed depth and detail to our understanding of how people create place and belonging while navigating the expansion of the global market to extract oil and coal from their land. This is a versatile book that would be accessible for undergraduate audiences, yet contains complexity that would be of great interest for graduate audiences and scholars as well. Highly recommended.

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CJ Appleton <applet2@pdx.edu> Graduate student, Portland State University, Portland, OR 97201