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## SPECIAL SECTION

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## From traditional tools and local spirits to digital tools and new interpretations: reflections on artistic practice in Nagaland

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Over the past half-century, Naga communities often living in remote hill-top settlements, have faced a deluge of modernising forces, and today, an educated younger generation now participates in the digital domain. This paper examines the ways in which local cultural representations are linked to forms of agency in the midst of transition. For instance, a central focus of Naga art has been prowess in warfare, as courage brings with it certain status in the community. This has been linked with important customs such as choosing a suitable marriage partner. Widespread Christian conversion, however, has contributed to the removal of traditional effigies commemorating heroic ancestors. Moreover, modern schools have replaced many of the traditional sites - such as the morung or male bachelor's dormitory - for artistic development. As traditional artistic practices decline, collectors of Naga art have displayed them in galleries around the world, in many ways reifying old stereotypes. With growing tourism, the production of handicrafts that draw on traditional art is now a source of income for local artists, and cultural performances such as are found in the year-end Hornbill Festival are new sites for performing traditional uniqueness. As young people are more exposed to mass media entertainment, however, animation proves a viable alternative for young artists not at home in traditional art mediums. This article looks at the ways in which animation is used by young artists in exploring identity and cultural representation. It looks at the ways in which these new forms challenge embedded notions of authenticity art, and notions of indigenous culture as necessarily about the past.

Audiences in Nagaland have become used to watching cartoons on a multitude of TV channels including Cartoon Network, Disney Channel, Pogo TV and the popular Arirang TV channel from Korea, as well as on other media devices. In the process, young Nagas seem to have become more familiar with the narratives projected by imported cartoons such as *Kongfu Panda* (2008), *Chhota Bheem* (2012) and Japanese Anime, than with their

own traditional and cultural stories. The expansion of the Internet and mobile technology in peripheral areas further impacts the erosion of traditional forms of cultural entertainment. In this situation, the parallel signs of the visible destabilization of identities present the incentive to review the local, specific and reflexive dimensions of culture. The postcolonial discourse (Spivak 1988; Ashcroft 2001) argues that dominant media forms can be subverted by a return to the local context to enable the articulation of local perspectives. Therefore, a broader awareness of the scope of this rhetoric could lead local young artists to consider how the popular entertainment medium of animation can be used to explore their own cultural identities and tell their stories in ways that are interesting to their peers and younger age groups.

The population of Nagas in India is nearly two million (Census 2011) and there are 17 major tribes and numerous sub-tribes in the state of Nagaland, that was carved out of Assam and the North-East Frontier Agency in 1963. Developments and easier communication, both of physical access in the rugged terrain, as well as the spread of Nagamese and English as the common lingua franca, means that members of communities that were once in open conflict are today cooperative neighbours in the urban space as modern Naga society works to establish peace and reconciliation.. Notions of cultural purity are challenged by the technology of modernization and the spread of Westernized and more recently East Asian cultures that steers the young generations towards external homogenized projections. This postcolonial condition of cultural hybridity that makes 'tradition' and 'modern' complementary rather than contradictory (Longkumer 2014) also suggests that modern young artists can explore and communicate the complexities of their indigenous identity using contemporary forms of mixed media. This paper examines the ways in which local cultural representations are linked to forms of agency in the midst of these transitions. For instance, a central focus of Naga art was once individual prowess in warfare, as courage brings with it certain status in the community. This was also linked with important customs such as eligibility for marriage (Haimendorf 1939). Widespread Christian conversion, however, has contributed to the removal of traditional effigies commemorating heroic ancestors. Moreover, modern schools have now largely replaced the traditional *morung* (or bachelor men's dormitory) - once a primary site for artistic development. As traditional artistic practices declined, collectors of Naga art took them up and displayed them in galleries around the world, producing descriptions of their findings for curious visitors. Today, the production of handicrafts for sale is a source of income for local artists who now engage in the marketplace. Cultural performances, such as we find in the year-end Hornbill Festival, are ways of asserting unique ethnic identities. In this environment, where young people are exposed to mass media entertainment, the popular medium of animation has been used as a new tool by local young artists. This paper looks at the ways in which these new mediums of artistic expression, and, in particular, the use of animation, are used in exploring identity and cultural representation. Finally, this paper

looks at the ways in which these new forms challenge embedded notions of authenticity in traditional art, and notions of indigenous culture as stagnant and outdated.

### **Historical representation and the situation of change**

*Nagas in the Nineteenth Century* was a volume of reports, tour diaries, and ethnographic studies on some of the Naga tribes written in the 19th century, compiled by Verrier Elwin and published in 1969, five years after his death. All the accounts presented in the volume were by external cultural observers, many of whom were soldiers. In some cases, the first-hand experience was scant, and yet for others the exposure to the Nagas was more extensive. At the outset, Elwin wrote that the aim of the volume was to illustrate how British military and civil officers perceived the Nagas at that time. This was, of course, prior to Edward Săid's seminal book titled *Orientalism* (1978), which shed light on how colonial representations reflected more accurately the unconscious social preconceptions of the contributors, rather than the actual cultural outlooks of their subjects. The authority of these observations was based on assumptions that the people could not represent themselves (Miley 2006). Săid's work exposed how colonial representations succeeded in creating an illusion of that time, presenting a complex relationship of subordination. More recently, postcolonial insights (Spivak 1988) about the equation of representation with power now offers a revised approach to readdress the inequality characteristic of colonial representations and acknowledges local perspectives.

Elwin praised the literary accomplishments of the earlier writers, and the rich information collected by them in circumstances where communication was difficult. After all, Naga languages were particularly complex, which made it hard for them to obtain information from informants. From the descriptive accounts presented in Elwin's publication, a vivid picture emerges of the extent of fascination colonial officers had for Naga tribes. The appreciation for the aesthetics of these native manifestations was based on their difference from 'civilized' European cultures. These early texts also related information about Naga beliefs – interpretations that were drawn from the lens of nineteenth century Western education, Christianity, assumptions about the superiority of European cultures, the white man's burden to civilize them (Butler cited by Elwin 1969: 299), and the motivation for knowledge that would serve towards administering the 'Other'.

Despite the revised critique about the concept of the 'exotic' other in scholarship, these imaginaries also persist, for example in images presented by particular National Geographic photography. In the colonial era, there often existed little knowledge about native world views, nor did the documentation recorded during this time reinforce Nagas' values. Instead John Butler (cited by Elwin 1969: 302) commented on "how little we have done towards improving, civilizing, and weaning from their accursed thirst for blood, this otherwise noble race". It is now acknowledged that the 'advanced-backward' binarism

taken for granted in the concept of the 'Other' had the primary function to define and reinforce European identity in contrast to an imaginary, unchanging orient (Säid 1978: 207). Interestingly, particular Naga groups now also distinguish between categories of advanced and backward tribes on the basis of the duration of their exposure to Christianity and Westernized education, thus replicating the colonial outlook.

Much changed after the arrival of colonial rule and the subsequent transition to the post-colonial scenario. Traditionally, the elders of the community directed the defence activities and the village administration, and they also transmitted the knowledge of cultural traditions - the history of the community, the social values, beliefs and rituals, in stories told from one generation to the next. Western education, first introduced by Christian missionary schools in the nineteenth century, brought majority languages - English and Assamese - to students from diverse tribes and also made the bachelor's house (*morung*) obsolete as the school for training in tribal life (Das 1963; Odyuo 2013). It has been contended that little of what the Naga student learns from contemporary schooling is relevant to his provincial situation (Chaise 1999, 121) and this puts forward the need for more culturally relevant educational materials in local languages and for skills and personality development for the youth to balance the examination and job-oriented education system and to extend the students' critical thinking, problem solving and creative ability (Mukherjee 2012; Basu, 2014).

Many Nagas today are drawn to urban centres where they participate in the market economy. However, first-hand experience shows that the underdeveloped infrastructure continues to make it difficult to work in Nagaland. For local young people that are currently challenged by the shortage of employment opportunities, the prominent ambition is to secure Government jobs (Balwally 2003, 269; Goswami 2010) and discrimination is reported from further afield (Wouters and Subba 2013; Das 2014; McDuire-Ra 2015). Most significantly, these educated young people with new ideas are important agents of change and are now unwilling and unprepared to continue the traditional work of agriculture (Wettstein and von Stockhausen 2012).

To further expand this description of contemporary Naga society, Chaise (1999:120) contends that since the most educated have entered the bureaucratic system that reproduces a uniform outlook, there is now a 'scarcity' of original ideas. This signals the space for research that explores the role of new cultural interpretations to reinvigorate the traditional narratives and artistic practices for the contemporary context. My research in Nagaland was part of a practice-led PhD project at Bournemouth University that put participatory media practice as the primary method for collecting information about the use of animation as a tool to re-engage young indigenous people in their existing cultural practices. The project was to test how a local folk story could be adapted for a short animated film and to engage local talent to achieve this. It was thus a study to explore how collaboration could be carried out by an external media professional with local communities in the field of cultural representation.

In his book *Nagaland* (1961, 48) Elwin recognised that relative isolation meant that the Naga tribes got left out or were forgotten by the external administrators. Scholars of post-colonialism have since questioned how those whose voices have been marginalized and silenced would represent themselves (Spivak 1988). 'What story would they tell? What media and language applied, for what purpose, and for whom?' Significantly, are Nagas still expected to represent themselves in traditional ways to be considered authentic?

For traditional Naga societies everything was handmade and in some sense this handiwork had aesthetic value as well. The objects that are admired by urban based collectors of Naga art for their artistic merit today were conventionally made for specific practical purposes. Textile designs and personal adornments displayed specific kinship identities and proclaimed personal achievements in warfare (Mills cited by Elwin 1969: 284; Johnstone cited by Elwin 1969: 314). These images of Naga warfare that were promoted by the colonial archives over and against other representations (Mills cited by Elwin 1969: 284-287, 290; Haimendorf, 1939: 88) was seen to justify the British presence in those areas.

Rituals were invariably performed to appease deities, ghosts and spirits to cure illnesses and also performed prior to significant events such as moving into a house or setting out on a journey. Along with other cultural practices these rituals strengthened the sense of identity and connection to the land, the village and the community. For the Nagas, to whom rank depended on personal merits, and disbursement was lauded over the accumulation of wealth (Das 1963; Haimendorf 1976), the use of certain objects was only permitted following sacrifice and initiation - an example being the Feasts of Merit (Elwin 1961: 9; Godwen-Austen cited by Elwin 1969: 533; Odyuo 2013). Therefore, the ubiquitous conversion to Christianity and the discontinuation of many traditional cultural practices threatened the purpose of these arts (Haimendorf 1976), as a result of which certain tattoos, embellishments on textiles and other accessories have become singularly decorative. On the other hand, ethnographic museums such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford are repositories that have preserved the same Naga artefacts that were collected by historical figures of the colonial period including J.H. Hutton and J.P. Mills, and the pre-colonial image of a 'dying culture' is still preferred by Euro-American audiences (Markusen et al. 2008).

The Hornbill Festival in Nagaland is an interesting locus for understanding the intersection between old practices, colonial collecting, and the consumer demands of a growing regional tourism industry. The term ethno-kitsch was used by Graburn (1996) to refer to the modern phenomena of 'exotic' tourist art; produced by indigenous artists worldwide, removed from its traditional context and made for sale. This indicates the significance of contextualization to communicate the knowledge that is the foundation of traditional art. Traditional stereotypes of Naga portrayal have ongoing appeal in the marketplace at the annual Hornbill Festival organised by the State Government to

promote Nagaland as a tourist destination, and also in the wider marketing of tribal tourism. For Conklin (1997) and Wright (1998) displays of reconstructed pre-colonial culture that deny change and the performance of essentialised identities based on symbols from the past that appeal to Western views of exoticism is the only capital available to indigenous communities without economic or political power. Yet for the Nagas that participate in it, events like the Hornbill Festival also have importance for asserting their own culture and identity as distinct from others. I therefore ask: 'How does Naga art transcend the stagnant, archaic category so that new representations reflect the living traditions and the transformations that are the experience of contemporary Naga societies?'

### **The challenges of contemporary representation**

Complex arguments pertaining to the politics of Naga representation are beyond the scope of this paper, yet it is necessary to establish the background context for contemporary media representations of Naga identities. In the nineteenth century, Woodthorpe (cited by Elwin 1969: 47) and Butler (cited by Elwin 1969: 294) recorded that the people themselves did not have any generic term that was applicable to the whole 'race'. Historians have since shown that the concept of unity and a pan-Naga identity began to take shape during World War 2 and that prior to this, every village was a self-contained entity (Wettstein and von Stockhausen 2012).

There is ambivalence towards the earlier essentialized misrepresentations, and yet at the same time unity is required for political action (Spivak 1985). The territory that is home to the Nagas extends beyond Nagaland to Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar and continues to be contested by local and international interests. Open conflict that ignited in 1956 under the leadership of AZ Phizo (Mar 2011) was based on the violent self-assertion of an independent Naga nation. In 1980 the already disunited underground political insurgency was further divided to form the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), that later separated into two factions in 1988, the NSCN-IM led by Th. Muivah and Isaac Swu and the NSCN-K led by S.S. Khaplang, which illustrates how the society continues to be divided along tribal lines by loyalists to these groups.

My recent study of indigenous cultural representation using the medium of animation (Douglas 2015) found that the specific tribal identities continue to be of paramount importance to the Nagas themselves, as was seen in the issues that arose over the attempt to represent more than one tribe in a single story (more below), and by reports that these identities are prominently intertwined with access to political power. For example, if Naga politics is arguably first about access to the financial incentives that are handed out by the Central Government (Chaise 1999), this provisionally contributes to the sense of social exclusion, ongoing intertribal rivalry and the struggle for hegemony (Sashinungla

2013) that now drives the claims by groups from Eastern Nagaland for their own independent administration (Handique 2015).

The complexities of the political landscape of Nagaland have been reported extensively by journalists and writers (Anand 1980; Lhousa 1992; Iralu 2000; Zhimomi 2004; Kikon 2005; Glancey 2011). However, the voices that are reported in the media tend to be those in political power, and the present lack of local journalistic criticism as well as the sensitivities of clan, tribe, and society determines the parameters of reportage (Longchar cited by Ngullie 2016). The absence of a direct critique of dominant society in traditional indigenous artistic practice further suggests that analytical challenges have cultural underpinnings.

On the other hand, local wisdom was communicated to young generations of Nagas in folktales that often contained morals and when these stories are no longer revived and retold, the future of this indigenous knowledge becomes threatened. Therefore, research on traditional folk stories is presented as an appropriate starting point for developing animated content in Nagaland. Animation can become an effective medium for young Naga artists to reclaim the indigenous folk traditions (Mar 2011: 43-44), as well as to communicate these wider audiences, as the short films can be dubbed into multiple languages and disseminated by the Internet. The support that was awarded by the Government of Nagaland in 2010 for the animation project proposed by the Adivasi Arts Trust to enrol young people from Nagaland in the adaptation of a traditional story for a short animated film, further demonstrated the local interest for revisiting the traditions and developing new representations. However, the politics of ethnicity, specifically the importance of village and tribe identity that supersedes pan-Naga configurations, foregrounds the need for sensitivity in the approach towards developing local representations based on the folk traditions.

### **Tales of the Tribes: participatory media practice in Nagaland**

Indigenous media encompasses a category of politically engaged film-making produced by indigenous communities that has emerged worldwide and is primarily targeted at local audiences and about local concerns. The Maori film-maker Barclay (1990) called this media practice 'Fourth Cinema' and a study of this genre contributes to defining a practice for media representation in Nagaland. In this case, the *Tales of the Tribes* research project set out to explore how animated film-making could be developed in a way that would be accessible for indigenous artists in India, so that instead of being only consumers of the media, local young people can also use animation technology to research their traditions, explore their identities and tell their own stories. Five animation workshops were organised to engage local participation in the experimental adaptation of the folktales for the five short films for the *Tales of the Tribes* series. In Nagaland, the urban centres draw Nagas from different tribal affinities to a common space, and the



Animation Workshop that was organised in Dimapur in 2009 attracted participants from several tribes to further suggest how modern technology can serve an integrative purpose.

Because participatory film-making puts greater value on collective interpretations than on individual achievements, this method is more aligned to indigenous folk traditions and artistic practices that engaged the community. The process is more important than the outcome, and indigenous research is expected to be respectful, educational and beneficial to the local community (Smith 1999: 125). Therefore, collaborative film-making in the educational environment is a way to develop culturally appropriate Naga representations in the media. Expectations are that local young artists already exposed to digital technology will be able to pick up the basic software skills to manipulate images, and several Indian animation students and media professionals were also invited to join the workshops to share their experience with the local participants. The attendance by animators from elsewhere also provided cultural exposure and work experience for them as part of the objective of this research to raise awareness of the value of indigenous culture with non-indigenous people. In India, reports during the *Tales of the Tribes* project by graduates of Animation Film Design about the amplified pressure to earn income to repay student loans, points to the reason behind the limited incentive for these young animators to experiment independently with tribal folk stories and art forms as content for films. Therefore, a platform that attracts a diverse team, competent project management and the financial means to support commitment from young animators can lead to the development of new forms of original Indian animation.

The workshops are directed towards reconnecting with indigenous knowledge by research on folk narratives and art forms, and as inspiration for new interpretations in the sphere of contemporary media art. The context that brings each story to life and enhances the meaning is expanded by inviting guidance on the content from elderly storytellers of the local community, which also acknowledges the protocol of showing respect for the role of the elders as the cultural authority. Local participants gain a sense of ownership in their contributions to the shape of the film, and they also gain from the experience of teamwork, new research and communication skills and the wider exposure to art and culture.

The purpose of the earlier ethnographic documentation was to describe, familiarize and interpret the phenomenon to distant audiences. Ethnographic methods of participant observation and documentation were also used in the workshops to contextualize the background to the narratives and to record the collaborative relationship. As the only film-maker in the group from a European cultural background this also raises personal sensitivity of the assumptions that are frequently made about the local cultures. The outsider's approach must evolve cultural sensitivity by sustained collaboration as a two way learning process to nurture empathy towards marginalized groups, to guide the project appropriately and ethically and to manage the technical requirements of the project, and in the process to develop patience, humility and negotiation skills. For a

visiting team, the collaboration with local artists provides a way to break from the earlier mode of understanding of the 'other culture' from the viewpoint of the external observer, and to incorporate internal perspectives and multiple voices for a more authentic representation. In this setting the animation practice is a forum for discussion and self-reflection and for experimentation with creativity, storytelling and the media.

As the coordinator of the workshop and the director of the production, my presence has influenced the final output of the film. The aim of participatory media is for decisions to be made by consensus, but in this first workshop of the series of five that were held to develop the five short films from different states, the story had already been chosen by me based on prior research in libraries and followed up by confirmation that the story belongs to several of the southern Naga tribes – the Angami, Chakhesang, Mao and Sumi Naga. This meant that more time was available to introduce new design and animation processes to the novice participants.

With this project, the cross-cultural collaboration brought exposure to new techniques, new ideas and new aspirations to the entire team as well as the experience of working with each other and sharing information between tribal groups. I propose that the younger age of the mainly adolescent participants meant that they were more receptive to investigating the stories of a tribe other than their own, than would have been the case with more politically engaged participants. The yardstick of success of an Animation Workshop is when participants are motivated by their own interest to become absorbed in the event and collective action is considered as important as the final product (Telo, 2013). This was not always the case in the first workshop in Nagaland for the series, as the overarching lack of local exposure and definition of expectations reduced emersion by the participants, while time constraints further put pressure on the team to meet targets.

### **The story**

The following section is a discussion and contextualization of one of the short animated films in the *Tales of the Tribes* series. According to some Naga traditions, the mother represents the Earth, and many Angami stories project the view that they emerged from the ground. In the short animated film *Man Tiger Spirit* (2011), three brothers emerge from a cave. The story apprehends the special kinship that some tribes attribute between mankind and tiger, as well as the widely-held belief in lycanthropy, or the idea of transformation and the exchange of souls between human and tiger (Sutter, 2008). That the story has been recorded in various forms (Hutton 1921: 261; Butler cited by Elwin 1969: 295; Singh 1977: 72-73; Oppitz et al 2008; Mao 2009; Iralu 2009; Mar 2011), verifies that every folk story is an adaptation by the teller; relating to this, the meaning from a film is also the collaborative effort by many people. In the process of adaptation from the oral to the audio visual, the story is transferred from the village to the urban setting, where the cultural exchange has further influenced the retelling.

The theory of folk narrative (Propp 2009) and film adaptation (Dudley 1984; McFarlane 1996; Wells 1998; Sanders 2006; Cartmell and Whelehan 2010) was used for the translation from text to the audio visual medium, the first step being to create a film script that divided the story into scenes and provided metadata relating to location, characters and time of day (Murtagh et al 2008). The storyboard could then be created from this to determine the pacing, the composition and the visual links between the shots. The first intention was to identify the original meaning of the story and then to depict mankind's connection with the natural and supernatural worlds, and his distinction as a human being, for as Mar (2011: 162) wrote "These stories in particular, talk about how the process of identification or separation started when the three brothers – spirit, tiger and man – separated from their mother".

A climax in a sequence, act or plot is essential (WGBH Educational Foundation 2011) and in this film the climax occurs when man's eyes are exchanged with those of a dog – thus reducing his perception and making it possible for the dog alone to witness the supernatural. According to one version, if man would subsequently see a spirit, it is believed that he will die. The original story contains numerous meandering details and the adaptation process is first about deciding what to include and what to omit. For example, in the story of *Man Tiger Spirit*, I felt that the original concept of the tiger's desire to eat the elderly mother would be confusing to the understanding of the family relationship.

The young participants of the Animation Workshop were initially drawn to copy popular cartoon styles, for example, Japanese Manga and Anime, in their own character designs. This illustrates the ambivalence in the desire for acceptance by the mainstream society that intersects with the awareness of their unique cultural identity.<sup>1</sup> The question is how young Nagas will develop a strategy that subverts the power equation and uses the dominant text for their own messages (Ashcroft 2001).

The technique of computer generated 3D animation was used to create and manipulate characters designed with reference to wooden sculptures for the film *Man Tiger Spirit*. The technique of basing CGI character designs on traditional sculptures was also used by *Raven Tales* director Simon James whose designs for the visual style of the animated characters were inspired by Haida and the Kwakwaka'wakw traditional masks (Hearne 2008). Stop-motion was incorporated into two scenes for the story from Nagaland, to test the effectiveness of using mixed media and to increase the involvement of local participants that did not have high-end 3D software experience. For example, the title sequence for the film was made with cowrie shells (used locally as traditional embellishments to textiles, jewellery and other accessories) and animated in incremental

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<sup>1</sup> D. Ghoshal, D. 2012. *Korea out of Kohima* (available on-line: [http://www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/korea-out-of-kohima-112112400002\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/korea-out-of-kohima-112112400002_1.html)) reports that foreign cultures are openly embraced amidst the identity crisis experienced by young Nagas.

movements captured in single frames by a novice workshop participant with assistance from an Indian student animator. A second stand-alone sequence was created using animated sand. The use of mixed media separates the film from the unity of style that is characteristic of orthodox cartoons (Wells 1998), and the use of handmade rather than computer animation techniques is more intuitive and therefore easier for novice animators than software based animation. They also work better to create a stronger connection between animation and traditional artistic practices. The local talent for song and music was also incorporated into the musical track of the short film that was also developed as a fusion of folk forms and digital manipulation.

In Nagaland where conflicts are rooted in the ethnic diversity (Tariq 2011), the need for political unity and the goal of forging a larger Naga identity is frequently emphasized. The first artefacts from the various tribes that I had seen in ethnographic museums in the UK<sup>2</sup> and in India<sup>3</sup> therefore inspired the idea of exploring a pan-Naga visual identity by referencing multiple tribes in the one film.

The character designs for the film were based on Konyak wood carvings, as these are widely considered to be the most accomplished sculptures (Ao, 1992:165). However, the criticism that has since emerged suggests that this logic, presented from a purely aesthetic approach, risks being misinterpreted as cultural appropriation by the Angami, and this captures the current reality of the tribal conflict and the struggle for dominance. A decision to include references to folktales from other neighbouring tribes in the film (for example, the Mao story of a primordial mother, *Dziilli mosiuro* at the beginning of the film (Mao 2009), and the incorporation of textile designs from other Naga tribes that are depicted in the landscape design were two additional devices that were explored as an attempt to extend inclusivity. This however received an ambivalent response:

My Naga sense of aesthetics is so ingrained that I feel you should not do it. There are many who will oppose it. Our folklore is tribally separate from each other, that is what we like to believe. If you are telling an Angami folktale do not use Ao or Sumi shawls or items" (Kire, personal communication, 2014).

Assigning a common identity was perceived to be too close to the colonial strategies of homogenization (Ao 2006), and this approach was not taken forward in any of the subsequent films in the *Tales of the Tribes* series, even when the story was shared by more than one tribe. This further underscores the significance of local inputs for developing representations that are acceptable for local audiences. On the other hand, the Government Department of Art and Culture in Nagaland, which had backed the film, also communicated their concern towards partisan representation and suggested that folktales from the other Naga tribes could also be adapted as animated films to produce

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<sup>2</sup> The Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford) the Horniman Museum (London) and the British Museum (London).

<sup>3</sup> The State Museum, Kohima (Nagaland), The National Museum (Delhi).

a more comprehensive, balanced view. To do this would require the engagement of trained animators to manage the complex technical processes of the digital medium; responsive project management is also requisite, and that the media professionals work in company with and provide software training to local workshop participants. A digital media studio, power back-up and the financial resources to pay the costs for the animators and participants need to be budgeted for. The development of animated films by indigenous communities and experimental artists has had Government support in Canada, Australia, the former Soviet Union and in Scotland,<sup>4</sup> suggesting that this approach would be ideal for developing an Indian animation sector targeting specific rather than mass audiences.

Broader exposure to experimental animation film techniques in the workshops can give new ideas about how local materials and resources can be used, and screenings of animated films made by other indigenous groups and independent artists are also instructive. Following on from the pre-production phase, the films can be completed with ongoing support from qualified animators; the output of short films can be distributed online, broadcast on local networks and they can also be provided to local schools as bi-lingual educational programmes.

There have been some recent initiatives to produce graphic novels by local artists including Vito Choppy, Vito Sumi and Akanito Assumi, and in 2012 the artist Lepden Jamir guided a group of students in a workshop to produce illustrations for a publication by INTACH, entitled *Tales of the Tribes: Folklore of Nagaland* (2013). There have been few short animated films made by artists of Naga origin so far; of these, Meren Imchen received the Governor's award in 2006 for his short film *Nopokliba* that was based on a folktale from the Ao tribe. As Kire observed, the representations that are initiated by outsiders and are carried out with sensitivity can be inspiring for local artists, but it is the examples by Nagas that will give confidence for local young people to enter new professions such as the media. On this note, *Puliebadzie* (2012) was a more recent bid by a local group to adapt a folktale from *Naga Folktales Retold* (2009). Smith's (1999) review of the implications of becoming incorporated in the world's market place shows how tension invariably exists between the material benefits that are potentially available by catering to the market, fulfilling the expectations of sophisticated viewers and

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<sup>4</sup> In Canada, the National Film Board produced films about First Nations peoples that have addressed social and political issues cultural preservation and the creative arts as well as collaborations in the medium of animation; *Dust Echoes* (available at: [www.abc.net.au/dustechoes](http://www.abc.net.au/dustechoes)) is a series of twelve animated dreamtime stories from Central Arnhem Land in Northern Australia produced by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) is an Aboriginal owned media organisation has also had a major role in the maintenance of Indigenous Language and Culture in Central Australia; Soyuzmultfilm was the most influential animation studio in the Soviet Union until its breakup in 1991; In Scotland, West Highland Animation produced animated films of the native Gaelic stories during a period of over two decades, from 1985-2005.

achieving accolades in the medium from further afield, and the loss of independence and the courage to experiment to develop original forms.

For the external researcher and film producer, sustained long distance collaboration and communication with partners in the North East is ambitious since the communication networks are unreliable and the socio-political conditions are volatile. My experience of collaboration with indigenous artists in four areas of North East India shows the advantage of face-to-face communication for building trust. In conclusion, indigenous research implies long-term relationships that extend beyond the research relationship, and this makes it especially important to go back to Nagaland to deliver the programme for local audiences in the Tenyidie language for the last phase of this project. 🙏

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