Lines of Identity: The Preference for the Broken Line in the Handloom Weaving of the Nagas of Northeast India

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Introduction

In the geographical area of today's India-Myanmar border we find a number of local ethnic groups that are subsumed under the ethnonym Naga. Historically, the Nagas are known, amongst other things, for their extraordinarily splendid material culture. In fact, one of the main collections that formed the original stock of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, stems from the Naga areas. Among these objects we find a large number of textiles: rectangular cloths mostly used as shoulder shawls by both sexes (measuring roughly 110-120 x 130-160 cm) and wrap skirts by women (measuring roughly 55-90 x 120 cm). Also smaller textile items are woven, such as bags, belts, and headscarves. The design of these textiles features a specific style that exhibits a clear preference for geometric patterns which are based on the broken line, especially on its variations of the square and the triangle. As analysed in detail elsewhere (Wettstein, 2014, 41-49), the rectangular cloths consist of a basic background design structure: either a blank background, lengthwise stripes and lines, or a cheque pattern that results from weaving lengthwise and crosswise stripes and lines in alternate colours. In many cases a range of geometric ornamentation is added to this background with one-faced supplementary weft that is mostly oriented along the lengthwise lines and stripes. The ornamentation mainly consists of extensions, repetitions and mirroring of triangles, as well as squares, and combinations of them, that follow characteristic geometric transformation principles[1].

[1] There also exist some single outstanding exceptions of textiles with other than geometrical designs among the Nagas. Most prominent among them are the *tsunkotepsü* men's shawls of the Ao Naga. In this case, these shapes are, however, not woven into the surface, but they are painted. This is an exceptional case as concerns both design and technique. For a visual impression and detailed analysis of Naga textile design see Wettstein, *Naga Textiles*, especially its supplement poster "Design Chart of Naga Textiles".

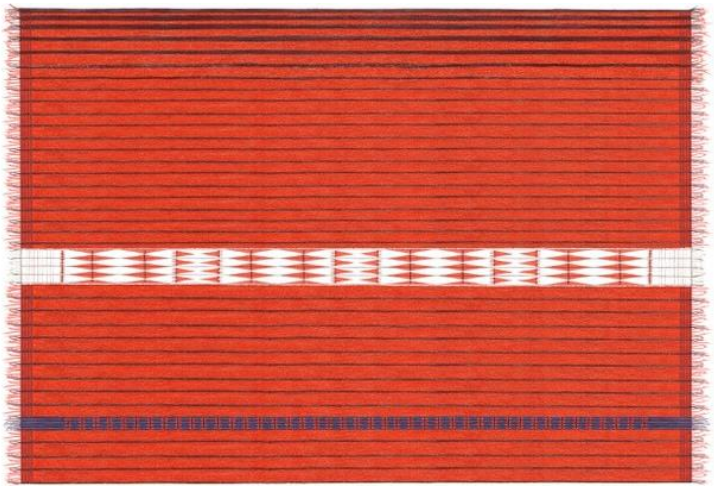

Figure 1 : Ao Naga men's shoulder shawl *süvangsü* from Chuchuyimpang village, 1920s. The middle-band is reserved for accredited warriors while the blue stripe indicates that the wearer has started his series of feasts of merit by sacrificing a *mithun*/*gayal*. The Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, Acc. No 1928.69.454.
Colour pencil drawing Marion Wettstein.

The aim of this paper is to suggest possible explanations for the Nagas' preference of angular, abstract geometric textile design, that is, their preference for the broken line. The question I ask here is a very simple one: How come the Nagas, throughout more than a century, by far prefer the broken line to other formal configurations of textile designs? In order to find possible answers to this question I will think along four hypotheses, starting with the most self-evident among them, then proceeding to two hypotheses I consider very likely and rounding up with a fourth, rather speculative one:

Hypothesis 1: The preference for the broken line in Naga textile design is an outcome of technical pre-settings. In order to test this hypothesis, I will have a close look at Naga textile techniques and ask: Do these textile techniques determine the design of Naga textiles, or would it be possible and economically manageable for the Nagas to produce other styles of design? Anticipating the result of this investigation, I cannot clearly confirm the hypothesis, since technical aspects do not seem to restrict textile design to angular, abstract forms. For sure, it is suggestive for a casual weaver, but not necessarily for a skilled crafts woman, for whom it makes little difference in time, effort or planning to weave other shapes. But textile techniques and shapes, once embodied, are likely to be reproduced and passed on to next generations in a similar fashion, which calls for the second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: The preference for the broken line in Naga textile design is due to a habit that leads to a distinctive taste. This is to say that a habit of technical practice can result in the reproduction of similar shapes. The shapes are reflected by and inscribed into the bodily movements, the conceptual mind-set, and the visual taste of practitioners and users of objects featuring them. At the same time, changes and development in design happen, but mainly within

the framework of the style of design's formal principles, which in the case of Naga textiles is built by rules of geometric transformations. But as soon as we think of habit in terms of 'habitus' (Bourdieu), we have to include a much larger universe of practices and attitudes, which are linked to the reproduction of social structures and configurations of power. The question of how this taste for the broken line is linked to social meaning and power relations leads me to the third hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: The preference for the broken line in Naga textile design is a result of symbolic identity politics. In many parts of the world – and especially so in India with its political, administrative and ideological scheme of "scheduled tribes" – cultural expression is closely linked to the collective identity of subcultures or, if one prefers, tribal or regional affiliation. Dress is a common expression of ethnic identity and when fostered by symbolic identity politics can be enforced as a feature of group identification. This process can explain how local weaving practices can come to the foreground in local notions of ethnic identity; it cannot, however, explain why it is exactly the broken line among the many features of textile design that has been strengthened in the process. What distinguishes the Naga broken line from other design concepts in local Indian or South and Southeast Asian textiles? Looking beyond ethnic identity we can ask: Where runs the borderline between those groups that focus on geometric design – on the broken line so to speak – and those who prefer the floral or figurative ornamentation such as they can be found in Central Indian saris for instance? If we follow such questions, we will find that this borderline has a tendency to run along the divide of those local groups populating the mountain and hill regions of Northeast India, southernmost Tibet, and Northern Myanmar and those inhabiting the low lands of the Indian and Southeast Asian plains or the Tibetan Plateau. Or, in other words, between those groups who are said to belong to – or once in a not too far past having belonged to – "Zomia" and those who do not (van Schendel). And this is where the fourth hypothesis comes into play.

Hypothesis 4: The preference for the broken line in Naga textile design is a technique within 'the art of not being governed'. In his seminal book, James Scott suggests that the people of Zomia, a region largely overlapping the Southeast Asian Massive, have found many ways of avoiding the state. Scott's analysis shows that a "friction of terrain" runs between those regions that cultivate wet rice, which is easily controlled and taxable, and those growing dry rice with a slash and burn method, that is, the populations living in the higher mountain regions where wet rice production is not possible. Since taxation and state control have become largely independent of agrarian production in recent times, hardly any Zomians are left that succeed at avoiding the state. Techniques other than agricultural ones are needed to escape the state. A

preference for the broken line in textile design can be seen as one technique among many – of a subversive symbolic kind, if we combine this hypothesis with the former ones – to work towards keeping the state at a distance.

An Outcome of Technical Pre-settings?

Let us now examine the first hypothesis in more detail, according to which the preference for the broken line in Naga textile design is an outcome of technical pre-settings. Weaving is exclusively practiced by women in Nagaland. The cloths are mostly rectangular pieces that can either be wound around the hips as a skirt or hung over the shoulders as a shawl. Traditionally these rectangular textiles are not cut but sewn to shape. Nowadays, of course, the younger generation of Nagas has discovered the possibilities of fashion design based on traditional patterns. This has caused major discussions about what is allowed to be done with a traditional textile and what is not – but that is another story and shall be told another time.

In some regions, the patterns woven into textiles are interlinked with specific rights about who can wear which pattern. Among the Ao Naga at the turn of the century, for instance, there were patterns for every clan-group of a village that were woven into women's skirts, while an additional graphic code indicated how high the status of the woman was. In men's shawls it was not clan affiliation, but the owner's success in headhunting that was recorded. My detailed analysis (Wettstein, 2008, 129-146; Wettstein, 2014, 115-201) shows that the system of graphic codes was highly elaborate and readable throughout a large geographical area well beyond the reach of single Naga tribes.

The Nagas' preference for the broken line in constructing this graphic code is not only visible in the finished pattern, but is also reflected in the weaving technique itself. If we look at the type of loom traditionally used by the Nagas, we find that it is a quite basic variation of the backstrap loom – or Indonesian loom as it is also called. More precisely, the Naga type of loom has been categorised as backstrap loom of the Dusun/Iban type (Roth, 65-108). Backstrap looms are also used in Mesoamerica (in Mexico and among the Zuñi in New Mexico), in Guatemala, Peru and some other Andean regions, and among the North American Navajo (Broudy, 76).

When weaving on a backstrap loom the warp thread is a continuous thread wound around the warp beam and one of the two breast beams, the second breast beam is used to fix the warp. The loom is tensioned by the strength of the weaver's body: the second breast beam is hooked to a strap which is placed around the back of the weaver. By pressing her feet against a hold and leaning backwards, the weaver can now control the tension of the loom. Among the Nagas, the two thread systems (shed and counter shed) are separated while winding the warp, and kept

separated with the help of a heddle wound around a heddle rod, a lease rod and a shed rod. While weaving, the two sheds are temporarily fixed in every round of passing the weft with a weaving sword. The basic cloth is woven by passing the shuttle (a simple stick wound with the weft thread) back and forth through the alternating sheds. Warp and weft of the basic background cloth thus consist of continuous lines in terms of design and continuous threads in terms of weaving technique. The broken line only comes into play when additional ornamentation is added to the basic cloth with the help of a one-faced supplementary weft. Technically, this is done by additional shaft beams. This means that the patterns on the surface of the textile background are not embroidered, that is, they are not applied after the basic cloth is finished. Instead, they are woven into the cloth directly as part of the weaving process. This is an important technical detail, because with this technique the weaver has to have a vision of the finished cloth pattern before she even starts mounting her warp thread. She has to know from the very start what pattern she will put where because she has to count the respective threads and colours. In contrast, if one adds a pattern to a textile surface by embroidery, the decision about the pattern design can also be made at a much later step of the production process; this is not the case with the Naga technique of textile ornamentation.

That which is considered an additional pattern on one side of the surface requires additional technical equipment for the loom. This equipment consists of a number of small sticks that are used as place holders and enable the copying of the pattern after its threads are counted by hand the first time. In complicated patterns, these sticks can also be fixed as additional heddle rods with an additional heddle thread. The sticks are only needed for the repetition of the pattern; when woven for the first time, the lines of the design are counted by hand.

It has been suggested that geometry is a basic design principle of textile traditions worldwide (Regensteiner). Weaving as a technique presumably suggests geometry because the lengthwise and crosswise running threads invite to play around with geometric principles of counting, mirroring, extending, flipping, and repeating shapes. But the most important aspect of this technique as concerns our hypothesis is that nothing limits the initial shape of the pattern. It is perfectly possible to weave a circle, a bird, or any random shape. Once the count of the shape to be woven is completed, it can be easily repeated, mirrored, extended or compressed, and added up, for instance, to a band of flowers. While weaving indeed suggests geometric ideas to play around with, nothing limits them to squares and triangles, that is, to variations of the broken line.

Having said that, every beginner or casual weaver will probably agree that angular and triangular geometric patterns are the fastest to count and the easiest to visually control while

counting. Such shapes suggest themselves when starting to weave. It is said that among the Nagas every woman knew how to weave in former times, and that their skill must have varied. While weaving is performed every year during the winter – the season that is not burdened with agricultural work –, dexterity is built up continuously, and depending, on passion or talent, a young "beginner" can fast develop into a skilled craftswoman and artist fast. To play around with patterns is a logical consequence of having reached a certain level of craftsmanship. Nothing hinders a skilled weaver to try out other shapes than angular geometric ones. Indeed, in other world regions where the backstrap loom is employed for weaving – such as Guatemala for instance – traditional patterns also extensively include bands of flowers and leaves winding into each other.

One could argue, of course, that counting the shape of an intricate flower takes much more time, calculation, and imaginative projection than counting an angular geometric shape. And if time investment into a pattern is too high, it is probably abolished in favour of a simpler and faster form. The Naga weavers, however, invest a considerable amount of time for calculation and imaginative projection when producing some of their geometric patterning. The highly complicated triangle-based patterns of most of the Ao Naga or Angami Naga women's skirts for instance surely take up more time to count than many anthropomorphic or floral patterns.

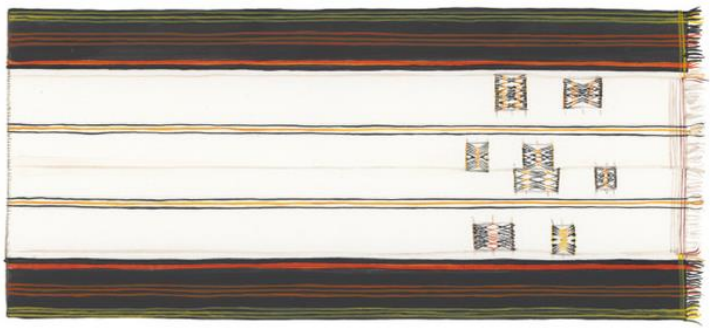

Figure 2 : Angami Naga woman's skirt used in variations since the beginning of the late XIXth century. Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich Acc. No. 9524. Watercolour drawing Marion Wettstein.

Figure 3 : Close-up of patterns in above Anagmi Naga woman's skirt. Photos: Marion Wettstein.

In summary, we can state that there is no technical reason why the Nagas should largely restrict their weaving to angular abstract geometric patterns: it would be technically as easy for a reasonably skilled weaver to weave round, floral, or anthropomorphic shapes with a Naga backstrap loom. Such patterns are neither more complicated nor more time consuming to weave and the Nagas also do not lack inspiration, as they have known of such other designs being used in the neighbouring plains for centuries. It can be observed that floral or anthropomorphic designs especially do turn up from time to time in Naga textiles. Such designs, however, have never really been picked up by the Nagas. They obviously seem to find the geometric shapes more attractive. This leads us to the second hypothesis.

A Habit that Leads to a Distinctive Taste?

If it is not the weaving technique as such that determines the Nagas' preference for the broken line in their textile patterns, maybe it is habituation that leads to a distinctive taste? That is to say, once the angular geometric design was established, it reproduced itself through a technical and visual habit, and through a taste that built itself via the transformation principles inherent to the angular geometrical design. But how does habit develop? How is taste built? Under which

conditions do they adapt and change – or resist change? It will be fruitful to approach these questions by considering three concepts that play into each other's hands, so to speak: the mechanisms of habit, the idea of taste, and the notion of embodiment.

If we accept a commonplace definition, habit is a practice or thought pattern that is repeated regularly and often without thinking. A habit usually starts with a specific goal. If the goal has been reached, the process to this end is repeated when in a similar situation. This can result in the original goal becoming secondary, or even being forgotten over time, while the process keeps being repeated. In psychological terms this reads:

> Habits are learned dispositions to repeat past responses. They are triggered by features of the context that have covaried frequently with past performance, including performance locations, preceding actions in a sequence, and particular people. Contexts activate habitual responses directly, without the mediation of goal states (Wood & Neal, 843).

The decision to repeat a performance that later can lead to habit is also dependent on the kind of responses received. Are they valued positively or negatively, worthwhile or not? Or, in the words of the popular writer Charles Duhigg: does the habit loop of cue, routine and reward kick in or not? In his book *The Power of Habit*, Duhigg's aim is to find ways of breaking bad habits and overcoming addictions. His basic model of the habit loop, as simple as it is, can nevertheless be used as a guide to conceptualize habitual behaviour. The relative value of reward and punishment has been identified as a crucial factor in habit formation at the beginning of the XXth century – by using test animals under laboratory conditions which are today considered unethical (Dodson). Recent studies, however, show that external rewards – such as praise, affection, money or goods – do not seem to be the main factor in habit formation: of greater importance are factors such as intrinsic motivation and perceived pleasure, especially when a change of habit occurs, or is intended to be triggered in someone (Judah *et al.*).

In our case study, the habit we are interested in is not weaving as such, but the weaving of a specific style of patterns. The technical skills of the weavers are adapted to these patterns through the embodied habit of counting lines and visually verifying the projected shape. Weaving a pattern is usually less automatic than merely weaving a portion of the background cloth. Nevertheless, many Naga weavers count their patterns intuitively. Their mind as well as their fingers automatically know how many threads to count in which line of weft for a specific outcome. Embodiment in this case means the bodily knowledge of how to weave and what to weave, it simultaneously incorporates the bodily representation of the pattern once the textile is worn. In the case of a piece of clothing that is woven in the very same community in which it is worn, the embodiment of weaving a certain ornamentation reinforces itself from two sides, from the side of the producer and from the side of the wearer. The habit of weaving certain

shapes that becomes embodied in this double sense also has an influence on what we can call the formation of taste.

Taste concerns aesthetic judgement and, following Kant, is subjectively universal. That is to say that "judgements of taste claim that beautiful objects are (or should be) a source of pleasure for all persons" (Rogerson, 301). Even if there is no accounting for taste, understood as an individual judgement with universal validity, social agreement on what is good taste – and what is not – is relevant for status and identification of in- and out-groups, as sociological approaches suggest. Taste is considered socially determined: "Different socio-economic groups or classes have different tastes. Consequently, in society taste is an empirical category" (Gronow, x). In this sense, taste is not only an aesthetic judgement but simultaneously a technique of status acquisition. This is at least how Pierre Bourdieu (1984) would understand it. Or, even more drastically: Taste, by constituting holdings of cultural capital, "is a weapon for drawing social distinctions and for exercising social and symbolic domination" (Warde, 2). The mutually reinforcing accumulation of economic, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986) via cultural objects, that then reinforces the judgement of taste – the preference for the broken line in our case – can be exemplified by the developments of design in Ao Naga women's skirts: the right to wear skirts with blue lengthwise stripes containing geometric patterning based on the triangle were restricted to certain clans. The number of ornamented stripes depended on how far the family had proceeded in the series of feasts of merit. Feasts of merit consisted of a clearly prescribed succession of ritual offerings, each requiring more wealth than the former – the number of sacrificial animals multiplied at every step. Thus, these feasts transformed economic capital into cultural capital. When the ritual systems of the (Ao) Nagas were destroyed by colonial and missionising intervention in the first half of the XXth century to such extent that sacrificial feasts were forbidden, the status record of the families was continued through textile ornamentation. Over time, the number of ornamented stripes that had formerly been regulated rose considerably. In recent times, Ao women's skirts have tended to contain more ornamented stripes than plain background colours. We can, therefore, observe an inflation of the status marker, that is, the broken line.

Figure 4 : Ao Naga woman's skirt of a woman whose father has not performed fests of merit, but whose forefathers have, Chantongya village, 1920s. The Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, Acc. No. 1920.69.172. Colour pencil drawing by Marion Wettstein.

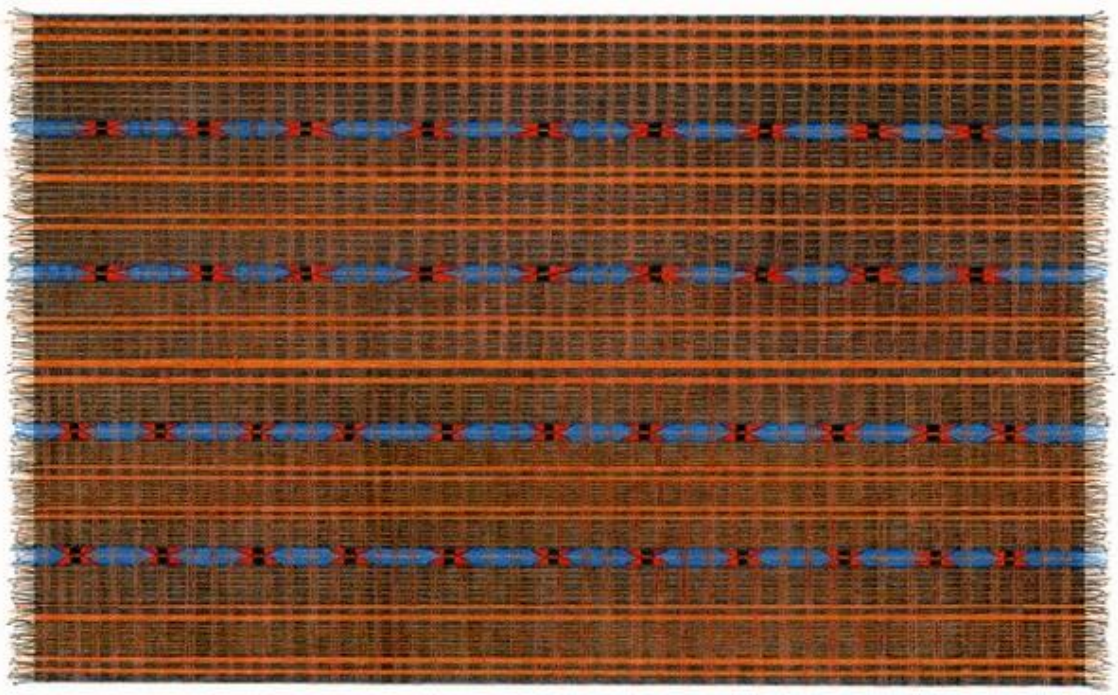

Figure 5 : Ao Naga woman's skirt of a woman whose father and forefathers both have performed fests of merit, Chantongya village, 1920s. The Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, Acc. No. 1920.69.170. Colour pencil drawing by Marion Wettstein.

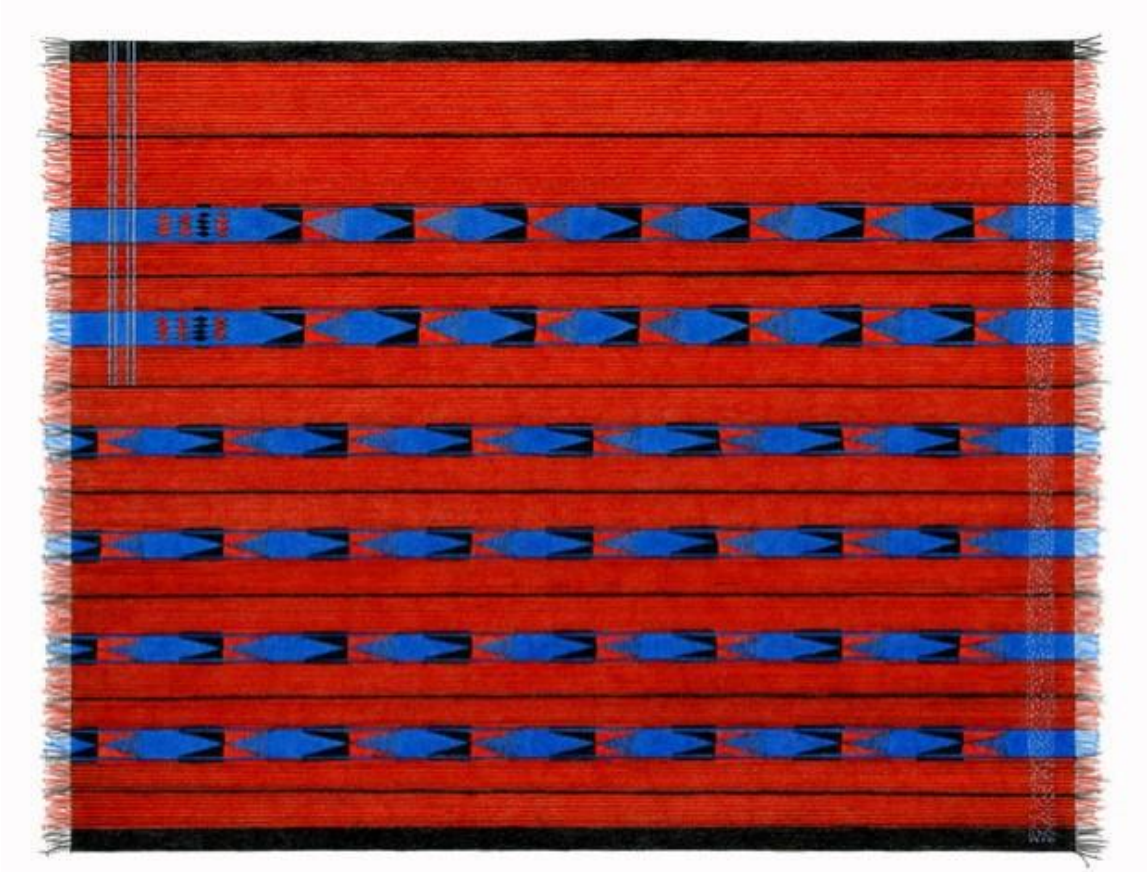

Figure 6 : Contemporary Ao Naga woman's skirt of Longchar, Pongener and Ozukam clans, Sangratsü village, 2004. Private collection. Colour pencil drawing by Marion Wettstein.

Figure 7 : Some historical and contemporary pattern variations found as one-sided supplementary weft ornamentation on the lengthwise stripes of Ao Naga women's skirts.
Colour pencil drawing by Marion Wettstein.

Concepts, such as Duhigg's habit loop as an explanation for the repetition of similar performances beyond the initial motivating goal, or Bourdieu's habitus as explanation for the reproduction of power structures, may help to understand why a certain style of patterning that had once been closely attached to notions of status among some of the Naga groups over time developed into a preferred design. The relevant practices for acquiring status and power that were once linked to respective textile patterns have vanished and have been replaced by other practices entirely for several decades, if not for nearly a century. The patterns have remained though, and have become attached to a new set of meanings in the last few decades, that of ethnic identity. If we consider this recent history of the Naga areas, we come to our third hypothesis.

A Result of Symbolic Identity Politics?

The third hypothesis suggests that the preference for the broken line in Naga textile design – at least in recent times – is a result of symbolic identity politics. In order to examine this hypothesis, we first need to look back into the history of the Naga areas. Most of what we know of the Nagas' erstwhile culture stems from colonial ethnography of the 1920s and 1930s. That is to say, from a time when many of the old Naga traditions were already about to change, or had even died out already, due to strong Christian missionising by the Southern Baptist Church and through the impact of British colonial administration.

From the old monographs and articles by colonial ethnographers J.H. Hutton or J.P. Mills (for instance Mills, 1922, 1926, 1937; Hutton, 1921a, 1921b), we can conclude that most of the Naga's daily life revolved around agriculture. The Nagas were organised in local groups who mostly identified at village or clan level. Larger communities that the colonial administration called tribes were rare. Such identifications started to build up mainly through colonial intervention.

Important factors in the lives of the Nagas were clan affiliations, and notions and practices related to status and rank. They were known for their practice of headhunting which was linked to the status of the warrior, and for their feasts of merit, large village clan festivals that transformed material wealth into status. The Nagas recorded both these aspects of individual status in material culture: in ornament, architecture, landscape modifications, and extensively also in textiles that were worn during festive occasions.

The Naga Hills were only at a very late stage incorporated into the British Indian colonial territories, around the turn of the century. It took the colonial power a long time to take grip in the Naga Hills. Some regions that are today part of the Indian Union state of Nagaland in fact

had never been under British control at all. In colonial times, American Baptist missionaries arrived in the Naga Hills, and today over 90% of the Nagas are Christians. The old rituals have vanished nearly completely. What has survived, however, are parts and transformations of the former material culture, for which the Nagas have found new ways to relate to their new Christian faith and lifestyle. During the First World War, a group of Nagas was recruited to build roads for the English troops in France. This is usually seen as one of the most important turning points in Naga history. It was the moment when the Nagas became aware of their position in world politics. Those who returned from Europe made it clear to their fellow Nagas that the small tribes were about to be crushed between two large political entities, the British and the Burmese Empires. This is how the movement for Naga independence formed itself. When India became independent in 1947, it was automatically assumed that the Naga Hills would become part of the Indian state. This, however, was not what the Nagas themselves had in mind, and an armed conflict between the Naga underground and the Indian Army arose. The Naga underground soon split into different fractions, armed fights broke out between the many different groups and also with the Indian Army. It is estimated that more than 100,000 people lost their lives, and there are villages in Nagaland that have been scorched during this conflict as much as ten times. This experience today still remains deeply rooted in Naga society. Since the year 2000 only has it actually been possible for outsiders to travel to Nagaland, which had been a restricted area for much of the second half of the XXth century (Oppitz *et al*.).

For many Nagas, the symbolic 'enemy' is still what they call 'mainland India'. The Nagas perceive themselves as entirely different from India: they look different, they have a different religion, they have a different taste in food, and they perceive their entire culture as decidedly not Indian. They have a very distinct material culture and the locally produced textiles are one aspect of this material culture. As mentioned above, textile patterns among the Nagas were interlinked with very specific rights about who could wear which pattern in (pre)colonial times. Among the Ao Naga, for instance, there were patterns for every clan-group of a village that were woven into women's skirts, an additional graphic code indicated how high the status of the woman was. In men's shawls, it was not clan affiliation, but success in headhunting that was recorded.

Therefore, certain notions of identity – as contested as this term 'identity' might be – have been attached to textiles from the beginning of record. These notions of identity, however, have changed considerably over time. As I analysed in detail elsewhere (Wettstein, 2008), a single piece of cloth was a record of individual status in former times, whereas, nowadays, the Naga style of patterning textiles in general has become interlinked with a collective identity, and in

this case a general Naga ethnic identity. The notion of individual rights attached to textiles has been transferred from the old status and clan markers to a tribal, even "national" level. A whole style of textile pattern design is locally perceived as protected by a collective ethnic copyright. This notion of copyright has emerged especially after the Government of India conducted copyright awareness workshops in Nagaland after the turn of the millennium. The Naga collective ethnic identification with the broken line can be strong at times: in a discussion with a local Naga academic, I was shown a book with images of textiles stemming from other parts of India. One of the textiles featured a simple zigzag line and the person told me quite outraged that the "Indians" had copied this pattern from the "Nagas", they had simply taken that traditional Naga pattern which they had absolutely no right to do. My objection that a simple zigzag line was probably something quite common in textile design all over the world did not convince my discussion partner at all. The copyright question comes to boil in certain situations, especially when other Indian textiles or fashion designs are detected, that show resemblances to the Naga style.

It can be observed that this collective textile identity has been strongly promoted by the State Government of Nagaland, which sponsors beauty pageants, fashion shows, designer contests and ethnic festivals on regional and state level. Why textile patterns are attractive for symbolic identity politics to such extent can, for instance, be gathered from findings in the psychology of fashion: under certain circumstances, textiles and clothing are understood as a second skin, as an extension of the self (Kaiser). Textile design that is aimed at clothing can therefore be understood as a medium that bridges the individual self and notions of the collective. It seems that among the Nagas, the angular, abstract, geometric patterning – or the broken line, if you want – has become this bridge.

In the context of modern India, clothing plays a crucial role in politics. The fact that fashion is predestined to serve as a tool for symbolic identity politics also has historical reasons. Since the era in which Mahatma Ghandi established a close connection between wearing a Khadi (cotton loin cloth) and representing a specific political and social Indian identity, fashion – or the question of what to wear – has been implemented as a political tool. Symbolic identity politics that are communicated and negotiated via fashion can lead to dilemmas of identification, as Emma Tarlo showed. In the case of the Nagas, the dilemma plays between identification with one's own small local group – a village or a clan – that claims the right to specific textiles patterns and the collective Naga identity fostered by state politics that claims Naga textile design in general for an encompassing "Naga identity". Naga designers that have made a career at the Indian national level, such as Atsu Sekhose for instance, and designer contests held and

sponsored in the regional context of Northeast India at large (including the Indian Union States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura) have a high potential to reveal such dilemmas.

Just like historical textile museum collections, such designer contests give a comparative overview on the textile traditions of India, revealing another aspect of the Nagas' preference for the broken line: the textile designs of many other Hill peoples in the Himalayan region traditionally feature angular geometric motifs as well. It is not precisely the same design as that of the Nagas, but the patterns likewise distinguish themselves from the textiles of the neighbouring plains through their preference for square and triangular design principles over falderal flowery patterns. Just like the Nagas, many other peoples of the Himalayan hills up until recently insisted on mainly weaving on their elementary looms, many of them backstrap looms like those of the Nagas. For long they resisted the Government's attempts to introduce the technically more automated heddle looms that are much faster to produce cloth. At least textiles conceived of as traditional still today have to be woven on a backstrap loom. If the Nagas' preference for the broken line is not theirs exclusively in the region, but is a preference that can, as a tendency, be found among most of the Hill peoples of the Himalayas, we have to consider explanations that reach further back in time than recent history and its symbolic identity politics, and that cover a wider geographical range than only the Naga regions. And this is where our fourth hypothesis comes into play.

A Technique within 'the Art of not Being Governed'?

The hypothesis that the preference for the broken line in Naga textile design is a technique within 'the art of not being governed' is based on James Scott's seminal work. In 2002, Willem van Schendel coined the term Zomia[2] for a geographical region that enclosed most of the peoples in Highland Southeast Asia who were not properly integrated into the states they – in theory – belonged to. Scott took up this starting point and suggested that such situation did not occur by accident or as a result of the state marginalising these peoples, but on the contrary, as a result of active resistance from the Zomians to being integrated into state structures. States have continuously tried to incorporate terrains by incorporating them into the system of wet rice or the cultivation of other grains. Due to the specific agricultural techniques they required, these grains make for an easily measurable, controllable, and taxable production. Wet-rice

[2] In most of the Tibeto-Burman languages which many of these people speak 'zo' means 'remote' and 'mi' means 'people' or 'man'.

cultivation, for instance, requires a population density that is conducive to state structures, and the crop grows on easily measurable fields that allow for fast calculation of yield to deduce the expected tax. The alternative that provides the possibility to escape control is a cultivation of crops that grow underground, with mixed cultivation, which is the type most Eastern Himalayan highlanders preferred as agricultural technique. The resulting "friction of terrain" is supported by altitude levels that limit wet rice production, but it is not necessarily determined by it. Pointing out examples from Malaya, Scott suggests that evading the state by withdrawing or even escaping into the hills and producing crops by shifting cultivation was an active practice of many local ethnic groups – also groups that originally had no tribal structure but "tribalised" themselves for the purpose – in Highland Southeast Asia. In other words, to prefer shifting cultivation over wet rice production, even though yields might be much higher with the second method, can be an active technique of the art of not being governed. While Scott focuses his analysis on agriculture and the state's effort to subjugate more and more terrain to taxable crops, he also suggests that "[v]irtually everything about these people's livelihoods, social organization, ideologies, and (more controversial) even their largely oral cultures, can be read as strategic positionings designed to keep the state at arm's length" (x) and: "Their agricultural practices, their social organization, their governance structures, their legends, and their cultural organization in general bear strong traces of state evading or state distancing practices (127-128)." This is to say that it should be possible to detect active techniques of the art of not being governed in many other aspects of the hill peoples' lives. It is likely that such techniques can be easily identified by observing the state's counter effort to break them, change them or replace them by its own techniques of subjugation and control.

We have already seen that the State Government of Nagaland strongly supports events and competitions that are closely related to fashion and textile design. This support is not only part of symbolic identity politics, it is also a means of controlling the developments of textile and fashion design by sponsoring competition prices, involving state-friendly protagonists into the organisational structures, making sure that speeches are held by the right persons and that the media reports on the government's support. We have also seen that the Government of India invests in copyright awareness workshops and in replacing the technical equipment of the loom by introducing heddle looms. Textiles are seen as potential commodities produced on an industrial scale. But only if they are produced under countable conditions and distributed via controlled channels would this industry be taxable. Governments have practically no control over home-woven, locally exchanged textiles. But not only that, representatives from Indian state companies also try to influence the design and patterning of the textile with the argument

that traditional patterning is too complicated and time-consuming to weave (Wettstein, 2014, 107). This is not a logical argument when we consider some of the very complicated patterning of "low land" textile patterns or the intricate weaving of Indian luxury fashion (Kuldova). The argument that local weavers would not know the colour trends and the general market trend for larger markets is irrelevant to a local Naga weaver who produces for the taste of her own village or region. Local Naga village weavers are (or until recently were) not interested in big markets and overseas sales. What interests them is whether the neighbour for whom they have woven a skirt is really pleased with it, which then results in a higher status as "good weaver" within the community.

The question that arises is: why should a state apparatus show interest in changing a textile design tradition at all, if not for the aim of incorporating Naga weaving into the system of state control? If the Naga textile design tradition can be shifted into a global market or national market that is controlled by the government through taxation and economic dependency, the government has one more tool of control. But if the Naga weavers continue to weave their local designs, that is to say their broken lines that provide identity at the local community level, their symbolic resistance to the state stays strong. In this sense, the Nagas' insisting on the broken line can be seen as a technique of the art of not being governed. This argument, of course, applies to the present days in which the Nagas have to face a strong state which they tried to fight with weapons for nearly a century, but which has gradually crawled nearer and successfully started to integrate them into its structures. But there is also another historical period that can serve as an indicator that the broken line in Naga textiles is a technique of the art of not being governed: the moment in history when the Nagas were confronted directly with the "state" for the first time, that is, at the end of the XIXth century when the administrative and military presence of British India reached the Naga hills.

If we look back in history, through the Naga textile museum collections, we can gather that the further back in time we get, the rarer the skirts and shawls with ornamentation of supplementary weft become. In proportion, simple cloths with just lines and stripes were far more frequent at the end of the XIXth century – that is the time of the first collections – than in the 1910s when J.H. Hutton was deputy commissioner of Nagaland and collected Naga artefacts. In the 1930s, under J.P. Mills as deputy commissioner and main collector, supplementary weft ornamentation intensified again, especially in women's skirts of some regions. It can confidently be stated that collectors have always been interested in ornamented textiles when they were available. Therefore, the museum collections that show a strong increase of ornamented textiles from the early XXth century onwards can be considered a mirror of an actual increase of textiles with

supplementary weft ornamentation. This increase of the broken line in textiles historically runs parallel with the strengthening of state control by the British Empire and later the Indian state in the Naga areas and also correlates with the resistance of the Nagas to this state control. As mentioned above, the local cultural code of ornamentation originally indicated success in headhunting or increase in status through feasts of merit. But both these practices had been largely abandoned already in the very early XXth century. Headhunting had practically vanished in the British controlled areas and specific sacrifices for feasts of merit were only rarely held. The ethnographic data, on which the monographs of J.H. Hutton and J.P Mills were based, had largely been gathered from the memory of elder Nagas who had witnessed these characteristic Naga customs. But the ornamentation symbolically indicating the related status increased in number and elaboration, without the symbols locally changing their meaning. To conclude a causal relation between the use of the broken line and the invasion of and resistance to the state would surely be highly speculative. However, when seen in the light of the development of today's governmental interventions to the design traditions of the Nagas, it could be an interesting argument to follow.

Conclusion

Bringing together the results of the four hypotheses in a conclusion, we can summarise that (1) the weaving equipment of the Nagas and their technique of weaving do not restrict them in any way to the broken line and its variations, the triangle and the square, for ornamenting their textiles. Weaving techniques may be affined to geometry in general, but a fairly skilled weaver would be able to weave any shape with reasonable effort. (2) The concept of a development of a distinctive taste acquired through an embodied habit loop can explain why the broken line and its transformations, once installed as a principle of patterning, would be continued as a style of design. But in order to establish itself as the preferred style of patterning, the broken line needs to be incorporated into the general habitus, one that allows the powerful with high status alone to wear such ornamented textiles. The mechanism of fashion kicks in as soon as the less powerful try to imitate the powerful. (3) In present times, the reason for insisting on the broken line in textile design can partially be found in symbolic identity politics that aim at linking this specific style of ornamentation to a notion of Naga ethnic identity, diverting the focus from the former symbolic meaning of the ornamentation that was linked to individual status. (4) Observed on a larger geographical scale, however, the broken line is prominent among many peoples of Highland Southeast Asia, especially among those who belong to the areas of so-called Zomia. The development of such ornamentation can be historically correlated with the

establishment of state structures and resistance against them in the Naga region, which leads me to suggest that the preference for the broken line in Naga textile ornamentation is a technique of the art of not being governed.

This last hypothesis, however, can only be discussed in a speculative manner and cannot be thoroughly examined in the scope of this article. Methodologically speaking, such an endeavour would require a large scale comparison of textile patterns, their meaning, and the historically changing relations between their meaning and shape in a significant number of Highland Southeast Asian local societies. Large scale comparisons of ethnographic details have come out of fashion for some time, but with the introduction of "big data" approaches to anthropology and kindred disciplines, it is worthwhile to reconsider classical thinkers that have already thought through large scale comparison of form and its morphology as linked to meaning and purpose, such as Claude-Lévi Strauss or D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, and combine their methodology with a historical perspective on change and transformation.

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