



Greeting

The Humboldt Lab Dahlem was a project of the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation) in cooperation with the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation). It developed new forms of presenting artefacts of the Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Asian Art Museum) of the Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (National Museums in Berlin) in Dahlem for the planned Humboldt-Forum in Berlin-Mitte. The experiment began with the question of how objects accommodated in a museum can open up new perspectives on our globalized present. In its search for solutions, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem therefore collaborated with scholars, custodians, curators, and artists. The results were regularly presented in so-called "Probebühnen" during the opening hours of the museum. In this manner, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem provided stimuli for dealing with the current challenges of presentation and mediation that are also posed to other museums in Germany and Europe.

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Headhunters' Paradise / Teaser

The Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin is host to a large collection of ethnographic artifacts sourced from the Northern Indian Naga people. The interest in this society stems not least from the fact that the ritual of headhunting was practiced here, and so the collection also comprises a large number of objects from this context. What does it mean to deal with this kind of heritage? The exhibition project uses different perspectives in its presentation, in order to take a closer look at headhunting. The perspectives of the "true heirs," the modern members of the former warrior society, play a central role herein: interviews, in which they talk about their attitudes to the culture of their forebears, form an exciting constellation with the objects themselves as well as the historical ethnographic photographs and videos.

Headhunters' Paradise / Project Description

Dealing with an Unusual Heritage

by Roland Platz and Andrea Rostásy

Over a century ago the Nagas attained great notoriety as headhunters and were stylized by the West into wild warriors. A head captured as trophy was proof of having been a successful warrior and was celebrated with a festive ritual. As late as the 1990s there were still isolated cases of headhunting being documented. Today the Nagas are a multifaceted and in part modern urban people who live mainly in the Indian state of Nagaland. But traces of the former warrior society are still visible to this day. Headhunting is not a taboo topic and among many Nagas there is still a residual pride when they talk about their past as fearsome warriors. Every year in the capital city of Kohima, they celebrate the Hornbill Festival, the largest cultural festival of the Nagas, in which memories of old traditions are recalled.

The Ethnologisches Museum is home to around 1500 Naga artifacts of excellent quality, dating back quite far; rarely are comparable artifacts to be found in Northern India. Especially Naga anthropologists value this legacy of their people, preserved in the museums. In future, looking at methods as to how the collections can



be opened up for interested Nagas, and finding a basis for cooperation, are key. Within the framework of the module about ethnic minorities from South East Asia the Nagas will also be topic at the Humboldt-Forum.

How can this unusual heritage be presented in the museum? The project "Headhunters' Paradise"¹ examines how the cultural phenomenon of headhunting can be curated and communicated without falling into the exoticism trap, without trivialization and without a narrowing of perspective. The central approach in the preliminary planning was to ensure that present day Nagas would have their say and be able to express their own perceptions within the exhibition. How do they talk about their past as fearsome headhunters? What significance does that have for them today? And why were the skull trophies so important to their forebears?

The aim was to create an approach that allowed for different voices and witnesses of the Nagas to be presented along side one another, widening the range of perspectives. Could the visitors access the phenomenon of headhunting in a more differentiated, less prejudiced or exoticized way through the communicated knowledge and the views presented by the Nagas themselves?

A Differentiated Approach in Material Production and Arrangement

The curator Roland Platz visited Nagaland as part of the project, and carried out numerous audio and video interviews. Farmers were represented alongside scientists, teachers and pastors. It was clear from the start that the material created should be used in the exhibition in combination with the museum's existing historic and contemporary documentary materials. Roland Platz received invaluable professional advice from Vibha Joshi Parkin, anthropologist and seasoned Naga researcher, from Oxford University, currently a guest lecturer for social anthropology at the Universität Tübingen, who also furnished him with numerous contacts in Nagaland, amongst them to the Kohima Institute. In Nagaland itself Platz was accompanied by Pangernungba Kechu, associate professor at the Institute for Oriental Theology in Dimapur, Nagaland, who also interpreted during most of the interviews. The photographer Edward Moon-Little documented many of the encounters and meetings.

The agency Luxoom Medienprojekte was selected from a number of agencies to create a spatial walk-in installation based on the material created during the trip as well as on the preexisting material and selected artifacts. To this end they developed a content structure in which films, photographs, audio recordings, texts and artifacts represented different contemporary as well as historical perspectives on headhunting.

Complexity in Space

Those who had passed through the designated entrance space found themselves in a room that was not immediately decipherable. From an intersecting horizontally strung wire and hemp rope system three meters from the ground, the entirety of photos, text panels, screens and headphones as well as mirrors were hung from red threads. In this way a kind of collage in space was created with many crisscrossing lines – the ropes, as well as the insights and vistas, created with the layered material. The complex hanging system invited the visitors to move and create their own perspectives in which the images and quotes interconnected with the mirroring of oneself and the objects in the display cabinets. Depending on the visitor's positioning, the materials create different constellations, overlaps and insights.

At its center a large projection caught the eye, showing a five-minute interview with an old Naga headhunter and his wife. They spoke as eyewitnesses and their narrative was audible throughout the whole space. To the left and right of the screen daos (swords) and panji baskets (warrior baskets) shone in the vitrines – objects used for headhunting. The path led the visitor on a circular tour around the display cabinets, past two audio stations, where short excerpts of interviews with a teacher at a Christian school and a youth pastor could be heard. At the front of the room a complex arrangement of numerous layered photographs were hung from the rope system, showing historical and contemporary images from Nagaland. In the mirrors integrated into the arrangement, visitors repeatedly caught glimpses of themselves surrounded by the other material. White and red lights set accents on the taut ropes and photographs in the room, whose otherwise only source of light was from the films and display lighting. On the farthest layer of the arrangement a second large projection of historical quotes could be seen, in combination with excerpts of the current interviews as text, thereby opening a further point of access. Having left the arrangement of photos behind, the visitor came across a small screen with passages from several video interviews as well as a video of the Hornbill Festival. Due to the brevity of the material, cut into a loop, the film sequences could almost be viewed in passing. The path along the longer side of the room finally led to a third projection, shots of a celebration, with elements of headhunting dances, from 1936/37. There the path ended, or rather, the circle returned to the beginning –



rounded off by an information panel on the collection history of the Naga objects in the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin – and discharged the visitors toward the entrance back to the spacious rooms of the museum.

Experiencing Perspectives in Movement

Thanks to the light and temporary feel of the hanging and the designated movement of the visitors through the room the installation allowed a perception of a simultaneity of voices that did not judge and permitted space for thought. In this way an openness of perspectives was facilitated, placing the dramaturgically intentional central narrative of the old headhunter and his wife into a relationship with the entire material arrangements and not least to the contemporary voices of the Nagas. This approach, anchored in the concept, was precisely visualized in advance and served as the basis for the ambitious implementation.

Upon invitation of the Humboldt Lab and Roland Platz, Zubeni Lotha, a photographer, artist and researcher, Pangernungba Kechu and Vibha Joshi Parkin as well as Edward Moon-Little were invited to visit the exhibition “Headhunters’ Paradise” in September 2015 and also to view the Naga collection in the depot of the Ethnologisches Museum. To integrate the views and the reflections of present day members of the source culture is an important step in the further development of the project for the Humboldt-Forum.

Already during the setup of the installation it became clear that it would be worthwhile to take the potential created here for a permanent exhibition. The hanging principle could for example be further developed so that the materials would be easy to rearrange in a flexible manner. In this way a communication would be facilitated allowing for thematic placement and involving the visitors. Also the intentional lack of hierarchy in terms of image, audio and text material, offering content on several layers of access, could be further developed under the specifications of “design for all” (topic of inclusion and accessibility). For the development of the presentation of the topic “Headhunting among the Naga” in the Humboldt-Forum, the project in its current form can certainly serve as inspiration, in terms of content as well as design, perhaps even serving as a starting point.

¹ With the exhibition title a term coined from a Christian perspective is picked up on: A memorial stone in the village of Molung Kimong is a reminder of Christian missionaries who opened “The First Gospel Gate into the Headhunter’s Paradise.” in the 1870s.

Dr. Roland Platz has been working as curator for South and Southeast Asia at the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin since 2009. He studied ethnology and sociology in Freiburg, and carried out extensive fieldwork in Northern Thailand. Many years of freelance work as a university lecturer, coach and journalist followed. His special focus is on the minorities of Southeast Asia and questions of identity.

Andrea Rostásy is a visual artist and media curator. Since 1995 she has been working in concept development and realization of spatial media installations for commercial projects and exhibitions worldwide. Since 2013 she has been contributing to projects for the Humboldt Lab Dahlem, for example, in the project management for “Travelogue” and “Enchantment / Beauty Parlour.”

Headhunters’ Paradise / Positions

Talk

It was a constitutive aspect of the exhibition “Headhunters’ Paradise” to involve members of the contemporary Naga society and their perspectives on their ancestors’ culture. But did it work? Invited by Humboldt Lab Dahlem, two guests from Nagaland came to Berlin to see the show and to discuss the exhibition with its makers – a discussion that necessarily also dealt with museum policy in general.

Compilation and editing: Dagmar Deuring

Michael Kraus: What we’re dealing with is one of the key questions of museum politics: how can a museum represent complex societies? How do members of these 21st century societies want to be represented when historical objects from these groups are included in museum collections?

Some of you have seen the exhibition now for the first time. What were your first impressions? And for those



who created it: What were the fundamental ideas behind it? Pangernungba Kechu, you accompanied curator Roland Platz during his research in the region. What are your first impressions of the exhibition?

Pangernungba Kechu: First I want to congratulate the Humboldt Lab for having us here to talk about our impressions and thoughts. For the installation, I'm not surprised about the content, because I knew a lot of it and about it. But I'm very impressed by the way it is made, by how it exposes the issues surrounding the notion and the narratives of headhunting.

Vibha Joshi: I think it's very interesting that you can see such different histories: the history of the Nagas as well as the history of anthropology and of the museum collections. And I wondered about the title. It's a kind of play on the word paradise and I guess it will attract attention.

Roland Platz: We came up with the title as a team and I also liked it because it's a little provocative. Now I'm not sure whether it was a wise choice or not. I got the idea for this exhibition when I saw that video made by Peter van Ham with this old man talking about his experience. It touched me and I liked the idea of showing people, not scientists, talking about their experiences.

Zubeni Lotha: When Roland asked me to come to Berlin I didn't know what to expect. The title puzzled me. But now my first impression is: The design of the installation, with its timeline of the historical Naga people and the voices of today, is cohesive.

Edward Moon-Little: One of my hopes for the exhibition was that it would show an alternative image to that of Nagas in traditional dress with lots of feathers. And it does! One of the pictures that I really wanted to see in the exhibition is there: a girl helping her grandfather put on the traditional headhunting gear and behind him is an image of the Last Supper. It was nice to see that genuine domestic intimacy, the Christianity in the back, the headhunting and the passing on between the generations.

Tobias Sievers: It was a fascinating task for Luxoom and a challenge. Normally we create a story for the visitors with a very specific meaning. But in this case it was quite the opposite as we show different snapshots of possible perspectives to allow the visitors to come up with their own point of view and to feel that there are always other ways of looking at things.

Kraus: Zubeni and Panger, you come from Nagaland. Speaking of the 21st century – what is the general significance of headhunting to the Naga people now? And what is your personal attitude towards this phenomenon?

Kechu: Today, headhunting no longer exists. But the self-will, the spirit of sovereignty that it expressed, the sovereignty to defend one's dignity and identity, is still prevalent. And it is still something that everybody struggles with.

Lotha: For me as a person, as a Naga in the 21st century, headhunting is as alien as it is to you. I have been away from Nagaland for a very long time now. But still this aspect of our culture is always on my mind. It is a very relevant question for me because I photograph my society. Today headhunting has no place in our Christian society. It's quite easy to dismiss it as barbaric. But it had a different significance in the past. So to make easy judgments today would do more harm because it prevents us from understanding this culture. And I think that this tradition taught us good values too: values of communal spirit, of a certain dignity, values that are necessary in our political situation.

Kraus: As the exhibition reveals, there is a great outside interest in Naga headhunting. What do you think about this interest? How do you feel about it?

Lotha: Normally when you say the word headhunting people joke about it: "Do you eat your enemies' heads?" – "Yes, of course, and I will take your head now!" (*laughter*) Many, many anthropologists have studied the Naga people and I think headhunting was the main reason for that. Personally, I don't see, why they shouldn't be interested in that. But because of that, there has also been a lot of stereotyping. And this is a frame of reference that I would really like to deconstruct.

Joshi: I think we have to become aware of the many layers constituting our perception of headhunting. On the one hand this has to do with how it was documented. One question is: Why were the British officers so interested in writing about headhunting? Was it to show how dangerous their jobs were, in order to ensure more governmental financing, and in order to control trade routes? This would have influenced their way of describing it. If you're dealing with photographs you have to keep in mind that it is not evidence by itself. For example it has been proven that those women shown naked on some of the Fürer-Haimendorf photographs



had been persuaded to take their clothes off because normally they wouldn't have done this to show themselves.

On the other hand there is the question of morality. Many Nagas gained first-hand experience of the First World War when they were forced to work in the British Labour Corps in France. During the Second World War, they observed how villages were bombed and how the Japanese and the Allies' troops were killing each other – they may have wondered why they were told to stop their headhunting, which was very little in comparison?

Kechu: The very use of the word headhunting is already idolatrous and intimidating. But I think we live in a world where we're trying to cross borders, expand knowledge – like in this installation. There is also a general question of representation. Of course, the museum can't serve as an advocate of certain groups in political conflicts. But there are some important aspects coming up regarding the representation of indigenous peoples and I hope they will be discussed at the conference "Always in Crisis" on Saturday. One of the questions is: Why do European museums collect objects that were accumulated at a time when indigenous peoples did not have any power?

Platz: For me personally, it is difficult to describe why I chose the subject of headhunting. There is a fascination. I want to understand this phenomenon, learn more about it. But what is important: I don't want to judge it in a moral way. And I want to show the Nagas' very rich and fascinating culture. That's also why I look forward to broadening the topic for the Humboldt-Forum in a more diverse presentation on the Nagas. There are so many interesting aspects to that great culture and we should never reduce it to headhunting.

Moon-Little: I suppose in some ways talking about headhunting is very much like the way the British looked at the Northeast in general; they looked for and 'saw' the exotic. In Assam when the British arrived they were very interested in tantric practices and human sacrifice, in Mizoram they looked for slave raiders and in Nagaland they looked for headhunters. And somehow the Nagaland headhunting thing has endured. And it is overshadowing not only many of the Naga tribes but that whole section of tribal groups in the Northeast. Even though it was quite unusual, not just among the Nagas but in the Northeast in general.

Joshi: Those British officers you mention were very important because they were also anthropologists and wrote the first monographs. And they tried to gain control over the communities through understanding them anthropologically. Also because they saw that religion affected many aspects of the societies of the villages. They were trying to control the people in order to access their natural resources.

Lotha: As a photographer I look at the representation and self-representation of the people. So I am very impressed by Haimendorf's photographs, which he took in the 1930s. These pictures are the frame of reference that every anthropologist and photographer of the Nagas thereafter has followed. And that is problematic. I'm sure that the encounter between Haimendorf and the Nagas was very complex one. But the complexity does not come through. And this is important for me because I also live in a country that is very, very diverse in its culture. But we are stuck in that primitive image because Haimendorf's photographs have worked so deeply in the perception of the people. And it's so difficult to break out of that.

Kraus: What does this mean for the role of a museum? Do you think that an exposition about headhunting is helpful in sparking interest about Naga culture?

Lotha: Headhunting has been taboo for a long time and I think that it's important to speak about it. And if it leads to a deeper interest to the Naga culture – what could be a better reason to talk about headhunting! But as far as the museums go – I hope that they will help me to change my attitude. At the moment, when I visit an exhibition on a special culture, I always feel like I am looking at specimens kept in cases like animals in a zoo. That is my feeling although I come from a very ethnic culture. You're looking at them for their exotic value. And I hope that museums can get beyond that.

Joshi: Yet museums do have a special task. Some years ago I was researching Naga textiles in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. When I showed the research photographs to Lotha women in Nagaland, they were really impressed by the variety and the beauty of the textiles their ancestors had made and which were not being woven anymore. So these collections revealed a very rich cultural history. Collectors like Bastian, the founder of the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin, tried to give a holistic image of how a community lived in a certain time, and this is reflected in the collection of both ceremonial and everyday objects. And when we now take these objects back to the societies there, they sometimes use them to revive something of their previous animistic culture, but now in a very secular way. They take the objects as their cultural heritage.

Kraus: That's an important point. We talk so much about cultural heritage or even shared cultural heritage.



Do you think that it is legitimate to speak about a museum's collection of Naga objects as a "shared cultural heritage"?

Kechu: Yes, I think so. Though of course it is a result of our specific history that the Nagas do not have such a collection like you have.

Platz: You're right. Until today, there has always been an imbalance. We have to be honest and see that; have it in mind. That is what the Humboldt-Forum aims to do. But I have learned that in Nagaland young people often aren't interested in those old objects. So I think we should take it as a heritage of mankind. And we should establish ways of exchanging, like this encounter, or like the database they have with Venezuela for instance, where people from the region of origin can work with the objects.

Lotha: I don't believe in this idea of shared heritage. Because of the imbalance between the indigenous people and the collectors and their societies – at that time and today: Naga people don't know anything about the people in Germany. It's a one-way street.

Kraus: How could we improve this situation?

Kechu: From a radical point of view we would first have to demolish the museums in Europe and give up the concept of fieldwork in distant places! But I think the real question is one of museum politics and funding. Whether museums have the money to realize encounters like this one. And whether they can tell something about the fears and the longings of the people. In the context of the Naga people this wouldn't be possible without footnoting India whose government denies the existence of indigenous peoples. But I don't know how this could be done in an exhibition.

Platz: I sometimes heard the question: Why are you concerned with skulls, why don't you work on living beings? And I really would like to make an exposition about contemporary Nagaland.

Moon-Little: There's maybe an interesting point of contrast. In Kohima, they are building a new museum dedicated to a non-Christian who led a religious movement in the 20th century, Rani Gaidinliu. And there's a big controversy within Nagaland about what constitutes Naga identity. So although headhunting is a controversial topic, the real controversy for Nagaland museums is far more local, far more related to local politics, stories of nationalism and religious difference.

Joshi: What is our role as anthropologists and exhibition designers? Learning and teaching anthropology, I also try to understand why they collected all those things in the 19th century; what was the purpose behind it? It was also to understand what humanity is. How different people solve everyday problems. How diverse we are and at the same time similar. So there is also a very liberal idea of mankind in this anthropology, which could be important in our difficult times, too.

Lotha: I'd like to ask Tobias as the "editor" of the show: Working on a thing that is completely unknown to you, how was the process of putting all these perspectives together?

Sievers: We always try to find a way of opening the door for the visitors. For example, we wanted to place something in the middle that attracts their attention – and decided on this video that Roland mentioned before. One of the important decisions was: it needed to be contemporary but it should feel temporary, like a working place, an anthropologist's working place. It shouldn't look like something finished or self-contained. Developing on from this idea we came up with the space with its many perspectives. Like in Nagaland, where headhunting has vanished, yet is somehow still present, in the values, in the jokes you mentioned for example, by using the files and the flexible elements in the room we tried to make these different layers felt. And with these mirrors, we wanted to give the visitors the feeling that it's not too far away from themselves.

Kraus: Thank you everybody for coming here and taking part in this insightful conversation. Our hope for the future is that dialogue will continue between the Humboldt-Forum and the Naga people, and this is an auspicious start.

Dr. Vibha Joshi Parkin is guest professor and research fellow at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Tübingen University, and Research Associate of the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, from where she also obtained her doctorate. Her research interests focus on traditional religion, healing, conversion to Christianity as well as ethnographic museum collections and their history, and cultural history of the Naga peoples and their self-presentation.

Vibha Joshi consulted the exhibition team during the conceptual development of the installation and facilitated field



contacts in Nagaland.

Dr. Pangernungba Kechu is an associate professor of society, ethics and contextual theology at the Oriental Theological Seminary in Nagaland. Kechu obtained his doctorate in religion and society from Princeton Theological Seminary, USA. He employs art, community organizing and research for promoting education and action for change in the areas of indigenous identity and politics.

Pangernungba Kechu, an Ao Naga, organized Roland Platz's field trip to Nagaland. He selected the villages they visited, where his work as interpreter allowed the interviews to become intense discussions.

Zubeni Lotha is a photographer based in Dimapur in Nagaland. She has published work in Outlook Traveller and The Caravan and has contributed to the New York Times blog and the Random House blog. She has also been a consulting photographer for UNDP. Her main focus of work is an exploration of ideas of representation, stereotype, difference and conflict in the context of Dimapur in particular, and Nagaland in general.

Edward Moon-Little is an Oxford-trained anthropologist with an interest in museums and visual culture. Previously, Edward conducted research in central India on Adivasi identity and mission history, before moving on to the study of museums and indigeneity in Northeast India. Alongside these interests, Edward also works on social media and identity, open data, and technology in the heritage sector.

Edward Moon-Little travelled with Roland Platz in Nagaland and took many of the photographs shown in the exhibition.

Dr. Roland Platz has been working as curator for South and Southeast Asia at the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin since 2009. He studied ethnology and sociology in Freiburg, and carried out extensive fieldwork in Northern Thailand. Many years of freelance work as a university lecturer, coach and journalist followed. His special focus is on the minorities of Southeast Asia and questions of identity.

Tobias Sievers is creative director of Luxoom Design Berlin/Shanghai. He studied social and business communications at the Universität der Künste Berlin, has worked in Asia for many years and – besides his design and creative work – currently teaches at the Shanghai Institute of Design of the China Academy of Arts in his capacity as associate professor for digital design.

Dr. Michael Kraus, who moderated the discussion, is an ethnologist and exhibition curator and Akademischer Rat at the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn.

Dr. Dagmar Deuring is a copyeditor and writer. Together with Christiane Kühl and Barbara Schindler she supervised the online documentation of the projects for the Humboldt Lab Dahlem.

The discussion took place in September 2015 in Berlin.

The Trophy Culture of the Naga

by Heike Gäßler

Headhunting is a globally widespread ritual that has taken place throughout human history. In several cultures it was practiced until well into the 20th century, for example in several regions of South and Southeast Asia, like Kalimantan (Indonesia), the Philippines and in Myanmar, but also in New Guinea, Taiwan and in South America. The Naga too are known for their headhunting. With a population of around three million people, they live in the northwestern region of Myanmar and in Northeast India, above all in Nagaland. This is home to around thirty linguistically and culturally very distinct ethnic groups, who consider themselves part of the Naga people and who were all characterized by headhunting as a cultural phenomenon. In southern Nagaland amongst the Ao and Angami Naga headhunting was phased out more than a century ago. To the north, amongst the Konyak and Phom, the ritual continued until the 1970s, and its sporadic occurrence was documented into the 1990s.

The installation "Headhunters' Paradise" investigates the phenomenon of headhunting in order to gain an understanding of the personal and social significance of the ritual. It illuminates several periods, from the time when the first artifacts were collected in 1875, to film documentations made around 1936, in which an ethnological (Eurocentric) "outsider" perspective is still clearly apparent, up to recent times with original audio recordings, videos and photos taken in the region in 2014. Particularly informative is the centrally placed interview with an old headhunter (Film: Peter van Ham, 2004) in which he talks about his own headhunting experiences as a young warrior, the social significance of headhunting at that time, as well as giving his current appraisal of it. But the opinions of Christian converts of the succeeding generation, who view the culture of their forebears from the perspective of their new religious beliefs, while at the same time



recognizing the traditional values represented by their forefathers, are also heard.

The representatives chosen also speak about possible conflicts and loss of identity that could occur as a result of externally imposed cultural change. In the case of the Naga, in addition to the banning of headhunting by the British colonial administration, the spread of Christianity, propagated mainly by an influx of American missionaries, was the key external pressure for change within their culture – at the same time calling into question their traditional values, like those of the headhunting rituals. Thus succeeding generations have found themselves in a dilemma, between an acknowledgement of their own culture and at the same time its very negation.

In headhunting periods, a group of young warriors from a particular clan would head to an enemy village; occasionally there were also larger expeditions, revenge acts and blood feuds that went on over generations, perpetrated back and forth by family members of the victims. The men would be prepared for their expedition with religious ceremonies, festive dancing and special meals made by the women of the clan. A successful headhunter would be celebrated as a hero, as a protector of the community. Among the Naga, severed heads were considered proof of the warrior's success. Trophies could be heads of men claimed in battle, but also those of women and children. For young men it was, at the same time, an initiation ritual towards manhood. The skulls were usually exhibited in the *morung*, the men's house of the Naga, or on a special head-tree belonging to the clan. Head motifs as emblems on necklaces, baskets or weapon holsters as well as tattoos bear testament to "heroic acts" and were openly worn and displayed.

The installation, which was developed as an integral part of the planning for the Humboldt-Forum, uses layering, in its spatial as well as conceptual design. In the foreground are actual implements, like machetes, known as Daos, that also served as beheading hatchets, as well as headhunting baskets and warriors' décor made of human and goat hair. Comprehensive text and image materials complement the installation. The juxtaposition of several historical periods with the different ways they have been interpreted, together with each period's own specific perspective of the phenomenon of headhunting is reflected in the aesthetic implementation: in an interweaving and dialectical interaction between the exhibition elements. Suspended from ropes, like fragments of different cultural worlds with their various atmospheric images, thought fragments, levels of consciousness and emotional access points, there arises from the combination of singular positions and set elements, an associative overall picture, a comprehensive image in motion, visible from all sides depending on the observer's perspective.

Transparency becomes the essential principle of representation. The lightness of single fragments that float in space and are visible from the front and rear aspects, and the inclusion of parallel observations of, for instance, various film sequences from different historical periods, underline the installation's focus on content, in which the inner conflict of today's Naga regarding their own position on headhunting becomes clear. Mirrors were integrated in the installation as design elements to make the public conscious of its own perspective too. They challenge the observer to consider their own, externally-determined perspective, and how these influence our ways of dealing with the topic of headhunting in the past, present and in the future. The title of the installation is taken from a memorial stone from 25th December 2007, in Molung Kimong, the first Christianized village in Nagaland:

"The First Gospel Gate into the Headhunters Paradise – Foundation Stone Laid by REV. O ALEM, Executive Secretary ABAM IMPUR."

The American Baptist couple, Clark, set up a Christian missionary station here in 1878. As part of the spreading Christianization program, which largely originated in the United States, a gradual societal change was set in motion as a result of residual colonial attitudes, according to which the "savage" culture would be overcome, along with the banning of headhunting by the British colonial administration.

In the interview, the elder of the Yongjong clan of the Phom Naga reports that he is happier now than in the days when he was a headhunter. Beforehand he speaks together with his wife, with great clarity, composure and candor about his clan's headhunting past.

From the succeeding generation, the Baptist teacher Assang talks about the transformation of traditional Naga consciousness into that of the present day. She describes how she no longer hunts heads, but souls instead.

And, in his interview with Roland Platz, Imnakum Zuk Jamir formulates how important it is to know your own roots: "If you lose your roots, you lose your identity."

From text fragments, images and objects from various different contexts, Roland Platz, together with Luxoom,



has created an installation full of contradictions – contradictions as they also exist in the Naga society. The younger generations ask themselves how they should deal with the cultural heritage of their forebears. On the one hand there is a pride in the warrior tradition – the positive force with which it was seen within the culture and which is still palpable – on the other hand, the Naga are now living within a value system imposed on them by colonialization and Christianity. Added to that are the newly evolving perspectives brought about by globalization. The carefully chosen, and at the same time differentiated, view of the subject offered by this installation allows the public to access complex layers of information and to approach headhunting in a non-sensationalist manner.

The fact that this installation's chosen topic is also a potentially volatile one is demonstrated by the example of research scientist, Tezenlo Thong, himself a Naga. He describes headhunting as a "fantasy construct" of the Western world, with the argument that there is no real proof that headhunting really took place at all; that no one was actually "there" when it happened. The Naga's possible concerns about devaluation and marginalization are, in this context, no doubt fed by their experiences as a colonized culture.

The Naga installation, which is currently on display in a small separate room at the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin, is rather modest: one could wish for a more generous space to present the small-format images and text material. The individual elements that make up the spatially-dense, suspended installation are very much "in your face." Even the audio excerpts overlap on a number of occasions. Certainly, minority cultures, which are under great external pressure already, are given attention here – but to date only in the smallest of spaces.

Dr. Heike Gäßler is a drama specialist. As an expert on Asia her focus has been European-Asian cultural exchange since 1996. Her teaching posts have taken her to the Universität Vienna, Universität der Künste Berlin, HZT – Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz and to the EuroAkademie, Berlin, among others. She works internationally as a cultural journalist, festival manager, director and author.

Headhunters' Paradise / Credits

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Installation view "Headhunters' Paradise," photo: Uwe Walter



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Installation view "Headhunters' Paradise," photo: Uwe Walter



Installation view "Headhunters' Paradise," photo: Sebastian Bolesch