

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been published without the help of many people. Not all of them can be named here, especially because pseudonyms have been used for many interlocutors. Nonetheless, above all, my thanks go to the families on the tea plantations who allowed me to stay with them and to the numerous people from the plantations who invited me into their homes, allowed me to join them for work and leisure activities, and shared their stories and lives with me. I am inexpressibly thankful to Binita, who grew up on a tea plantation and who helped me get used to life on the plantations, spent many hours explaining to me her point of view on my experiences during fieldwork, and read and commented on many early drafts of this book. Binita has an extraordinary desire to learn more. Her nonconformist determination has inspired me. The world needs people like Binita in important positions. I owe my thanks to Juna, who always welcomed me in front of the firepit in her kitchen for a pot of tea. Juna's wisdom, warmth, and joy for life are an incomparable treasure. I regret that she will never be able to read this book because life did not give her the opportunity to learn to read. I wish the many scholars of this world, including me, had even a spark of her world-changing wisdom. I am thankful for all the things that I learned from Juna. Equally, I am grateful to Rimti for taking me to work, walking me around the plantation, and sharing many insights about life and work with me. Rimti's eagerness and rebelliousness impressed me deeply. I am also thankful to Alex, Angansri, Anita, Anjana, Arti, Ashin, Ashok, Hiramoni, Kathrina, Klara, Mahipal, Mansuk, Manjushah, Melkhas, Petrus, Richek, Rita, Sarita, Shuklal, Simon, and Sunita.

At an early stage of my research, I stayed at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. During that time, academics, human rights lawyers, and activists inspired my thinking and helped me in many ways. I am particularly thankful to Anant Kumar Asthana, Amit Prakash, Colin Gonsalves, Franscesca Feruglio, Jayshree Satpute, Meha Khanduri, and most importantly Pratiksha Baxi.

In Assam, Adivasi activists helped me with my fieldwork in various ways. I am thankful to Raphael Kujur, and Wilfred Topno for sharing their valuable knowledge with me. From the academic circles around the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Guwahati, I am grateful for the rich discussions with Dolly Kikon, Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman (IIT Guwahati), R. K. Debbarma, Sanjay (Xonzoi) Bar-bora, Trishna Gogoi, Virginus Xaxa, and Yengkhom Jilangamba who helped me

to gain a better knowledge about Assam and its tea plantations. My heartfelt thanks go to Trishna and her family, who have shown me more hospitality than one could ever imagine. It is such a joy that we met and were able to walk a part of the way together in Assam. Thank you for everything!

For their guidance and feedback at various stages of research and writing, I express my deep thankfulness to my mentor Julia Eckert and her sit-in colloquium group. It was a true pleasure to work with Julia Eckert. She has profoundly shaped my perspective on India, and I am deeply grateful for the countless hours we spent discussing my research. I sincerely appreciate her exceptionally astute criticism, combined with her genuine warmth. For further guidance and feedback on parts of the book, I thank Andrew Tony-Odigie, Edda Rohrbach, Gabriel Zimmerer, Gaurav J. Pathania, Johanna Mugler, Johannes Quack, Justine Le Goff, Laura Affolter, Luisa Piart, Miriam Wenner, Rana Behal, Ravi Ahuja, Sabine Friebolin, Sandra Bärnreuther, Sanjib Baruah, Sarah Besky, Sarah Ewald, and Selina Abächerli. I would like to express special gratitude to Sandra Bärnreuther for her countless support, much like a Didi (“older sister”), in helping me navigate the academic world. Her exceptional ability to listen and ask insightful, well-founded questions has been a constant source of inspiration for my anthropological work. I am grateful to Olaf Zenker for his belief in the success of this book. Without his support, the book would surely not have been published by Cornell. I also thank Olaf Zenker and the Political and Legal Anthropology Network for all the inspiring conversations about the book.

This book started at the University of Bern. My fieldwork was funded by the Heinrich Boell Foundation and by the University of Bern’s Faculty of Humanities fieldwork grants. I thank the foundation and the faculty for their trust in my project and their generous financial support. The many discussions with Axel Harneit-Sievers and Caroline Bertram from the Delhi office of the Heinrich Boell Foundation were fertile and enjoyable. Caro’s and my shared love for India has brought us especially close in recent years. Thank you for our special friendship.

Parts of chapter 2 of the book were first published in *Anthropology and Humanism* in 2023 under the title “‘It Would Taste Better with Sugar’—Navigating Deprivation and Confidence in Everyday Life on a Tea Plantation in Assam.” An earlier version of chapter 1 appeared in the 2022 article “Beyond ‘Enclaves’: Post-Colonial Labor Mobility to and from Assam Tea Plantations” in *Anthropology of Work Review*. Parts of chapter 4 were published in the article “‘No Justice—No Rest!’: How Activist Conceptions of Justice Influence Categories of Collective Identification among Tea Plantation Laborers in Assam” published in 2023 in the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie | Journal of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. I am extremely thankful to Jim Lance and the ILR Board from Cornell University

Press and the two anonymous reviewers of the book manuscript for their helpful comments, suggestions, and guidance.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to my dear family. I thank my parents, Margret and Josef; my brother, Benjamin; and my beloved sons, Adam and Amadeo, for supporting me emotionally, although my path as an anthropologist remains puzzling to them.