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## SPECIAL SECTION

**Masculinity in the margins: men and identity in 21st century Nagaland**

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# Masculinity in the margins: men and identity in the 21st century

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Constructions of masculinity in Nagaland have historically focused on stereotypes of a pre-modern, warrior savage. Early discussions are rife with ascriptions of primitiveness and a widely perceived adherence to 'headhunting' practices. Recent discussions of masculine discourses in Nagaland engage with ideas of manhood and masculinity as externally informed and influenced by these constructions, as well as Indian mass media, and national and international tourism dialogues. I argue that masculinity in Nagaland navigates myriad structures and scales of identity, involving shades of this externally drawn masculinity, as well as local configurations of masculinity that are less salient and 'loud', but in many ways are highly relevant to the changing nature of identity in Nagaland. Essentially, masculinity in Nagaland is fluid and dynamic, despite popular tourist and media rhetoric framing Naga men as cut from an ancient, temporally distinct, and savage stock. It is informed by these historical stereotypes, but also by contemporary politics and social issues. This is important for two reasons. First, it contributes to discussions of multi-scalar identity in Nagaland, how Naga culture is presented to the outside world, and the ways many Nagas perceive themselves in a changing Nagaland. Second, these identity structures shape identity politics and political outcomes today, a phenomenon that is part of larger local debates on marginality in Nagaland.

Although there is no singular 'Naga masculinity', there are common themes that cut through ideas of manhood and the assumed roles of Naga men in Nagaland. These include the realities and perceptions of tribalism, the experience of living in an environment of conflict and an exceptional space, and the status of being a marginal community in India. In this article, I discuss how these themes shape the construction of masculinity and masculine norms in Nagaland today. I explore the perceptions that surround 'tribe', not only as a network of relations, but also as a construct of identity that, from the outside, is often associated with ideas of temporal distinction and primitivism. I consider the ways insurgency and exceptional state violence have shaped local ideas of

manhood and masculinity, reifying ideas of men's roles as cultural guardians, ones that often romanticize a culturally 'pure' past that marginalizes women and excludes non-Naga communities. I discuss how this discourse of cultural guardians frames discussions of migrants and experiences of marginality. In so doing, I build on earlier work by Longkumer (2015) that sheds light on how Naga identity is actively engaged with, and in whose process communities are not simply 'passive onlookers' but are active participants in the making and remaking of identity. In agreement with Longkumer's (2015) focus, that identity is actively engaged with and not simply ascribed or received, I consider how this active engagement with identity shapes local debates of identity and marginality.

This research focuses on masculinity, and hence it is important to link 'masculinity' to the subjects of this research, men. Masculinity has become a referential term for thoughts and actions associated with 'being a man', the everyday experiences of men, and the unequal relationships between men and women (Thompson 2012). Hearn and Pringle (2006: 7) acknowledge that the term 'masculinity' is convenient shorthand to refer to how men act, think, believe and appear, or are made apparent. Likewise, Smith (2010) defines masculinity as 'the trait of behaving in ways considered typical for men' (Smith 2010:1). Considering masculinity requires a naturalization of the biological - sex, and a focus on the cultural - gender (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). That is not to say that masculine considerations marginalize or ignore the physical aspects of sex and gender altogether, but that the focus of masculine theory and research is the cultural, social and political aspects of gender - its construction, reception, performance, and attitudes and thoughts surrounding gender. This overall ethic is aptly summed up by Fausto-Sterling, 'men are made, not born' (1997: 219), an adaptation of De Beauvoir's 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (De Beauvoir 1949: 330). In light of this, this article focuses on the experiences of men in Nagaland, but not in the quotidian sense. Rather, I focus on the themes and constructs that surround, frame, and shape ideas associated with men and manhood.

Young men in particular are the focus of this discussion. Youth is notoriously difficult to define, being a culturally elastic concept, and while defining youth is not the focus of this article<sup>1</sup>, this article cautiously frames "youth" as individuals born in Nagaland from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s. There are three reasons for this focus. Firstly, Nagaland has experienced significant changes that affect young people in particular since the mid-1980s. The peace processes beginning in the early 1990s, along with the 1997 NSCN(IM) the 2001 NSCN(K) ceasefires have reconfigured, but not completely ended violent conflict between Naga insurgent groups and the government, and also between each other. Secondly, Nagaland has 'opened up' in this time, with the relaxation of the Inner Line Permit system in Nagaland and several neighbouring states in 2011, and an expanding tourism industry aimed at Indian and international markets. This has increased

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<sup>1</sup> It has been discussed in depth by Cole & Durham (2008).

interactions with 'mainland' India and occurs alongside the ongoing process of Northeast India's transition from a 'frontier' to a 'corridor', changing the way many young Nagas and Northeast Indians relate to India, to each other, and how identity operates at different levels (McDuie-Ra 2016). In other words, people growing up in this era are presented with, in many ways, a wholly different Nagaland from that of their parents and grandparents. Finally, Nagaland is a young persons' state. It is amongst the five Indian states with the highest percentage of persons aged between 10-14 years (12.6%). Nagaland also has the second highest population of adolescents in India aged 10-19 (24.2%), the fourth highest percentage of people aged 15-24 (21.9%), and the lowest percentage of elderly people in India (5.2%) (Government of India 2011).

Young people are also at the centre of the community. They are often more dependent than older demographics, with the exception of the elderly, on existing networks (Mcdowell 2001). These networks include the family networks they rely on, the peer groups they conform to, the clubs and organizations that represent and protect them, and the wider ethnic and national community they identify with. At the same time, however, young people exist in a 'liminal legal and political space' (Gergan 2014: 70), where they are often seen as 'adults in waiting' (Skelton 2010). This puts young people, and in particular young men, at risk for pursuing status and recognition through alternative means, often through violence, drugs and alcohol (see Nilan et al. 2011). Young people also experience higher rates of domestic violence (Holt et al. 2008) and outside-of-the-home violence (Hagedorn 2008), higher risks of imprisonment (Cox 2011), homicide (Farrington et al. 2012) and suicide (Canetto & Cleary 2012). Young people shoulder the greatest burdens of unemployment (Kieselbach 2003) and lack of opportunity (Jeffrey 2010). In essence, the insecurities and challenges faced by young people exist in layered ways, and are related to their centrality in the community but also their marginal status within it. The agency of young people needs to be understood as operating at these multiple scales (Gergan 2014). In other words, young people need to be understood as not simply a liminal population, but as living with various forms of vulnerability and opportunity simultaneously in relation to this liminal status. I aim to shed light on the factors that shape this agency and identity in a changing Nagaland.

### **'Naga'**

A distinct 'Naga' identity is a relatively new construction. Although designations of a 'Naga' group in the hills east of Assam and north of Manipur were not a new or exclusive construction of colonial anthropologists, communities in the Naga Hills appear to have had little sense of commonality or unity in the past. As stated by Hutton:

It is generally assumed in a vague sort of way that those tribes which are spoken of as Nagas have something in common with each other that distinguishes them from the many other tribes found in Assam and entitles them to be regarded as a racial unit in themselves... the

truth is that if not impossible it is exceedingly difficult to propound any tests by which a Naga tribe can be distinguished from other Assam and Burma tribes which are not Nagas (Hutton in Mills, 1922:xvi)

Similarly, Woodthorpe states:

Various deviations have been given for the name *Naga*, some supposing it to come from the Bengali word *Nangta*, in Hindustani 'Nanga' = Naked. Others think that the *Kachari* word *Naga* = a young man = a warrior, supplies the name; While others again derive it from 'Nag' = 'a snake'... the name is quite foreign and unrecognized by the Nagas themselves" (1882: 56).

Less than a century after Hutton's statement, and just over a century since Woodthorpe's, the phrase "we are Nagas by birth, Indians by accident" has become commonplace in political speech and protest language in Nagaland (Hussain 2009:100). This articulation of Naga identity is the result of a myriad of local and imported ideas, and is continually developing and changing (Wettstein 2016). At the same time, new adjacent forms of identity exist and are gaining relevance alongside clan and tribal identities in Nagaland and wider Northeast India (McDuie-Ra 2016). These identities are not exclusive, but inclusive, and are indicative of the fluid nature of identity, and of how new constructions of identity are engaged with without necessarily replacing older constructions. This fluidity does not suggest that identity is fleeting or flexible to the point of being ephemeral. Rather it suggests that identity is shaped by many factors that may have roots in history, but are also continuously evolving, recreated, and re-interpreted.

Identity in Nagaland and its gendered aspects have deep roots in the colonial experience, and these roots, I argue, are reified in renegotiations and reconfigurations of identity today. As aptly stated by West (1994: 55), "The use of the term Naga, as personal and political identity today, stems from the aspirations of hill peoples toward self-determination, but its construction as a viable entity is very much part of that colonial past". Understanding this historical influence is important for understanding its contemporary manifestations.

### **'Headhunters and savages': constructing a frontier identity in colonial India**

The idea of violent savagery was part of the script that legitimated conquest, but that violence was then supposed to be tempered by a new Christian conscience and Protestant work ethic... The headhunter is a stubborn image of violence threatening from the outside... Most Europeans thought he would vanish from the stage of history by the middle of this century, but his time has not passed, and indigenous peoples will not let us forget it

Hoskins 1996: 43

Hoskins (1996) argues that in the postcolonial era, these ascriptions have been appropriated by indigenous communities; “indigenous people have stolen the script and rewritten it” (ibid). The framing of men, and masculinity in Nagaland has proceeded along similar lines. In the Naga Hills, colonial administrators and anthropologists focused on ideas of temporal distinction, violence, and primitiveness. In the post-colonial era, constructions of manhood and masculinity in Nagaland, though not directly a reflection of this colonial discourse, are nevertheless informed by it.

At first glance, this argument appears to make two controversial claims. One, that all discussion of India’s Northeastern Frontiers and the Naga Hills involved negative stereotyping and ascriptions of savagery and violence. This is not the case. Wouters (2012) argues that these stereotypes were only half of the picture, that colonial discussions of the Northeast were not homogenous and uniformly negative. Negative stereotypes involving temporal ascriptions were rife, especially during the consolidation of the Naga Hills and other Northeast Indian highlands, but positive ascriptions existed as well (ibid). These ascriptions, however, also served the needs of colonial administration, much like common ascriptions of violence and primitiveness, albeit differently in two ways. First, they tended to contrast highland communities with Hindu Indian communities, justifying continued special treatment of the North-Eastern Frontier. For example, discussing Kachari festivals, Endle (1911: 53) states

These Kachari festivals are almost always attended by an immoderate consumption of the national rice beer... On the other hand, they have their good side in that they help to keep the people to some extent beyond the influence of the destructive vortex of Hinduism, in which their simple primitive virtues might otherwise be so readily engulfed, and the adoption of which in whole or in part is invariably accompanied by a grave and deep-seated deterioration in conduct and character.

Second, they emphasized the acceptance of Western norms in Northeastern communities in a manner that contrasted those members that have adopted Western lifestyles from those that have not. Gurdon’s (1914: 6) description of Khasis in Meghalaya, offers a telling example:

Khasis of the interior who have adopted Christianity are generally cleaner in their persons than the non-Christians, and their women dress better than the latter and have an air of self-respect about them. The houses in a Christian village are far superior, especially where there are resident European missionaries... It is a pleasure to hear the sound of the distant church bell on the hill-side on a Sunday evening, soon to be succeeded by the beautiful Welsh hymn tuned which, when wafted across the valleys, carry one’s thoughts far away. The Welsh missionaries have done, and continue to do, an immense amount of good amongst these people.

While there certainly is a heterogeneity of descriptions, some positive and some negative, the problem of agency and identity remains pertinent. Colonial officer-anthropologists constructed an understanding of the Northeastern Frontier based on their positions as producers and as products of the Empire. New ideas, lifestyles, political and social organizations found at the Frontier were not only different, but were seen as uncivilized and in need of civilizing. Whether this was framed as violence and savagery in need of being tamed, or as noble savages in need of the protection of colonial administrators, understandings of the Northeast were, with very few exceptions, the result of the outsider looking in.

The other apparent claim this argument suggests, related to the above, is that Naga men have no agency over their own identities, that “Naga” is merely a colonial construct. This too is not the case. There is growing debate on the roots and Orientalist underpinnings of identity in India. Dirks’ (2001; 1992) seminal work on caste and identity argues that the colonial discourse transformed institutions in India, including caste and tribe. In other words, the colonial experience shaped identities. This has been mistaken in some cases as arguing that colonialism created caste and tribe (Fuller 2016: 458). Piliavsky (2015), on the other hand, argues that the ‘colonial fiction’ argument espoused by Dirks has gone too far, that colonial stereotypes drew from tribe and caste stereotypes that were already well established. While this article does not engage directly in this debate, it does focus on two issues of identity formation that touch on this debate and are relevant in Nagaland, and Northeastern contexts more widely.

To begin with, the majority of anthropological information produced in Northeast India, and wider South Asia, are colonial accounts, which are rarely separable from colonial state-making and society-shaping missions (Wettstein 2016; Ngully 2014; West 1994). Because of this, colonial anthropology is a field as valuable to understanding the role of state-making in the framing of identities in line with Dirks’(2001; 1992) focus, as it is to understanding how identities shaped the state-making mission, which is Piliavsky’s (2015) focus.

Furthermore, oral histories, as are those of many Naga communities, have been prone to reinterpretation according to colonial understandings, a phenomenon that is already well discussed by Tezenlo Thong and is revisited below (Thong 2014; 2011; 2010). Rather than discussing the normative quality of ascriptions or their veracity, this section focuses on how these ascriptions are understood in contemporary Nagaland and the role they continue to play in framing men’s social roles.

Two themes in particular are recurrent in post-colonial readings of colonial discussions of men in the Naga Hills: head-hunting and primitiveness. These themes have dominated contemporary understandings of colonial and pre-colonial Naga society. Nagas as headhunters appear in most histories of the Naga Hills. Today this discourse is employed as a means of presenting Nagas as cut from a primitive and savage stock, as still holding

to a supposedly ancient culture of savagery and ritual violence but in new materializations such as insurgency and organized crime (Patil 2011:1000).

At the time of the earliest reports of groups in the Naga Hills, Europeans had not yet directly contacted Naga communities. McCosh wrote: “[the Nagas] are the wildest and most barbarous of all the hill tribes, and looked upon with dread and horror by the neighbours of the plains, who consider them as ruthless robbers and murderers”(1837:p.156). Colonial imaginings and reproductions of Nagas continued to employ this perspective in writing a history and forming a discourse of the Naga Hills. Colonel James Johnstone (1896:27) described Angami Nagas as “a strong built, hardy, active race... they have a mainly independent bearing, and are bred up to war from their earliest years”. Likewise is Woodthorpe’s description: “bloodthirsty, treacherous, and revengeful all Nagas, even the best are” (1882:65). Other expeditions into the Southern Naga Hills described Naga tribals as “savages” (Butler 1875:313), “warlike” (ibid: 320), having a “thirst for blood” (ibid), and coming from “long generations of anarchy and bloodshed” (ibid: 313). Johnstone (1896), regarding his own intervention in an uprising at Kohima speculated that “the result would have been no one who knows the Nagas can doubt; five-hundred and forty-five headless and naked bodies would have been lying outside the blockade” (1896:159).

Later descriptions of the Naga Hills drew heavily on these early accounts. Woodthorpe’s (1882) notes are lifted directly from Butler’s expedition memoirs, some several paragraphs in length. Lorrain (1915: 85), who described his own experience as “I found myself in the midst of a wild head-hunting tribe of savages, traversing through dense jungles” later clarified that he had not met with any head-hunters directly, or witnessed a beheading, but that his interactions were limited to “sons of head-hunters” (Ibid.: 235). Gait (1906: 312) notes that “blood feuds and head-hunting now survive only in the memory of the older generation which is rapidly passing away.” American army personnel encountering Naga communities during WWII made claims that “there was no doubt that the Nagas were still taking heads when we were in their country”. This was followed by the clarification that “I did not personally see any collections of heads in the Naga country... my only contact with the Nagas was the visit several of them made to our marching line and demonstrated the use of their crossbows”(Randle & Hughes 2003:44, 45).

Indeed, head-hunting and other violent acts did occur in the Naga Hills and the Northeastern Frontier, and there are confirmed instances of beheadings (Reed 1942: 178). Colonial officers also bore witness to human skulls on display in Morungs (bachelor sleeping houses) and dangling from trees and at some significant sites (ibid:189). The true source of these heads, whether hunted by rivals, dug after a burial, or kept as a traditional memorial, forms a debate of its own (Zou 2005; Thong 2012; West 1985; West 1994). Reports of widespread and common head-hunting, however, were seldom confirmed, and much of the discussion of head-hunting appearing in the diaries and letters of

colonial administrators such as Butler, Woodthorpe and Johnstone, and missionaries such as Lorrain, were informed by rumour, speculation, and a growing conviction that the Frontier *must be* a space rife with chaos and head-hunting, despite few actual recorded instances of beheadings (see Thong 2012).

The Naga Hills therefore always represented more than a geographical delineation from the plains and foothills of Assam. They were a divider between the legible and controllable Empire, and an illegible, untaxable, region beyond the reach of colonial administration. The space was framed as untamable and in need of harsher and different treatment compared to many other Indian territories in the form of an excessively violent campaign of subjugation and control. Notions of the 'tribal man' were central to this civilizing mission. By necessity, this 'tribal man' was seen as violent, resistant, and unpredictable. Tribal man in colonial South Asia was a construction of temporally and Social-Darwinist oriented notions of primitivity and violence, a construction that served the needs of colonial administrators, and the curiosities of colonial anthropologists and audiences. Correspondence by Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, Hutton, illustrates this civilizing logic well:

In these circumstances we cannot hope to civilize our own half-savage peoples so long as they see raiding and head-hunting practiced by their brothers and cousins just across the border. In order to complete our mission of civilization within our own borders we must gradually extend the area which we control (Reed 1942: 155).

Likewise, the Governor of Assam's Secretary stated in April 1937 that 'there is little doubt that any considerable relaxation of our control would inevitably lead to head-hunting and tribal warfare' (Reed 1942: 88).

This was not a phenomenon unique to the Naga Hills. Primitiveness and savagery were paradigms that applied to the much of the lower Himalayan region, from the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bengal (now Bangladesh), to the highlands of Sikkim and Tibet, and encompassing highlands and hinterlands in Indochina as well (Scott 2009). Arguably though, the construction of temporal distinction and savageness in the Naga Hills was louder, more anthropologically invested, and certainly has maintained relevance in ways different to many other highland communities. Headhunting and the related cult of the primitive have become integral parts of identity in Nagaland, an identity that is constantly evolving. Discussed below, these colonially informed ascriptions have taken on new meaning, coexisting with, and complementing other aspects and shades of identity.

### **Internalizing the savage: headhunting in the modern context**

We are still very confused about ourselves. From a society of head-hunters, we directly shifted into a modern, Western society. We are in the middle of an identity crisis

Anen Molungnenla, quoted in Ghoshal 2012

Earlier constructions of savages and primitive spaces have ramifications for identity extending into the post-colonial era. Colonial structures that were used to define and regulate populations have been co-opted and adopted by the formerly colonized themselves when identifying themselves as a distinct group (Said 1978: 24). Essentially ascriptions applied to populations can turn into cultural identifiers of those populations. Thong (2012) discusses two ramifications of this process: self-primitivisation and self-alienation.

Self-primitivisation involves the appropriation of colonial ascriptions by subjects. The image of the 'savage', 'primitive', 'headhunter' or 'cannibal' is assumed to be an accurate depiction, and becomes a feature of identity of that community or group, a process not unlike Bourdieu's framing of self-structuring structures - *habitus* (1984; 170). In New Zealand, European notions of a 'cannibalistic' Maori have been subsumed into modern notions of Maori identity (Tempesta 2005: 120). In Papua New Guinea, Brison (1996) notes the adoption of savagery, aggression and notions of perpetual violence into Kwanga identities based on the colonial portrait of them (Brison 1996). Likewise, ideas of Nagas as 'headhunters' have become embedded into Naga identity. Singh (2006: 1) notes a Naga interviewee as saying 'your head would be decorating this drawing room had you met my forefathers a hundred years ago'. The actuality of these claims is of little concern, as they have *become* social truths.

The second phenomenon identified is one of self-alienation. The relationship between a community or individual and their history is defined by the colonial experience. Old customs become taboo, or shamed. Introduced customs such as Christian ceremonies and holidays became the new norm. Through this, history is divided between the time before Christianity and civilization and the time after. Pre-colonial histories are thought of as savage, timeless and ancient. Christian developments are considered enlightened and a time of cultural rebirth. In Nagaland, the expression 'from darkness to light' has been popularly employed to refer to this change (Kiranshankar 2011).

However accurate colonial headhunting reports may be, the contemporary myth of widespread and pervasive headhunting nonetheless has become embedded in popular understandings of Nagaland, as well as Naga people's understandings of themselves and their past. The legacy of the violent, savage, Naga man, the headhunter, is one part of masculine identity in Nagaland today. This construction seems especially salient in tourism narratives.

### **Tourism and identity**

Tourism operates through the creation of spatial and temporal narratives (Henderson & Weisgrau 2007: 64–65). These narratives bind a space to a time, portraying the past in the present for an audience, the tourist, to experience and escape into (ibid). Tourists are presented with a space advertised as 'traditional', 'authentic', pure, and exotic (Tucker

2003: 2-3, 30-34). This has been described as the 'cult of the primitive' (Mumford 1934: 237). The tourist is presented with a 'timeless society', a romanticized step back in time to a pre-modern world (Wang 2000: 87). Tourism is the business of linking sites and experiences with these expectations (Henderson & Weisgrau 2007, p.65).

Picard (1990: 198) argues that the outcomes of these narratives cannot be compartmentalized, that the host community cannot perpetuate and exploit narratives constructed for and by tourism without these narratives overlapping into the larger cultural discourse. The lines between the invented and embellished cultures that are sold to tourists, and the lived and identified cultures that belong to a community become blurred (ibid). In other words, culture, among other things, is bent and changed to suit the demands and expectations of tourists and this process shapes identity itself.

This phenomenon is not limited to expressions of culture alone. The geographic space itself and control of who can and cannot enter this space is shaped by the presence and demands of tourists. Mendis (1981) describes the spatial outcomes of the surge in tourism to Sri Lanka from the mid-1960s:

We are compelled to create these tourist enclaves since we are obliged to fulfill the expectations of our visitors who come here to sample a taste of paradise... Hence the strenuous efforts at window-dressing, camouflaging the hell-holes of squalor that blot the landscape, and sweeping the dirt under the carpet, take the form of rounding up beggars, keeping the cities clean, and planting colourful flowers on our roundabouts. We cover up the festering sores with bright raiment and present our visitors a cheerful, smiling Lanka who in reality is nothing but a sick and anaemic [sic] lady with a painted face' (Mendis 1981: 90-91)

In Sri Lanka, the onset of tourism brought with it changes to the physical constitution of Colombo, its capital. 'Tourist spaces' were isolated from the poverty of the city, beggars were expelled from these spaces, priority was given to keeping these spaces clean and beautiful. The city as a narrative packaged and marketed to tourists was separated from the city as a reality lived by its residents.

This is similar to the case in Nagaland today. State tourism promotions involve selective histories that omit as much post-independence violence as possible. Where necessary or unavoidable, discussions of violence are contextualized within a larger picture of 'warriors' with a historical resistance to outside influence (Patil 2011). State promotions are also highly gendered, using male imageries of warriors, headmen, chiefs and headhunting and featuring women as passive subjects engaged in traditional women's activities and wearing traditional shawls. Tourism companies present moderated histories of the Northeast, while occasionally mentioning the politically contested nature of the region, a marketable Naga identity is the focal point, with a common and exotic theme continually reappearing – 'state of the headhunters' (GO Travelling Ltd 2015), 'fierce tattooed headhunters' (Greener Pastures 2012), 'former

headhunters' (Brahmaputra Tours n.d.), 'headhunters' (Lonely Planet 2015). This fascination with headhunting and the ideas of primitivism portrayed in colonial texts is the cultural export the Naga tourism industry is based on. A timeless, pre-modern space is the pull that brings in tourists and attracts global interest. This tourism narrative is perhaps most loudly promoted in Nagaland's annual Hornbill Festival.

## Hornbill

The 20-lakh [2,000,000] strong Naga people, by nature, are fun lovers, and life in Nagaland is one long festival

Hornbillfestival.com

The Hornbill festival is organized by the Nagaland State Tourism Department and Nagaland Art and Culture Department. The annual festival was established in Kohima District in 2000 with aims to revive, protect and preserve Naga heritage and attract tourism (Hornbillfestival.com n.d.). The festival involves Naga dancers dressed in traditional clothing, live theatre, morung tours, souvenirs, food and clothes stalls, acrobatics, pig-chasing, wrestling, a motor rally, the Hornbill International Rock Contest, the Miss Nagaland Beauty Pageant, and chili-eating contests (Longkumer, 2015). Young men at the festival are presented in traditional warrior uniforms, holding shields, daos and spears. Officially this cultural extravaganza takes place at Kisama, a 'Naga Heritage Village' 10 kilometers south of Kohima.

The site is designed as a mini-village and was commissioned by the State Government of Nagaland featuring amphitheaters and stages, traditional morung dormitories, and small trade and food stalls. Similar to Mendis' (1981) discussion of Sri Lanka, Kisama village is temporally and spatially oriented towards satisfying the demands of the tourist audience. During the Hornbill season, the space is 'activated'. It is cleaned, structural repairs are made, roads leading to the site and the major arteries of Kohima are hurriedly patched up, and the space is populated by traditionally dressed dancers, guides, wares-sellers and food staff. The site is presented as a traditional village, an enclave where time has frozen and the mythicized headhunter reappears for an international audience. When not 'in season', Kisama reverts to a peri-urban space of the city. Being a 'site' with a specific purpose, there is no thoroughfare traffic and little reason to pass through outside of the tourist season. Young people frequent the site because of this. Here they can drink alcohol with relative privacy, and make noise and mess away from the gaze of their families and gossipy neighbours.

Ao (2006) argues that such globalizing phenomena as Hornbill alters identities in Northeast India into marketable brand names – 'Naga', 'Khasi', 'Mizo' for example. This involves the subsuming of cultures into amorphous masses, marked by often derogatory and wide-reaching identifiers such as savageness, primitiveness, and headhunting.

Culturally significant practices are transformed into cultural shows. Clothes that often denote complex meanings that are hidden to visiting audiences become loud and vibrant costumes. Icons and items, both practical and culturally significant, become souvenirs, often produced far away from the spaces they are presented as a piece of and attached to. The Hornbill has also become a space of contentious representation of control and authority (Kikon 2005). The ten-day Festival is opened with the Indian National Anthem, and the presence of the Indian Army is highly visible (Longkumer 2013, p. 93).

'Touristification' proceeds from within (Picard 1990: 199). The narratives that are created and embellished to suit the demands and expectations of tourists are also internalized, and become a part of the cultural discourses of the host communities (ibid). This might take the form of emphasizing specific cultural habits and items that interest and attract tourists, and de-emphasizing parts of a culture considered ordinary, banal, or offensive to the tourist. In Nagaland this process has been informed by the colonial discourse, where issues of primitiveness, savageness and specifically headhunting have been emphasized by state institutions such as the Nagaland State Tourism Department and the Nagaland Art and Culture Department, and by private tourism companies. The narratives constructed emphasize stereotypes of a male Naga warrior. Promotions link violence today and in recent decades with this warrior typology. For young men in Nagaland, the tourism discourse and its products, such as the Hornbill festival, reify ideas and expectations of men as dominant, violent, and anti-modern. The issue is not that the Hornbill festival itself is the source of this cultural interpretation. Rather, the festival is both an expression of this interpretation, and plays a role in informing the interpretation as well. This is discussed by Longkumer (2015).

Longkumer (2015) considers four layers of meaning of the festival for contemporary Nagas. The festival educates young Nagas and is a form of Naga cultural revival. Second, the festival reinforces a sense of Naga community. Third, the festival attempts to supersede local variants of identity and to encourage a state-wide Naga identity. Finally, the festival is a reconfiguration of the Naga identity to rewrite Naga history on its own terms, rather than being spoken for by colonial sources and distant academics. Overall though, Hornbill and the wider tourism discourse is a part of what Longkumer describes as cultural hybridity. That is, the melding of an often highly idealized, and in the case of Nagaland often externally directed 'traditional' identity, with aspects of modernity that relate to contemporary issues and values. This dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' is problematic in a temporal sense - what is 'traditional' often finds ways of being more relevant in 'modern' contexts and issues than it was even in the 'traditional' context it is claimed to emerge from. The melding of traditional and contemporary themes nonetheless is complimentary. "Imagery of exoticism portrays an idea of Naga culture through the performance of identity" (Longkumer 2015: 61). I argue that these themes are even co-constitutive. Interpretations of 'traditional' values and identity are

framed by a myriad of contemporary social and political issues. These issues, however, are also shaped by interpretations of tradition and identity.

### **Insurgency, AFSPA, impunity**

Demands for independence in the Naga Hills has been a pervasive issue since before Independence. As early as 1929 the Naga Club expressed its desire for an independent and separate Naga nation. Other ethnic groups in the Northeast including the Kukis, Garos, Bodos, Assamese, and Mizo communities have also made demands for independent ethnic spaces of various degrees, from absolute separation and independence as is the case with Nagaland, to autonomy and recognition as a federal state of their own as with Garos in Achik-land. Within these space-making projects have been dozens of insurgent outfits demanding recognition and competing for legitimacy and overlapping claims to land, governance, and resources.

These calls for separatism have been met with a militarized response from Delhi. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1958 allows the government far-reaching powers in 'disturbed areas' in Northeast India, effective since 1959 in parts of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Under the Act, the region has been heavily militarized, with broad, sweeping powers handed to the military executive, and an effective impunity for transgressions from the law. In essence, the AFSPA creates a state of exception in nominated disturbed areas (McDuie-Ra 2009a; Kikon 2009). The military presence has been associated with human rights abuses and abuses of power, with regular searches of people and homes, road closures, curfews, arbitrary arrests and violent and sexual attacks committed by soldiers (Farrelly 2009; McDuie-Ra 2009b; Gaikwad 2009).

This state of exception has complex outcomes in Nagaland. On the one hand, the Indian army has legal impunity throughout the state. Military bases dominate town and city spaces, with checkpoints at or near most entries to large towns, and regular searches of vehicles. These interactions, due to the army's impunity, are fraught with tension as it is clear to many that arrest, harassment and even death are not unrealistic possibilities. The impunity claimed by the Indian army in the state and in other 'disturbed areas' puts young men at especially high risk of arbitrary arrest, searches, assault and summary executions, commonly under the guise of being 'killed in crossfire' between insurgents and security personnel. Although the risk of this has reduced since the 1997 and 2001 ceasefires\*, discussion of the risks posed by the army and abusive soldiers continues to be common. On the other hand, insurgent groups justify their presence as a response to the Indian army. These groups exploit a waning but still substantial degree of popular support, and related to this, a degree of impunity for their own abuses and transgressions.

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\* The NSCN-K ceasefire has been discontinued following an attack on a military convoy in the state of Manipur in June 2015.

Where the AFSPA (1958) creates a state of exception empowering and giving impunity to the Indian Army, that power and impunity itself grants a degree of responsive impunity to violent groups opposing the occupation. Young men, and indeed the wider population as well, experience fear and apprehension from outside of their communities through the AFSPA – from Indian soldiers, but also from within – from insurgent members and extortionists.

Insurgency affects young men in a number of ways in Nagaland. Young men are targeted by insurgent groups as potential recruits. Groups such as the NSCN(IM) and NSCN(K) have offices dedicated to recruiting and enlisting young men. This can be an attractive option for unemployed and bored men, especially as insurgency offers an income, a sense of adventure and a purpose for many disaffected young men. Although women are also involved in these groups, the groups are predominantly male. From my own experiences spending time with members of groups in Dimapur, Phek District and Mon District, joining a group brings with it a sense of camaraderie, a way of actively defending vaguely framed Naga interests, offers access to drugs and alcohol and is associated with ideas of manliness and adulthood. However, interviews by the author in 2016 with former members of two Naga insurgent outfits bring to light violence employed in the everyday management of groups. New recruits are in some cases beaten, sleep deprived and forced to take part in repetitive manual exercises to break down egos on entry, and maintain the superiority of officers. There is also ongoing and widely discussed violence between groups, especially the NSCN(IM) and NSCN(K) (Lacina 2009).

For Nagas outside of these groups, regular ‘taxes’ are enforced with the threat of violence, a practice that is increasingly resisted, but nonetheless is still a regular occurrence in both urban and rural contexts (Anonymous 2013). Although arrests of extortionist members are more common, in many cases these abuses continue to be tolerated and acceded to rather than go through the risks, frustrations and dead-ends of pursuing justice through the state police and courts. My own interviews with businesses owners in one large Naga town brought to light both a disdain for the practice and for extortionists’ violent behaviour, but also an understanding that the funds extorted went to a shared interest in resisting an Indian hegemon and maintaining the Naga resistance, one which many business owners continue to support, despite the violent means employed to reach that end.

### **Marginality at home and outside: Nagas as marginal citizens**

The discourse of ‘outsiders’ and invaders in Nagaland is one of the strongest points of support resorted to by politicians and insurgent groups (Mukherjee 2014). The militarization of Nagaland is seen to be an occupation, one associated with human rights abuses and high rates of sexual assault (Nag 2002: 252). This discourse is not limited to the Indian army though. The presence of outsiders, especially of Bangladeshi migrants, has been a focal point for the insecurities of young Naga men. Immigrants are seen as

suspicious, as illegal migrants or more commonly “IBIs” (illegal Bangladeshi immigrants), and as a threat to Naga representation in the state. Popular resistance to migrants, especially to Bangladeshi migrants, has entered the masculine discourse. Bangladeshi migrants are seen as threatening due to their overwhelming numbers, Bangladesh’s close proximity to Nagaland, a popular sentiment that Bangladeshis take jobs away from Nagas, and stereotypes of Bangladeshi migrants as uneducated, dim-witted, dirty, and as rapists. In this environment, Naga men are self-styled as protectors and guardians of Naga territory and culture from an oncoming wave of migrants who look different, hold different values, and are perceived as capable of numerically overwhelming the Naga population in Nagaland (Kotwal 2008).

This discourse was displayed in the ‘Dimapur lynching’ incident of March 5 2015. Although, both men and women took part in the attack, men were the overwhelming majority, and references to ‘our women’ suggested that many young men assumed a place as primary social guardians, and exercised ownership and guardianship of Naga society and women through violence (Laskar 2015). Dolly Kikon (2015) argues that the international focus on xenophobia and men’s violence in reporting on the lynching obscures the contentious cultural and political issues of representation in Nagaland and that Nagas were portrayed as a xenophobic and reactive collective. This article doesn’t disagree. What I argue, though, is that the Dimapur lynching was many things. It was an expression of frustration and impatience with an inefficient and seen by many to be ineffective legal system. It was a violent outburst aimed at a group that is unpopular in Nagaland, especially so in Dimapur, where Bangladeshi migrants are more numerous. It was also multifaceted, with few media accounts highlighting the role of the Naga Mothers Association in opposing the mob, and little international recognition of criticisms of the lynching by Naga activists, journalists, academics, and politicians in the aftermath. However, the rhetoric that surrounded the lynching, of xenophobia, hostility towards Bangladeshi migrants, and the perception of Nagas as under threat from IBIs is one part of a larger discourse that is popular with many young men in Nagaland, that Nagaland is under threat of being overwhelmed by (mostly) Bangladeshi migrants, that Nagas are at risk of becoming a minority population in Nagaland.

Discussions of the perception of Nagas becoming a minority in Nagaland have evaded wide academic discussion, but remain a predominant issue at the local level (Sandham 2016; Johari 2015; Kashyap 2015; Eastern Mirror Nagaland 2015). Differing from neighbouring Assam, where a substantial attention has been given to the issues surrounding Bangladeshi migration (Mahanta 2013; Baruah 1999), attention has been given to Bangladeshi migration in Nagaland only recently. The ways that a perceived and often embellished risk of marginalization of Nagas in Nagaland through demographic shifting shapes the way Naga men place themselves and their role in the community remains understudied. One focus of the migration issue that has been given attention, though, is unemployment.

Young Nagas find it hard to find work in Nagaland, and increasingly leave the state to find gainful employment in other Indian cities (McDuie-Ra 2012b). With few opportunities to find work and a growing culture of tertiary education, whether that comes from recognized Universities and training centres, or from dubious providers; young men find themselves 'waiting' for employment after school for longer periods (Government of Nagaland 2007). This phenomenon is not unique to Nagaland, but is a growing issue among young men in India, colloquially termed 'timepass' (Jeffrey 2010). Timepass is a pervasive and growing problem globally. Although not strictly a gendered issue, timepass in South Asia seems to be defined by educated and unemployed men. Men are unable to meet the demands on them to find work, or get married, and are "dogged by a sense of not having achieved locally salient norms of masculine success" (ibid: 11). In contrast, Bangladeshi and Bihari migrants have a visible presence in construction and manual labour jobs due to their lower labour costs and a general unwillingness among many young Nagas to engage in these forms of labour. This visible ease with finding work has become a focal point for local political agitators and has contributed to anti Bangladeshi and Bihari sentiment. It has led to Bangladeshi migrants in particular becoming scapegoats for employment woes in Nagaland (Karmakar 2015).

Outside of Nagaland, perceptions of Nagas held by many 'mainland' Indians, a term I employ recognizing its problematic breadth, reflect those produced by the colonial and tourist discourses, especially in gendered terms. Stereotypes of backward, head-hunting men and sexualized stereotypes of women abound (McDuie-Ra 2012a; McDuie-Ra 2013; Smith & Gergan 2015). Women are seen as immoral and 'loose' and are often the targets of sexual attacks and sexual discrimination, men are often also viewed as alcoholic, unpredictable, and violent (McDuie-Ra 2012: 48). Recent developments such as the success of Mary Kom in the 2012 London Olympics have encouraged a greater awareness and acceptance of Northeast Indians in Mainstream India. There is a growing acceptance of Northeasterners as 'Indian', rather than as a peripheral community. Furthermore, fluent English in many Northeastern communities has opened job opportunities for many Nagas outside of Nagaland, especially in major Indian cities, for Naga women in particular (ibid).

Despite these inclusive developments, racism does continue to be a dominant theme in interactions between men from the Northeast and Nagaland, and 'mainland Indians' (Smith & Gergan 2015, p.127; McDuie-Ra 2012b). This discrimination is one aspect of the 'anxious belonging' experienced by Northeast Indians (Middleton 2013). Nagas and other Northeast Indian communities live within the borders and are confined by the laws of India, but are also not Indian in the traditional sense, being considered different in terms of race, language and appearance, and are subjected to alienation and discrimination both within their home communities, through the AFSPA, and in mainland India through everyday experiences of racism and discrimination.

### Conclusion: manifold masculinity

There is no prototype 'Naga man' as many earlier colonial accounts attempted to construct. Earlier ascriptions painted a pre-modern, mythologized, savage ideal, one that satisfied the curiosities and social Darwinist leanings of early Western researchers and audiences, while also serving the needs of and being conveniently in need of saving by colonial administrators. Contemporary understandings have to be placed in a context that has re-appropriated these often highly mythicized characterizations. Naga men in the twenty-first century navigate systems of colonial ascriptions and stereotyping; a context of exceptionalism, violence and impunity; and an identity perceived by many to be under threat at home, and marginal in wider India. Greater connectivity and increased movement between Naga communities, heartland India, and Asia has brought new possibilities for young people exploring and expressing identity, challenging traditional norms and on some levels, placing 'Naga' into a wider 'Northeastern' identity. At the same time, though, older ideas of social guardianship and cultural ownership continue to shape social relationships and loudly proclaim "Naga" as a distinct identity, albeit for new reasons and in new ways - new opportunities to re-appropriate colonial narratives for employment and a burgeoning tourism industry, and fears of an oncoming wave of outsiders. Despite the fluid and changing nature of identity, and masculinity for Naga men, a distinct Naga identity continues to frame political and social debate, especially of issues such as migration and marginality. 🙄

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