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EDITORIAL

The essays in this special issue were first presented as contributions to a workshop on the Hyolmo organized by the research project “Negotiating Boundaries in Religious Discourse and Practice” and sponsored by the Cluster of *Excellence Asia and Europe in a Global Context*, at Heidelberg University on 14-15 November 2014. Originating near Kyirong in Tibet, the Hyolmo migrated hundreds of years ago to the Helambu Valley in Nepal. During the past century they have continued their migratory journeys in search of work: to Kathmandu, India, the Middle East and, more recently, New York, London, Israel and elsewhere. In the present cultural and political climate of Nepal, where ethnicity looms so large as a political and cultural issue, how does such a mobile and diasporic community define itself? The essays in this special issue respond to that question in terms of religious practice, self-designation, and migrant labour. Davide Torri, who organized the original workshop, analyzes the tensions between, on the one hand, rituals of animal sacrifice associated with shamanic side of Hyolmo religion, and on the other hand pressures from the Buddhist side not to perform such rituals. Lauren Gawne writes about the multiple ethnonyms used by Hyolmo to designate themselves, which are surprisingly diverse. Seika Sato compares the traditional movement of Hyolmo brides to the homes of their husbands with the contemporary movement of Hyolmo women in search of work. Despite their geographical isolation, the Hyolmo are evidently caught up in processes of mobility and identity transformation that are typical of many peoples around the world in the 21st century.

William Sax, Editor
European Bulletin of Himalayan Studies

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Desjarlais is a cultural anthropologist who has taught anthropology at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York, since 1994. He received his PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1990, and was a NIMH post-doctoral research fellow at Harvard University from 1990 to 1992. In 2000, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. His main scholarly interests relate to the fields of cultural, medical, and psychological anthropology, and phenomenological approaches in anthropology. He has conducted extensive and collaborative ethnographic research among Hyolmo people, an ethnically Tibetan Buddhist people, in both Nepal and in New York, beginning in the late 1980s. Three of his published books draw from that research: *Body and Emotion: the Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); *Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists* (University of California Press, 2003); and *Subject to Death: Life and Loss in a Buddhist World* (University of Chicago Press, 2016). He is also the author of *Shelter Blues: Sanity and Selfhood among the Homeless* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), which received the Victor Turner Prize in Ethnographic Writing, and *Counterplay: An Anthropologist at the Chessboard* (University of California Press, 2011).

Davide Torri is a Post-Doctoral researcher at the Cluster of Excellence *Asia and Europe in a Global Context*, University of Heidelberg (Germany). He studied Hindi and Hinduism at the University of Venice. After his dissertation on the Lepchas of Sikkim, he dedicated himself to the study of shamanism among the indigenous communities of the Himalayas. His current research on Hyolmo shamanism is part of a larger project on the negotiation of religious boundaries between South Asia and Tibet. He has written several papers on shamanism and forms of syncretism among South Asian indigenous cultures, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. Having done fieldwork in Nepal during the Civil War and the following peace process, he developed an interest in conflict dynamics, religion and violence, politics and patterns of change affecting small-scale societies. He co-edited, with Diana Riboli, the volume *Shamanism and violence: power, repression and suffering in indigenous religious conflicts* (2013), is the author of

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Seika Sato is an anthropologist (PhD University of Tokyo), presently teaching at Teikyo University, Tokyo. She has been carrying out fieldwork among the Yolmos for more than two decades. Her current research interests include labour and livelihood issues among working class women in Kathmandu and beyond. She has recently published an article on this topic, entitled "'Satisfied with my job' – what does she mean? Exploring the world of women construction workers in Nepal" (*International Journal of South Asia Studies* 6, 2013).

Hyolmo, in time

Robert Desjarlais

When I began to undertake anthropological research in Nepal in the late 1980s, in a region then commonly known as the Helambu valley, the word “Yolmo” was seldom voiced in everyday speech to designate a formal ethnic identity. Most people living along the mountainous ridges of the Helambu region identified as being either “Lama” or “Helambu Sherpa” in ethnic and social designation, and most families carried a surname of either “Lama” or “Sherpa.” The term “Yolmo” was understood by some to be a more proper, Tibetan-based name for the region and the people of Tibetan descent who had been living in villages there for several generations, as well as the distinct language spoken by those people. But at the time, only a few educated youths from the region were actively advocating that this word be adopted and used to signify the collective identity of a minority people in Nepal. To my knowledge, no individuals or families identified themselves by the surname “Yolmo” or “Hyolmo.”

A lot has changed since then. Many people from the region now identify as “Hyolmo” or “Yolmo”, and many carry that surname, informally and in official identification cards. A group of dedicated youths established The Hyolmo Foundation in 1991. Since then, several other formal social groups have been established, including the Hyolmo Social Service Center and the Hyolmo Society of America. The word “Hyolmo” has been registered with the government of Nepal as the official designation of the people who identify as such. Helambu is understood by many as being the Nepali word for a region that should be more properly called “Hyolmo.” In effect, the last few decades have brought the development and solidification of a concerted collective identity for those who presently know themselves as “Hyolmo” or “Yolmo” in name, genealogical origins, and social appellation.

Alongside these transformations in name and collective identity has come a vast number of changes in the social, political, and cultural landscapes of Hyolmo communities. In the 1980s and 1990s, few roads capable of carrying motorized vehicles reached the villages in the Hyolmo region, meaning that most travel in the region had to be undertaken by foot, with any goods being carried. The great majority of families resided

in the Hyolmo region, with some families having established residences in the Kathmandu valley, particularly in Boudhanath. Those who sought work abroad usually did so in India; people from various families worked in factories or other settings in Indian cities. Communication from a distance usually involved letters sent through national or international postal services. Most of the communities in the region hosted village “lamas” who performed Tibetan Buddhist rituals, especially funeral rites and other Buddhist rites. These religious specialists worked in structural relation with shamanic healers, known as “bombo.”

Shift to the current scene, circa 2016: most villages in the Hyolmo can now be reached by unpaved roads, which carry, when the conditions are right, buses, four-wheel vehicles, and motorcycles. The main residences of many families are now in Kathmandu, or elsewhere. With every passing decade, fewer people reside in villages in the Hyolmo region. While some people from the region continue to work in India, many others have migrated to places like Japan, Korea, Dubai, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States, where they have established homes and long-term employment. While some people reside in these nation-states in legally “undocumented” ways, many others have secured visas and residence permits. More than a few have raised families in their host countries, with their children speaking several languages fluently. They and their parents rely on email, international phone cards, Facebook, and other social media to keep in touch with family and friends living in other places in the world. Village lamas continue to undertake Buddhist rites for their sponsors and communities. But there is a greater collective awareness and understanding of the main tenets and teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, and many practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism seek the counsel of Tibetan lamas and teachers in the well-financed *gompa* and monasteries in Kathmandu and elsewhere.

Thus, within a span of thirty years there have been radical shifts in the lives of Hyolmo people. These changes range from the economic and political to the social and cultural; every dimension of Hyolmo life and culture has undergone transformations, from matters of social identity and language use to residence and migration patterns to religious practices and the status of women. These changes are not lost on Hyolmo peoples themselves; there is a strong historical consciousness of the transformations in people’s lives. As a man in his thirties once put it,

after moving to New York and establishing a career in art design there, “Sometimes I look at where I am, and think about the fact that, when we were kids, my brothers and friends and I were running around barefoot in our village....It’s all so amazing” (paraphrased). The turning of time can convey an uncanny sense of exhilarating displacements into new domains of life.

Throughout the course of this recent history, the reflections of Hyolmo peoples on their histories and identities have proceeded in tandem with the research studies of anthropologists and other social scientists. In the 1980s, the main published research on Hyolmo people came from the skilled work of the anthropologists Graham Clarke (1980a, 1980b, 1990, for instance) and Naomi Bishop (1989, 1998). My own modest contributions appeared in the decades that followed (Desjarlais 1992, 1997, 2016). In recent years there has been a flourishing of new research projects - by a third generation of Hyolmo scholars, as it were (see, for instance, Gawne, 2010, 2011; Hari and Lama 2004; Sato, 2006, 2007; Torri, 2015). All of these writings, from the 1980s on, have worked to articulate various features of Hyolmo life while indirectly shoring up the sense that Hyolmo people are a distinct ethnic group.

The authors of the current set of papers - Davide Torri, Lauren Gawne, and Seiko Sato - have made important contributions to our understanding of the lives, histories, and languages of Hyolmo peoples. Their essays offer insightful inquiries into particular aspects of the ongoing configurations of life among Hyolmo people. Change is the meta-theme here.

In his paper, “To Kill or not to Kill? Helambu valley as a ‘no kill’ zone, the issue of blood sacrifice and the transformation of ritual patterns in Hyolmo shamanism,” Davide Torri offers a fine reading of the “patterns of change” affecting Hyolmo approaches toward the shamanic rituals. In particular, he examines the ongoing debate surrounding the practice of animal sacrifice during healing rituals undertaken by bombo - the so called “red offering.” Torri has, through comprehensive ethnographic research, identified an ongoing transformation of the ritual patterns of Hyolmo shamanism, in which a number of interconnected factors - from the “identity revival process” at work to the display of a proper Buddhist identity and associated shifts in moral sensibilities - are making the practice of animal sacrifices morally problematic. The designation of animal sacrifice as a karmically negative act of killing entails a certain

rhetoric of the rejection of violence, wherein the moral trope of violence can become a “tool” to situate peoples and practices in certain ways. All of this, Torre notes, ties into the ways in which the Hyolmo region and its people are coming to be identified, vis-à-vis other lands and groups within the wider framework of Nepal. Thus it is clear that shamanic practices are transforming; they are coming to be more in line with the tenets and sensibilities of Tibetan Buddhism as practiced by village lamas and religious experts. The religious spectrum appears to be becoming more Buddhist, less shamanic.

In her essay “Yolmo Women on the Move,” Seika Sato looks at the changes that migration and labor and residence patterns have brought to the lives of Hyolmo women. In exploring gendered mobility in the contemporary world through the case of Hyolmo women from Nepal, Sato chronicles the reasons that women have sought to migrate and undertake work in foreign lands. In so doing, she observes a “sea change” that has occurred in the financial resources available to women, particularly in line with the ways in which women can earn money by traveling and working abroad. By contributing financially to their families’ households, their own status has been augmented. While it is clear that women are not always considered the equal of men, either at a societal level or within their families, the economic and social forces involved in the prospects of relocation and migrant work have, in general, led to greater gender equality. Once again, Hyolmo women are keenly aware of these historic changes and their implications. As one woman notes in the course of a life history interview with Sato, “It’s better, far better now than before....I really think I was born too early; I wish I had been born at the time when things are like now.” Sato writes perceptively of the lives and statuses of Hyolmo women. As such, her essay is a valuable ethnographic contribution to an understanding of gender and migration in a global context. It remains to be seen what will transpire for Hyolmo women in the years to come. But as Sato notes pointedly, Hyolmo women have “always been on the move,” as a consequence of marriage and the moves and displacements that life can bring.

Laura Gawne, in her paper “My name is Maya Lama/Hyolmo/Syuba’: Negotiating identity in Hyolmo diaspora communities,” offers a fascinating exploration of the Hyolmo diaspora communities in Lamjung and Ramechhan districts of Nepal. She traces their historical, cultural, and

linguistic relations and affinities with the Hyolmo communities in north central Nepal, and is able to shed significant light on the history and collective identity of these distinct groups, including the links between the language known as Kagate and the Hyolmo language spoken in the Hyolmo region. This research adds considerably to our understanding of the genealogies, history, and pluralities of people who now identify as “Hyolmo” or “Kagate,” in one form or another. Gawne also shows the ways in which in Lamjung, Hylomo speakers have sought to strengthen their ties to a Hyolmo identity, while in Ramechhap, many are engaged in constructing an identity as Syuba or Kagate. She clearly shows that “Hyolmo identity as a modern Tibetic ethnicity in Nepal is still being actively negotiated by its speakers.” In this respect, it will be interesting to see what identities, practices, and cultural sensibilities these different communities adopt and solidify in the coming years.

What does the future hold for Hyolmo people? Will the sense of a collective identity continue to be established and identified - leading, perhaps, to a concerted international Hyolmo identity? Will families continue to shift residences away from the Hyolmo region? Will there be a continued diasporic flow of lives away from Nepal? Will individuals and families live much of their lives outside of Nepal, or will they return after being away for years? Will people want to return to family homes in places like Sermatang and Melamchi? Will the earthquake that devastated in Nepal in April 2015 have lasting consequences for the Hyolmo region and its residents? What forms will the religious and cultural dimensions of people’s lives assume? Will the Hyolmo language continue to be spoken in households, generations from now? Will women come to have the same legal and economic rights as men?

It’s difficult to predict any of these possibilities in any certain way. The one thing that seems clear is that the forms of Hyolmo culture and collective life will continue to change, as will the sense and spirit of Hyolmo people, indeed of a Hyolmo people.

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To Kill or not to Kill? Helambu valley as a *no kill* zone, the issue of blood sacrifice and the transformation of ritual patterns in Hyolmo shamanism.

Davide Torri

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ABSTRACT

With this paper I want to highlight patterns of change that are affecting Hyolmo approaches towards shamanic rituals, especially the ongoing debate surrounding the practice of ritual sacrifice. While the issue is surely related to the conceptualisation of the Helambu valley as a Buddhist sacred land, the practice is also challenged by other factors. As a matter of fact, blood offering is increasingly seen as a despicable action and many shamans, influenced by Buddhist ideas and/or due to a certain degree of social pressure, are transforming and adapting their rituals in order to cope with this challenge to the very core of their every transaction with the spirit world. Among the other relevant factors that affect the perceptions and practices of blood sacrifice, the urbanisation of Hyolmo and their transformation into a urban middle class plays a role, as does the idealisation of the Helambu valley as a sacred space where both ritual activities involving animal sacrifice and the consumption of meat are strongly discouraged and socially sanctioned.

Shamanism and Buddhism among the Hyolmo

It is a well-known fact, as amply demonstrated in the works of several renowned scholars (Samuel 1993, Bellezza 2005, Ramble 2008, Balicki 2008), that Buddhism, encroaching and spreading across the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayan slopes and valleys, has incorporated indigenous, pre-existing religious complexes of a different nature, absorbed several elements from it in a constant process of adaptation, and introduced important changes in terms of beliefs and practices (Kapstein 2000, Kapstein and Dotson 2007, Heirman and Bumbacher 2007). In these processes, stretched over time and space, one of the main areas of conflict with the other religions has been the issue of animal sacrifice, the so-called 'red offering' (Tib. dmar chod). According to popular ideas, local deities prefer the red offering,

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consisting of blood and meat, over the white one. The shift from the red to the white one marks also a movement toward stabilisation, domestication and pacification of the aforementioned deities. The original domestication of territorial gods and spirits operated by Padmasambhava corresponds to their cooptation into the Buddhist sphere, while their preference for blood is considered a step back towards the supposed darkness of pre-Buddhist times. This liminal dimension of practices and beliefs is the realm of the shaman, subordinated to a Buddhist worldview that incorporates him and assigns him a space for his activities: shamanic local deities become local Buddhist worldly deities. Debate about the red offering has characterized the dialectic processes between Buddhism and other religions since its inception, when Buddhism started confronting and challenging other Indian religions on ethical grounds and took a clear stance on animal sacrifice (McDermott 1989, Keown 2005).

When Buddhism was introduced in Tibet it already had a long tradition of polemical writing against blood sacrifice and the cults based on these practices, involving the ritual worship of local deities and spirits which were still to be incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon, despite being degraded to a lower status (Ruegg 2008). The repertoire of texts rejecting the so-called red offering was adapted to the new environments and enriched by several texts directly aimed at the eradication of the heterodox rituals. This ideological and ethical struggle was directed against differing expressions of belief and spirituality and their religious agents, variously identified in the texts as *gshen* or followers of the *bön* religion (Martin 2001, van Schaik 2013), exponents of the village religion (Ramble 1990, 2008) and the heretic lamas of the Tibetan dark age of fragmentation (Dalton 2011).

Yet, despite their formal allegiance to Buddhism, the practice of animal sacrifice must have been very resilient among Buddhist communities of the Himalayas, and not an easy one to eradicate, as it probably was and still is grounded in the material and pragmatic needs of people concerned with daily survival, wealth and fertility issues (Mumford 1989, Balıkcı 2008)¹. Moreover, the practice continues to be a relevant part of the rich

1 In the works of Mumford (1989) and Balıkcı (2008), we see examples of similar patterns related to conflicting practices due to the co-presence of shamans and lamas among different groups, namely the Gurung of Nepal and the Lhopo of Sikkim (India). In one case, the Gurung shamanic religious specialists reclaim the right to perform the

repertoire of ritual techniques of what can be seen as the other half of Himalayan religions, a shamanic religious system,² or systems, which still thrives and reclaims its space despite countless efforts by numerous agents at eradication, appropriation and domestication (Riboli and Torri 2013). Among the Hyolmo, one such shamanic religious specialist is called *pombo* or *bombo*. The specific aim of this paper is to highlight patterns of change affecting Hyolmo shamanic rituals, especially in light of the ongoing debate surrounding the practice of ritual sacrifice.

The employment of ritual violence (including animal sacrifice) in the course of religious activities continues to be a major point of friction opposing the two different sets of ritual techniques (shamanic and Buddhist) characterising the village religion of the inhabitants of Helambu Valley, also known as Yolmo *beyul*. Although the two components of Hyolmo spiritual life are inherently different, they constitute, for the villagers, just different parts of same ensemble. This paper is limited to the analysis of the role of violence and animal sacrifice in the aforementioned shamanic rituals and the current trend which, at present, seems to be oriented towards the refusal and rejection of these practices, combined with a general aversion to animal killing in the valley.

Up to ten years ago animal sacrifice in the context of shamanic rituals seemed to be the norm, but due to concurrent, multiple factors including social change and the increased influence of Buddhism, the practice seems to be coming to an abrupt end. The increased influence of Buddhism is surely one of the key factors in the contemporary ethnic revival process

annual deer sacrifice for their ancestral deities, while the Buddhist clergy is trying to reformulate the local socio-religious sphere by incorporating the local deities into the wider classes of supernatural beings wandering through the six worlds. The adoption of a shared worldview, grounded on the theory of karma and revolving around the notion of *samsara*, offers the Gurung people as well as supernatural beings a gradual path toward salvation. Among the Lhobo, the field of religious activities is shared among different religious specialists (village lamas, pawo and bonghting), all of whom are looked upon with equal contempt by educated lamas from major religious establishments, since village practices and specialists seem to be concerned only with mundane, apotropaic activities revolving around local deities instead of pursuing the higher ethical aims of the *dharma*.

- 2 The presence of religious specialists, variously named, which we may collectively term “shamans” despite pertaining to many different religious systems yet showing similar features has been attested in many of the Himalayan cultures. See, for example, Balicki 2008, de Sales 1991, Desjarlais 1992, Hitchcock and Jones 1976, Höfer 1981, Holmberg 1996, Maskarinec 1995, Mumford 1989, Peters 1998, Riboli 2000, Riboli and Torri 2013.

and probably the cornerstone of the whole narrative that sustains, shapes and upholds Hyolmo identity. Increasingly, blood offerings are seen as despicable and many shamans, influenced by Buddhist ideas and/or due to a certain degree of social pressure, are transforming and adapting their rituals in order to cope with this challenge to the very core of every transaction with the spirit world. In order to understand what is at stake, it might be useful to look at two inter-related themes: firstly, the relationship between Hyolmo culture and the specific part of Nepalese landscape that the Hyolmo inhabit and claim as their ancestral land, in which their relatively recent history as a distinct group is rooted and which seems to constitute the source of all identity-related claims; secondly, how these ties with the landscape are activated to provide legitimate narratives to the unfolding process of ethnic revival, the invention of Hyolmo identity, in which large segments of the Hyolmo people are involved in an ongoing process of self-reflection, research and selection in order to define themselves vis-à-vis other groups and cultures in the wider framework of Nepalese civil society and state.

Hyolmo identity

Who are the Hyolmo? In order to provide the reader with a working notion and at the same time permit an analysis and discussion of the specific topic of this paper, I will limit myself to an extremely concise definition which despite its brevity still retains some conceptual validity: the Hyolmo could be identified with a particular group of families from Helambu who link their distinct identity to a specific part of Nepal, and who refer to a set of sacred stories that place this Himalayan valley in the wider context of Buddhist sacred history and provide them with a more or less homogenous and coherent shared memory. The symbolic and practical values binding local communities to specific landscapes have been already fruitfully analysed (see, for example Ramble, 1997 and 2008) and I will not delve further into this: it will suffice here to note that the Hyolmo, as many other communities, retain a specific relationship with the landscape. It is worth noting that the Helambu Valley, or *yol mo gangs ra*, the ‘secret land screened by snowy peaks’, seems to be tied to the Buddhist arch-narrative related to the great mystic and master credited with the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet, Guru Padmasambhava (Blondeau 1980, Dalton 2004). During the eight century C.E. Padmasambhava, together with others,

apparently chose this place as a hidden valley for retreat, meditation, and refuge in time of danger, foreseeing a gloomy future, and prepared the area by hiding holy texts (Tib. *gter ma*) and various kinds of relics. The very same valley was also one of the retreat places of the great yogi Milarepa (Quintman 2008), during the Twelfth Century C.E. So carefully prepared and recursively blessed by the great masters of the past, the secret land was then finally opened by the 15th Century *tertön* Ngagchang Shakya Zangpo – known for the renovation of the Bodhnath *stūpa* carried out in the Kathmandu Valley, and the establishment of the Yolmo *tulku* lineage (Ehrhard 1990 and 2013). From this preliminary sketch, the importance attributed by the Hyolmo to the connection between their land – a sacred hidden land – and overarching Buddhist narratives that reach far beyond this small plot of land, deep into the ancient history of Tibet and Nepal, appears very clearly. In specific ethnographic literature, the Hyolmo seem to be late newcomers. In previous literature they were in fact simply known as Helambu Sherpa (Bista, 1972, Goldstein 1975) or Helambu Lamas (Clarke 1980a, 1980b). During the 1990s, several scholars started using the ethnonym Yolmo (Desjarlais 1992, 2003, Ehrhard 1990, 2013, Gawne 2010, 2011, Sato 2006, 2007), which is an exact transliteration of the Tibetan name of the Helambu valley. More recently, community associations started using the word Hyolmo, which appears to be a transliteration from the Nepalese (*devanāgarī*) script. It is with this term that they are now officially recognised by state agencies.

Let us now turn to the socio-political environment of contemporary Nepal, which affects notions and attempts at defining specific identities among several minorities of the country. After two successful democratic movements (one in the 1990s and one in the 2000s), a protracted civil war (Hutt 2004, Lecomte-Tilouine 2013), the fall of the Hindu monarchy and the following process of re-writing the Constitution, Nepal has witnessed a flourishing of movements reclaiming political spaces along deeply marked ethnic lines (Gellner et al. 2008). The rationale behind this phenomenon is that the Hindu monarchy was engaged in a long-term process or project of sanskritisation (Srinivas 1952), in order to create a national identity along the values and the aims of the high caste groups that constitute the upper societal segments of the Kingdom (Höfer 1979) and, to a certain extent, the people's war and the democratic secular movements represented a political answer to that project. In this process,

which is still unfolding and at least to a certain extent is hindering the writing of the new Constitution, all groups, but especially those groups gathered under the umbrella-organisation of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), have been involved in the collective effort to achieve a definition of their specific traits, features, and customs and the preservation, revitalisation and display of cultural heritages (Lawoti & Hangen 2013).

In the case of the Hyolmo, the identity revival process is conducted mainly by well-educated, relatively wealthy and politically active urban elites, and a certain kind of Buddhist heritage seems to constitute the main factor with which they articulate their cultural distinctiveness and specificity. This process of coming closer and closer to Buddhist orthodoxy has been sparked not only by the close proximity to Buddhist institutions in Bodhnath, where they live side by side with different Buddhist communities, establishments and traditions, especially those linked to the very powerful and rich web of Monasteries built by the Tibetan diaspora, but also by the resettlement of a significant part of the population of Helambu/Yolmo in the Kathmandu Valley in recent years. Becoming more orthodox, moreover, helps them to claim a higher status in relation to other communities, as in the case of the Tamang, with whom they are often neighbours both in Helambu and in Kathmandu³.

In this cultural and social project, the display of a “proper” Buddhist identity is in tension with the other part of their religious and spiritual life, a set of shamanic practices and beliefs revolving around the complex figures of specific religious specialists locally known as *pombo* or *bombo*. It is worth noting that Hyolmo society is made up of several patrilineal clans, of whom the highest status is attributed to the so called *lama rigs pa*: traditionally, in fact, Hyolmo Buddhism was centered on non-celibate village lamas who transmitted their religious role and knowledge⁴ from

3 Hyolmo settlements in Helambu are near to villages inhabited by other communities, especially Tamang and Hindu low castes. Although both Tamang and Hyolmo are Buddhists, the latter claim a superior status derived from religious authority and the maintenance of religious shrines and temples. Historically, the land on which these shrines were built was granted or donated by Kathmandu kings in exchange for ritual services. Over time, Hyolmo families in charge of the temples and shrines became a kind of landed gentry (Clarke 1980c).

4 Traditionally, Hyolmo lineage lamas are followers of the *jangter* (‘northern treasure’) transmission, started by *tertön* Rigzin Gödem (1337-1408), who was also the teacher

father to son and took care of village shrines, as the religious needs of their fellow villagers⁵. The other part of Hyolmo society, the patrilineal clans known collectively as *mangba rigs pa*, host and support the shamanic religious specialists, all the while adhering formally to Buddhism, too. Through the Hyolmo kinship system, we could say, multiple religious lineages flow: hereditary lamas on one side, and *bombo* lineages on the other, both further differentiated internally.

The upholding and displaying of Buddhism as the key factor of Hyolmo identity has greatly tarnished the legitimacy of *bombo* specialists, whose practices have begun to be considered superstitious and backward by well-educated and urbanised Hyolmo.

Hyolmo shamanism and the issue of sacrifice

A certain degree of antagonism has always characterised the relations between the two religious practices; however they should be considered a unified religious system, in which authority and legitimacy are evaluated by the sponsors of rituals, who contract the religious services of the lama or the *bombo* according to their own specific needs of the moment. The religious field of the Hyolmo, in fact, appears to be a unified whole of shifting asymmetries between the two poles represented by the religious specialists, each of them the upholder of a different ethical worldview. It must be noted, too, that Buddhism has the upper hand in this game: the more structured and organised religious establishment of the *dharmā*, relying on an elaborate written tradition and a wide set of rituals for nearly every aspect of the life of the people, enables the lama to fulfill nearly all the religious needs of the people, from divination to healing, exorcism, spiritual advice, and post-mortem rituals ensuring a smooth passage towards a new birth, perhaps closer to enlightenment.

The competition between the two systems is inscribed in witty tales about past confrontations between lamas and shamans, ranging from local memories to old myths, or even the famous race of Milarepa and

of Shakya Zangpo, the founder of the first shrine in Helambu. The *jangter* tradition is considered to be part of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism.

5 It should be noted that nowadays, several members of the younger generations seek religious education even inside the Tibetan monastic institutions, thus abandoning the tradition of the village lamas of Helambu/Yolmo. Moreover, monastic careers have been embraced by members of the *mangba rigs pa*, thus adding further level of complexity (i.e. the not uncommon case of a *bombo*'s son becoming a lama).

Naru Bon to the summit of Mt. Kailash (Oppitz 2013: 418-438). Among the Hyolmo, several stories testify this competition for hegemony, usually focusing on the privilege to, and the knowledge of how, to perform funeral rites. Almost invariably, the *bombo* has at the end to hand over the right to perform the proper *post mortem* rituals to the lama, while at the same time retaining the right to perform on behalf of the living. This corresponds to a religious division of labour which, while maintaining hierarchies, creates a space for a multiplicity of approaches, practices and beliefs. Both practices were considered legitimate, and even related to a certain extent: in the folkloric materials from Helambu, it is often mentioned that the lama and the *bombo* of the tales were, after all, brothers.

Hyolmo shamanism, which could also be termed a form of popular⁶ *Bön*, seems to be based on the worship and appeasement of ancestral other-than-human beings on behalf of the community. The whole host of these beings has been defined, according to Buddhist cosmology, under the collective name of worldly deities, still subject to the whims of karmic bondage, and extremely capricious in their relations with human beings: *klu*, *btsan*, *bdud*, and the like, together with the lords of the soil, the *sa bdag*, the mountain warrior-deities, the malevolent ghosts and various other entities inhabit, haunt and share the same space where human beings trod. The *bombo*'s role is that of mediator, negotiating for the wellbeing of his sponsors with the host of benevolent, ambiguous, menacing or overtly evil beings populating the cosmos. These beings, in fact, are thought to be responsible for many disruptions, misfortunes, disgraces, and for the spreading of various kinds of illness. In daily life, villagers are exposed to multiple interactions with the host of beings inhabiting the environment. Walking to and from the forest or across the streams, for example, is a common activity that may easily result in a contact with one of the non-human entities: a kind of encounter that could become inauspicious if

6 The expression *popular* or *village bön*, is used here in the sense of a non-Buddhist tradition that shows very similar traits to religious complexes that are elsewhere denominated as shamanism, and especially those of Northern Asia (Mongolia, Siberia, etc.). This was acknowledged by Balikci (2008: 12-17) in her study of village religion in Sikkim, and by Samuel (2013: 78-97) in a clarifying paper in which he shows the multiple areas of application to which the word *bön* could be fruitfully applied, and identifying at least five different contexts: 1) ancient *bön* and *gshen* in Dunhuang materials; 2) organised tradition of *yungdrung bön*; 3) invoker, conjurer-priest of the Himalayas; 4) shamans (i.e. Tamang *bombo*, etc.); 5) Buddhist negative stereotypes of *bön*.

not undertaken with the necessary precautions. The same can be said for numerous economic activities related to the land, from agriculture to hunting. At any time human beings are exposed to the actions of the non-human agents, who punish any misbehavior, pollution, or breaking of a taboo almost automatically. Several entities, then, feed on human life-forces or go hunting for souls. A specific folk illness, common across South and South-East Asia and beyond, is the so called soul-loss syndrome⁷: many shamanic rituals are devoted to the recovery and reintegration of the lost soul into the human body. Shamans are responsible also for the annual rituals related to specific clan deities and ancestors, as well for performing divination to answer the many doubts that may arise in the course of the life of the individual.

Animal sacrifices in the context of shamanic rituals are mainly related to the outcome of a series of events culminating in a healing rite that involves exchange between the human and the other-than-human. Schematically, the typical sequence of events could be summarised as follows: 1) a problem arises; 2) a divination is performed; 3) if the outcome of the divination shows the involvement of other-human entities, or is a result of witchcraft or ascribed to planetary influence 4) a ritual is often performed to deal with the forces held responsible. This ritual often involves exorcism or appeasement, or both, to solve the crisis. In the Tibetan context, such rituals are commonly called “ransom rituals”.⁸

Shamanic rituals are usually held at the house of the patient, who is responsible for all the expenses, and providing the elements used in the rite itself, along with food and drink for all the people who attend the ritual, and compensation in goods or cash for the *bombo*, who is usually accompanied by his attendants or helpers. Rituals are typically a nocturnal affair, conducted mainly from sunset till the first hours of dawn. In case of prolonged rituals, requiring more days to be completed, the shaman stops performing at daybreak, only to resume the following evening. The purified ritual space is prepared by introducing specific elements arranged according to a schema that is supposed to recreate the cosmic

7 On the topic of soul-loss among the Hyolmo see Desjarlais 1992, while for a general discussion on the topic, related to the Buddhist Himalayan contexts, see Gerke 2007.

8 As such, they are performed also by Buddhist lamas, with the main difference being that the substitute for the afflicted individual is an effigy (Cabezón 2010: 20) while in shamanic contexts it is a real animal.

order: dough images of deities and spirits are prepared and arrayed on a tray, together with cups of home-made liquor, grain (wheat, corn, rice), eggs, juniper twigs, and incense-burners. Everything is temporary and used only during the performance of the ritual: after it is over and the deities and spirits involved have been dismissed, no sign is left on the sanctified ground to show that the space was used for any ritual purpose.

If the ritual involves the sacrifice of a living being (generally a chicken or a goat), the act of killing itself will be conducted outside the house, generally near a crossroads, to make it difficult for the negative entities, lured outside the house by the promise of blood and meat, to retrace their way to the house and to the human host. As a precaution, the way back to the house is also disguised with branches, or by tracing crosses on it to mislead the hungry entities and prevent them coming back inside. The logic of shamanic ritual, in this regard, is quite straightforward: a life for a life, blood for blood, flesh for flesh and once appeased, the spirit must be sent away.

The shamanic rituals are usually performed with a therapeutic aim. Illness is mainly conceived as the intrusion of a pathogenic agent – an evil, malignant being, feeding on the life energies, soul-forces, breath, flesh, bone and marrow of the patient or sponsor, gnawing his or her internal organs or causing madness. Illness in itself could be conceived as a form of possession. In many cosmologies of the Himalayas, in fact, illness seems to be the domain of malevolent other-than-human beings. Furthermore it could be also inflicted on human beings by deities who usually play a more benevolent role towards human beings: if forgotten, neglected, not properly worshipped, or if their sacred places are trespassed without acknowledging them or, even worse, if those very same places are polluted, they can react hastily, inflicting illness and disgrace upon the trespassers. The illness inflicted, physically located inside the human body, could also be linked to a very specialised pathological scheme mirroring the cosmological distribution of those other-than-human entities inside and outside the human body: subterranean beings are known to attack the legs and veins, lords of the middle land affect the torso and the breathing system, higher entities strike the head, the eyes and the mind (see also Desjarlais 1992). In this process, the shaman acts as a warrior-exorcist: With his physical and spiritual weapons, aided by shamanic ancestors and other powerful spiritual beings, he attempts to

defeat, banish, scare away or force into a truce the intrusive agent. The health of the patient, usually the sponsor of the ritual, must be either won or negotiated. The rite in fact may consist of multiple phases, involving adorcism, which may be a voluntary, desired or curative possession by a spirit (i.e. conjuring of helping spirits, ancestor and protective deities) along with the calling of the evil spirit held responsible for the illness in order to negotiate the release of the patient and exorcism (its banishing) after appeasement. Appeasement is usually obtained through the offering of a ritual substitute: the life, blood, flesh of an animal is offered as ransom for the life of the patient, as already mentioned.

Another set of rituals focuses on healing an illness called “soul loss syndrome” in the anthropological literature. To retrieve the soul (life forces, life breath, vital energies, etc.), the shaman has to travel through different dimensions and worlds, including the underworld. Often, the soul is, here too, a ransom has to be offered: the life of an animal.

Changing the pattern: toward the suppression of the blood offering

Unchallenged for many years, this ritual pattern has for the past fifteen years or so been subject to increasing criticism,⁹ and has declined very rapidly. Indeed it is, not only shamanic activities, but every act involving the spilling of blood that has become a sensitive issue. With the revival of Buddhism linked to Hyolmo identity, and the spiritual relevance the landscape has been endowed with through the renewed recognition of being a land blessed by Padmasambhava (H. *beyul*), the villagers have stopped consuming meat and killing their farmyard animals. The village of Timbu on the way to upper Helambu, is virtually the last place where meat can still be consumed. Like other parts of Nepal (i.e. Khumbu and Tsum areas), local Buddhist communities refrain from consuming meat in places they consider to be particularly holy, and especially in those connected to Guru Padmasambhava. Among the Sherpa of Khumbu, for

9 While the practice itself was not directly challenged, it was frowned upon by village lamas. In the Buddhist view, the worldly deities and local spirits are still embedded in the wheel of rebirth, and as such still subject to laws of causality and dependent origination: as all the other sentient beings, they are still following the laws of karmic retribution. Feeding them with blood and flesh, according to lamas' perceptions, amounts to satisfying their dark appetites and cravings, thus distracting them from the path towards enlightenment they supposedly undertook once tamed and domesticated by Padmasambhava.

example, meat is still available due to the presence of lodges and guest-houses for foreign trekkers heading up to the Everest Base Camp, but there is a growing campaign against it, so that most of the meat is brought up by porters from the plains below. This is something different than the legal ban on slaughtering cattle under monarchic rule: it is a deliberate ban on animal slaughter by local communities who embrace Buddhism and inhabit areas of Nepal which they believe are infused with spiritual powers by Padmasambhava. The decision is made by local village committees and enforced only through social pressure, a process that started around 15 years ago. It should also be noted that Hyolmo lama voices are hegemonic in the villages, and they actively supported the social ban on killing. There is neither any law nor authority checking the activities of slaughtering for meat consumption, or ritual activities. Because of this, it cannot be ruled out that, privately, some households still kill animals for rituals or simply for food. It is common knowledge, for example, that animal sacrifices are even in some villages on the left ridges overlooking the Melamchi river. On the other hand, I can testify that meat was never part of the meals in any of the households I visited during fieldwork . As an example, let me relate what I heard in September 2014:

During the summer, towards the end of the monsoon season, some workers were building a road linking two villages in Helambu. They were not locals, but rather called from outside, and they came up with a bulldozer. Their daily wages included food, and they asked that meat be part of the meal. We agreed on a meal including chicken. You know, if we give them meat they will work better. So we bought a chicken in Melamchipul Bazaar, and brought it up here, to them, where they usually had their meals. The chicken was already dead, but the cook had to take away all the feathers from the body, in order to cook it. Few hours later a woman (the owner of the plot of land next to the road construction site) came along the road, saw the feathers on her land, and began shouting. She was furious, believing the workers had killed the chicken in her fields. She went back to the village and called for a village meeting, supported by other women. They asked, "Who will cleanse the land from the pollution derived from killing a chicken there? The land is polluted now!" Only after a long discussion the issue was settled. The cook explained that the

chicken was already dead, and that he was just cleaning it to cook it, and people were satisfied with the explanation. The chicken was killed in Melamchi, and not in Upper Helambu.¹⁰

The act of killing is seen as especially polluting, and thus it has been banned by the community. It underlies a fundamental change of attitude regarding violence, or, specifically, the killing of animals (sentient beings) according to a Buddhist perspective. The people of Helambu, it should be added, are not vegetarian. Whenever they have the chance, they choose to eat meat. But they have adopted a very clear stance about killing animals (and not only for ritual purposes) in their daily life, and especially in the land they inhabit, because of its intrinsic sacred qualities. Once I was walking on what used to be a road, before the Spring 2015 earthquake, with a friend originally from a village near Sermathang, but now living in the Kathmandu valley, when he told me this story:

I once attended the marriage of a friend with my cousin, and we brought some meat and whiskey with us, for the wedding party. It was sunset when we reached here, and very dark. The road to the village is not long, as you can see, but that night it took us ages to reach here. At some point, not even halfway, we stopped, because there was something wrong with the road. It was never ending and we were not making any progress. It was scary! Then we realised what it was: we were carrying the meat, that's why! We threw it away, and started the motorbike again. This time we were able to make some progress and reach the village. The morning after, I went back looking here and there for the bag with the meat I had thrown away, but it was nowhere to be found. The deities of the land were probably enraged because we had polluted the area".¹¹

It seems the moral ban on killing and meat is a self-sustaining subject, enforced through self-regulation by the people themselves, and even enlarging its field of action.

This is not an entirely new phenomenon, but rather an expansion of the field of moral imperatives already present in Hyolmo communities.

¹⁰ Personal communication, Bodhnath, September 2014.

¹¹ Personal communication, Sermathang, Sept. 2014.

H Yolmo society is split into two main groups¹² as mentioned before, to which different kinship units belong. Members of the lama *riba* always refrained from killing animals, but they were not and are not vegetarians: whenever they wanted to eat meat before, they asked a member of the *mangba riba* to kill an animal, and consumed meat even in the villages. Nowadays, most people in Yolmo society have aligned themselves with the upper segments of the Yolmo social structure, and have adopted the lama *riba* attitude toward killing and the consumption of meat. As a result, the Helambu Valley is becoming a no kill zone: it is almost impossible to find someone willing to slaughter an animal.

This attitude towards killing has, in turn, had a huge impact on shamanic rituals and on *bombo* who are active in the area. Much social pressure has been directed towards them. Yolmo identity seems to have been oriented mainly along Buddhist lines, and its coming closer, as we have seen, to a kind of Buddhist orthodoxy, due to the greater influence of educated lamas. Because of this, *bombo* practices have been changing themselves, and not only in Helambu. Even Yolmo shamans performing their rituals in the Kathmandu valley have altered their ritual patterns to meet the general consensus of the society.

Although Buddhism has become the pivotal trait the Yolmo have chosen to represent themselves, and shamanism seems to be losing ground, both in Helambu and in the Kathmandu valley, *bombo* practices here and there have shown a high level of resilience, and their main traits seem to be the ability to cope with change and to adapt. How do they cope with the ban on killing, which tends to undermine their role as religious specialists and foster their decline? In a long history of confrontation and mutual adaptation, Buddhism has often tried to appropriate shamanic practices, while at the same time eradicating some of its irreconcilable aspects, like animal sacrifice, which has often been at the forefront of confrontation between the two systems.

In relation to the issue of blood sacrifice, which has been practically banned in Helambu (with a few exceptions: it seems that shamans on the

12 This split is actually overcome through marriage alliances between lama and *mangba riba*. But it should be acknowledged that this is perceived as a substantial change in status, and marrying into the lama *riba* is considered a social advancement. This kind of upward social mobility also promotes alignment with the ideas, beliefs and customs of the upper segments of the Yolmo society.

left side of the valley divided by the Melamchi Khola still retain the blood sacrifice as part of their ritual repertoire¹³), the ritual pattern has been altered in order to be accommodated into the new context.

The first time I heard a *bombo* talking about the issue of blood sacrifice was in 2008. Being quite old, he was not practising anymore, except for smaller rituals not involving trance or possession states. Here, as elsewhere in Nepal, such states involve the violent shaking of the body. Given the duration of many shamanic rituals, such shaking requires high levels of stamina and endurance, and above a certain age it is common for shamans to stop performing the rituals that require it. The *bombo* told me that there were two different kinds of *bön*: white and black. “White” *bön* refrained from killing and sacrifices, black *bön*, deemed necessary to deal with powerful and dangerous entities, was largely based on animal sacrifice. He also gave a historical explanation of sorts:

At the time of the first king of Tibet, sacrifices were done. This is because the gods were asking for a red offering. People at that time were ignorant and they started using blood. But the gods were actually asking just for anything red. From that first mistake, the practices of black *bön* evolved. Then, much later, Shenrab came to establish the white *bön*.¹⁴

His explanations were very interesting, since they drew a direct connection between his own practices and the *jungdrung bön*. He also showed me some booklets from the Triten Norbutse Monastery, located at the other end of the Kathmandu Valley. It should also perhaps be mentioned that one of his sons was a very accomplished *gelugpa* monk, which might have influenced his reflection about his own practice and how it was related to the religious culture of Tibet. At that time I had documented several rituals which included animal sacrifice, and I quickly dismissed his statement, not realising that it hinted at future changes that would be important to the *bombo* of the Hyolmo community.

After a few years, it became obvious to me that contemporary Tibetan

13 One possible explanation could be the distance from the main Buddhist settlements in the area, Sermathang Tarkhegyang and nearby villages, where Buddhist shrines are located and the majority of the population is belonging to the lama *riba* groups.

14 M.B., personal communication, Bodhnath, 16 April 2008.

influences (both Buddhist and *Bön*), sparked by the Hyolmo revival, were consistently opening inroads into Hyolmo shamanism. So I decided to consult several *bombo* on this topic, both in the Kathmandu Valley and in the Helambu villages.

In 2014, I interviewed B.P., a famous Hyolmo *bombo*, who is a member of a renowned lineage of powerful shamans, and I had heard that he, too, had ceased to perform the blood offering. In a previous interview with him in 2008, he told me that animal sacrifice was not always necessary, but that in case of very serious illness he could see no other way than a sacrifice to save a sick person's life. In September 2014, he framed the same concepts in a very different manner: the red offering does not necessarily need to be the blood/animal sacrifice, he said:

It could be anything red: powder, fruits, flowers, coloured ribbons etc. I have tried. I have been performing the rituals in exactly the same way, but without any killings. The ritual works even if I don't use blood. Spirits are happy even without it.¹⁵

B.P. is one of the more charismatic and respected *bombo* among the Hyolmo. He was a disciple of M.B., whom I interviewed in 2008, so it was only natural that he followed the trajectory hinted at by his *guru* seven years previously. In the recent years, B.P. has been engaged in various activities related to the preservation, as he says, of the heritage of Hyolmo shamans: organising collective rituals, discussing with fellow *bombo* specialists, comparing their knowledge, and also entertaining relations with Tamang shamans¹⁶. He was also actively campaigning for the end of animal sacrifices, and probably it was partly through his popularity, speeches and deeds that the substitution of a real animal with an effigy, smeared with red powder, or an egg, was becoming a reality.

Of course the whole process was not without some resistance. In some upper villages the practice continues, even in the Helambu valley. For example Mehme P. (83 years old), an old *bombo* who is not performing rituals anymore, said,

15 Personal communication. Tinchuli, 12 September 2014.

16 These aspects of his activities were something completely new: ritual knowledge was traditionally regarded as secret, and shamans were known to be extremely suspicious of sharing it with their colleagues.

People do many things. They do this and they do that. I think we do not have to listen to others. We should do what has to be done, according to our knowledge, according to the teachings we have received. A sacrifice is not always necessary, but in serious circumstances, or when dealing with very powerful beings, a red offering has to be done. Now I am not doing rituals anymore, although you can see my drums are still here (he points to two shamanic drums hanging from a nail on the wall). If I were called to perform again, I would do as I always did, according to what I know.

His words summarise his position, which we could term traditional in the strict sense. What other *bombo* living in Kathmandu valley or even in nearby villages were doing, was none of his business. Although the concept of *beyul*, the sacred land, and the ban on killing animals for food on one side, and the ritual killing by shamans on the other are two topics that are not necessarily related, there is an obvious connection which could also offer an explanation to the aforementioned persistence of animal sacrifice (and presumably consumption) in the villages on the left side of the valley: the revival of ideas about the sacred land (*beyul*) is part of the socio-political revival of the Hyolmo as a minority group seeking recognition by the state, and as such it is essentially an urban phenomenon which was later projected onto the Helambu settlements¹⁷. This revival has centered on the assertion of an organic link with a specific Buddhist heritage, from which the Hyolmo *bombo* were initially excluded. While *bombo* living in urban areas felt much pressure to adapt to the new frames of Hyolmone-ness, those living in villages detached from the Buddhist shrines and from the influences of the lama *riba* families may not feel the same degree of pressure to conform to the new norms.

In other cases, the decision to relinquish animal sacrifice seems to respond to more individual concerns and experiences. Mingmar B., for example, worked in the fields, and together with his wife had a small lodge along the path leading to Milarepa's meditation cave¹⁸. In his mid-fifties,

17 Due to the proximity of Helambu to Kathmandu valley, the ancestral land of the Hyolmo has been interested by depopulation in favour of the Kathmandu suburbs of Bodhnath, Tinchuli, Chuchchepati, Jorpati.

18 Unfortunately, his fields and lodge were wiped away by a landslide during the Spring 2015 earthquake.

he is still an active shaman. In certain months, he is actually so busy with rituals that he has little time for his fields. When asked about the animal sacrifice, he replied very frankly,

Since ten years I do not perform animal sacrifices anymore. Actually, since I heard a speech by the Dalai Lama in Ladakh. I was greatly impressed by him. Before, I was always doing animal sacrifice. I cannot even count the chickens and goats I have sacrificed. At least a hundred goats, at least! Chickens I have no idea how many. Now this is over. I am still performing many rituals. As I told you, sometimes I have no time for myself, there are so many are the people asking me to perform (rituals) for the clan-deities. But I do not kill anymore”.¹⁹

His explanation was linked to the crucial event of hearing the Dalai Lama, which made him reflect on his karmic debts. As noted above, although the Hyolmo *bombo* adhere to Buddhism, they are at the same time conscious of following another tradition, which they regard as their own even though they don't expressly name it. They perceive it as separated from the *dharma*, but still legitimate. Being a *bombo*, after all, is a part-time affair: when they are not performing they engage in their own economic activities, and even attend Buddhist rituals. Several of them also maintain Buddhist altars in their homes.

This open approach is exemplified by Mehme Dindup B. In his sixties, he is still a very strong man, smart and bold and always trying to have the last say in a conversation:

'I am a herder, I have many goats and yaks. I spend much time with them in the forest. One day, six or seven years ago, a very famous lama (Chatral Rimpoche) came here, and I went to pay homage to him. He was very famous. All the villagers were going to see him, to receive blessings from him. I brought cheese and milk, as an offering. These are the products of my work, so I brought them to him as a present. He asked my name, and when I said I am M.D.B., he said, "Oh, you are the very famous *bombo*, is it?" He knew about me. He told me I was doing a very good job in helping people, but he added also that I should stop

19 Personal communication, Upper Helambu, 14 September 2014.

performing animal sacrifices. “You have to keep to your true mission, which is to help people. You are from the *Bön kar* (White Bön). Refrain from practicing the *Bön nak* (black Bön). Your true tradition is the *Bön kar*, from Tibet”. After that, I stopped the sacrifices’.

Again, as in the previous case, it was the encounter with a renowned Buddhist lama, in this case Chatral Rimpoche²⁰, where the *bombo* appears very gratified by the recognition of his powers and deeds by the famous tantric *yogi*, which, apparently, succeeded in convincing him of the existence of two ways of the *bön*, the white one being more beneficial to the ritual specialist and to sentient beings (that is, more in line with Buddhist precepts) than the black one.

It seems that the movement against animal sacrifice is widespread amongst the Hyolmo, and that the *bombo* must learn to cope with multiple factors entailing social pressure and individual feelings. In their explanations we generally find two kinds of motivations: the first one is that rituals seem to be working even without the employment of violent techniques and the slaughtering of sacrificial animals. In many of the rituals I have witnessed recently, the living animal offered to the other-than-human has been replaced in various ways. In several instances I have seen the shamans using an egg, or a dough image (Tib. *gtor ma*) representing a yak or another ritual victim. All the shamans tend to make a clear statement about the ritual efficaciousness, which seem to be unaltered despite the substitution of a real animal with its representation; secondarily, the shamans also point to a specific event of their life after which they stopped killing animals. In many of the cases, this event was an encounter with a famous lama. Every shaman seems to be aware of this movement and they apparently engage in collective discussions on this topic with other shamans, fellow villagers, relatives and Buddhist lamas.

Conclusion

The use of violence (practical, symbolical, conceptual) has deep implications for the social positioning of agents, victims and witnesses. It

20 Chatral Sangye Dorje (1913-2015) was a renowned *yogi* tantric specialist, active in establishing retreat centers throughout the Himalayas, including one in Helambu valley. He was also known for his advocacy of vegetarianism and his opposition to animal sacrifices.

draws, defends, expands, bridges and/or negotiates boundaries between different parts of the Hyolmo culture and society. Religious violence has, after all, often played an important role in defining and contesting legitimacies in Nepal as elsewhere (Riches 1986: 11, Mumford 1989). Rituals constitute nodes where societal modalities are reflected upon, enforced, contested and even redefined, and shamanic rituals are no exception to this (Riboli and Torri 2013: 4).

Amongst the Hyolmo, a movement rejecting sacrificial violence opened up huge gaps in the shamanic tradition, subordinating it once more, and in a deeper way, to the Buddhist ideology, an important factor defining Hyolmo culture. It implies the acknowledgement and the acceptance that the Buddhist view is ethically superior, and that killing has to be avoided because of the karmic bonds it produces, the negative effects it has on all the sentient beings involved (both human and non-human), and the ritual pollution it creates. The *bombo* shares these views, despite the fact that his practices are grounded in a different perspective. While there is adherence to the Buddhist notions of non-violence, and also to the Buddhist view that local spirits should not be appeased – and corrupted – by blood offerings, at the same time this process of adaptation to the new ideas also shows the innate resilience of the shamanic complex, which is trying to cope with a swift and deep change. From a local rural society, the Helambu Sherpa, as they were known to outsiders until recently, have become the Nepal Hyolmo, a urban group that is economically quite successful in the Kathmandu Valley, and at the forefront of many NEFIN²¹ efforts and events to represent and display Nepal's ethnic diversity.

Ritual violence in the context of Hyolmo shamanic rituals can be understood as a position marker: its adoption or rejection indexes the position of the performers in a wider web of social relations. A shaman who sacrifices animals is pushed further to the margins, in line with the Buddhist tenets that constitute a relevant part of Hyolmo identity-building process. The reasoned rejection of animal sacrifice, on the other hand, can be seen as a means for coping with such change, a strategy of adaptation consciously chosen in order to react to marginalisation²².

21 Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, an umbrella organisation which includes dozens of *janajati Adivasi* groups.

22 The marginalisation invoked here is actually also a political one: besides being a *bombo*, a Hyolmo shaman is first and foremost a member of his community, especially

Will shamanic rituals, in the eyes of their sponsors, retain the same popularity, validity and efficaciousness as before? Despite so many statements that blood offering is not required, shamanic rituals have already undergone several changes to adapt to the new urban context, including the length of the rites (which has been shortened), the time frame (during the day instead of night), and the display of paraphernalia and proper shamanic dress (simplified and kept to the minimum to travel on public means of transportation in the Kathmandu Valley). Some old shamans, when confronted with the evidence of a failed healing ritual, and especially when engaging in debates about shamanic healing and western medicine, already point out the most obvious of the answers: the rituals should not have been changed²³. The same complaints could theoretically come from sponsors, who might not be willing to pay for what they could perceive as incomplete rituals, although in my experience this has never happened: sponsors and patients do not usually argue with shamans on the content, legitimacy, or efficaciousness of their practices. Essentially, the popularity of a shaman is dependent on his results as perceived by his sponsors, and on his ability to perform rituals. And of course, everybody knows that the trend could also be reversed at any time, due to changing conditions.

On the other hand, the debate, facilitated by living in close proximity, often in the same suburbs, has sparked a great exchange among usually solitary and reticent *bombo*, who now even organise community rituals and collective pilgrimages, and who make themselves visible at Buddhist and Hindu sacred sites, setting in motion a process of display and exchange of shamanic knowledge never seen before. This collective dimension of ritual action in the public sphere is quite a new phenomenon: in several organised political rallies taking place in the Kathmandu valley it is now possible to see groups of shamans parading together in full regalia to demonstrate for political issues like federalism, secularism and minority rights, under the banner of their various ethnic organizations or of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities. The increase in activities related to the public and collective sphere highlights the role of shamans as conscious agents

in a period of ethnic activism. Religious and social marginalisation never hampered shamanic practices, which instead seem to linger, and sometimes even thrive, even in the worst conditions.

23 On ritual efficacy, see Sax 2010.

involved in the processes affecting their communities, able not only to cope with change at ritual level, but also organising themselves in order to have a say over strategic matters in the definition, assertion and representation of ethnic identity.

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'My name is Maya Lama/Hyolmo/Syuba': Negotiating identity in Hyolmo diaspora communities

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ABSTRACT

Hyolmo communities have resided in the Lamjung and Ramechhap districts of Nepal for at least a century, and are part of a historical trend of group migration away from the Hyolmo homelands. These communities have taken different approaches to constructing their identities as belonging to the Hyolmo diaspora; in Lamjung, people readily identify as Hyolmo, while in Ramechhap people accept their Hyolmo history, but have also developed an identity as Kagate (and now Syuba). In this paper I trace these groups' migration histories. I then look at the variety of names used in reference to these communities, which helps us to understand their historical and contemporary relationships with Hyolmo. Finally, I examine contemporary cultural and linguistic practices in Ramechhap and Lamjung, to see how communities perform their identity as Kagate or Hyolmo, and as modern Buddhists of Tibetan origin in Nepal.

Introduction

The majority of Hyolmo speakers reside in the Nuwakot, Sindhupalchok and Rasuwa districts of Nepal, to the north of Kathmandu, but there are also sustained populations that have lived in other areas for several generations, including Lamjung, Ramechhap and Ilam in Nepal, and Darjeeling in India. In this paper I discuss the Hyolmo¹ community in Lamjung, and the *Kagate* community in Ramechhap, and how they negotiate their identities as both separate groups and members of the

1 In this paper I use the spelling Hyolmo as the default variant in keeping with the other authors of this volume, although in my own work I use the spelling *Yolmo*, particularly in relation to the Lamjung community. There are a variety of different spellings in Roman script, including Hyolmo, Yohlmo, Yholmo and Yolmo. The first three options all attempt to use 'h' to capture the low tone, which gives words a breathy quality. As the degree of breathiness varies with different pronunciations, I choose to omit it from my orthography.

Hyolmo diaspora. The quote in the title of this paper is taken from an interview with a Ramechhap woman and demonstrates that current self-identification in these communities is anything but straightforward. I start with an outline of the political context of ethnicity in Nepal (Section 2) and the histories of Hyolmo migration (Section 3). I then look at how community labels serve as an important tool for identifying shifting attitudes towards ethnic identity (Section 4), before illustrating these attitudes with illustrations from contemporary cultural practices and language use (Section 5).

With this contextual information in mind, I look at the nomenclature that each community uses, and how it highlights the attitudes of each community to their relationship with the main Hyolmo population. In Lamjung, Hyolmo speakers have sought to strengthen their identity as Hyolmo, while in Ramechhap many are engaged in constructing a new identity as *Syuba* or *Kagate*, which is also strongly grounded in their Hyolmo roots. Overall, in this paper I demonstrate that Hyolmo identity as a modern Tibetic ethnicity in Nepal is still actively negotiated by its speakers, by drawing on history, geography, religion, language and self-identification. I focus in particular on the linguistic manifestation of ethnic identity, both with regard to what names speakers use to identify themselves, and how they use and perceive their mother tongue.

The Lamjung community is comprised of around 700 people living across half a dozen villages a few hours walk to the west of Besisahar, the main city of the Lamjung district. In the last few years, there has been heavy attrition in the number of speakers living in these traditional villages, as recent migration patterns have seen speakers move to towns and cities, as well as overseas, for employment. This community now identify themselves as speakers of Hyolmo. In Ramechhap the language is more often referred to as *Kagate* (or *Syuba*), although as I demonstrate in Section 5, this language is mutually intelligible with, and can be considered a variety of, Hyolmo. The Ramechhap population is much more stable than in Lamjung, with around 1000 speakers in ten villages, and there is much less long-term or permanent migration away from these home villages. There also appears to be less erosion of *Kagate* as the language of daily use.

Speakers from these regions appear to have always been aware of their Hyolmo origins, although in many ways the assertion of Hyolmo identity is either relatively recent, or in a state of concerted negotiation.

This fits within a model of identity as a production that is never complete (Hall 1993: 392), but instead is constructed, and emerges from choices people actively engage in (Bucholtz 2003: 408). Drawing on the linguistic histories of these communities we can see how diasporas are constructed and conceived by communities that are building ethnic identities that also reflect their role as modern-day Nepali citizens.

In this paper I consciously choose to refer to these groups as *diaspora* communities of the main Hyolmo community. Although many researchers working in diaspora studies focus on a definition that includes transnational movement of peoples (Clifford 1994, Cohen 2008), the ethnolinguistic heterogeneity of Nepal means that moving away from the traditional homelands *en masse* resulted in these Hyolmo people being in an environment that was alien in terms of linguistic, religious and cultural features. Instead of thinking in terms of home nation and host nation, I prefer the practice of referring to homeland and host land (as per Butler 2001, Coupland, Bishop & Garrett 2003). As Lavie and Swedenburg (1996: 15) note, diaspora studies are about people living in border zones which are not necessarily nation-state borders, but the cultural sites of 'creative reimagination... conflict and loss.' Section 5 of this paper illustrates how Hyolmo speakers are demonstrably different to their neighbours in both Ramechhap and Lamjung, and how they use this difference in construction of their ethnic identity.

As this paper demonstrates, even though many Hyolmo still reside in Nepal, they meet many of the other definitional features of a diaspora community, as per Butler's (2001) extended discussion of the definition of diaspora; they consciously identify themselves as a distinct ethnic group, and the development of that identity has been an important feature of their survival as a cultural unit. They also fit the definition of comprising more than one group of 'outside' people, and while I don't believe this feature is as important for diaspora studies as some of the literature has argued (Butler 2001: 192), in this particular case it is important as these previously isolated Hyolmo diaspora groups begin to develop new links amongst themselves.

Ethnicity and identity in contemporary Nepal

Group self-identification in terms of ethnicity is an important feature of social life in Nepal. This ethnic identity comprises of a series of features,

including religion, language, dress, traditions and homeland. These identities do not have to be simplistic or reductive, although communities often see an appeal in easily identifiable features that differentiate them from other groups (see Shneiderman & Turin 2006, and Shneiderman 2015 for discussion in relation to Thangmi). The focus on ethnic identity is worth considering in the light of historical and contemporary events in Nepal.

Nepal as a political state has long been concerned with the ethnicity of its populace, especially in relation to their social role. The *Muluki Ain* of 1854 was the national legal code, which sought to classify the population of Nepal based on labour status within a Hindu caste system (Höfer 1979/2004). From the perspective of Tibetan ethnic groups like the Hyolmo, the *Muluki Ain* gave very little recognition of their ethnicity. All Tibetan groups were subsumed into a single *Bhoṭe* group with the status of enslavable alcohol drinkers. Lecomte-Tilouine (2009: 292) argues that this was an intentional act on behalf of the Hindu rulers to simplify social structures for national coherence instead of acknowledging the diversity of Nepal's population. The current focus on ethnic identity and rights in Nepal can be seen as emerging, in part, from objections to the simplifying hierarchy codified in the *Muluki Ain* (Shneiderman and Tillin 2015, Lecomte-Tilouine 2009), and the exclusion of many of these groups from the official accounts of the country's history (Gellner 2009: 13).

Following the end of the Monarchy in 2005, Nepal has been on a slow path towards democracy. As Shneiderman and Tillin (2015) note, the preference for a model of federalism in Nepal is unusual in that it is not a unification of previously separate states, but a devolution of central power to what will be newly-created states, similar to the process that occurred (and is still occurring) in India. One suggested model for federalisation is to create states along ethnic boundaries, giving groups with shared ethnic identities a shared political boundary. Thus communities have a strong incentive to present a unified ethnic identity to increase their chances of official recognition. As I demonstrate in this paper, people with a demonstrated attachment to an ethnic identity do not always live in places that are geographically contiguous, and may also have long-standing attachment to a host land as much as to their homeland. For a model of ethnic federalism to work in Nepal, consideration needs to be given to the long history of internal migration for communities like the Hyolmo.

The process of drafting a new constitution and moving to federalised states has included a positive increase in recognition of Nepal's multi-ethnic makeup, and the rights of minority groups. This has included the interim government signing a series of agreements regarding some form of territorial autonomy with *madhesi* and *janajati* organizations in 2007 and 2008, and the ratification of the International Labour Organization's Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 (for more on these events see Shneiderman and Tillin 2015: 29-31). In this time of flux there has been an 'explosion of public debate over the nature of social difference' (Shneiderman 2014: 282), with ethnicity playing a major role (Hangen 2007, Shneiderman 2012, Lawoti and Hangen 2012). The Hyolmo have been part of these discussions. They were recognised as one of the 59 *janajati* ethnic groups as part of a government list published in 2002 (see Gellner and Karki 2007) and are a recognised group in the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities² (NEFIN), an umbrella organisation for the rights of *adibasi janajati* (indigenous nationalities) that is one of the most dominant voices in ethnic discussions in Nepal.

With these recent events bringing discourse around ethnic identity to the fore in Nepali political life it is perhaps unsurprising that in the diaspora groups discussions of identity such as Hyolmo have become more frequent. As Shneiderman and Turin (2006: 102) note, recognition can lead to 'political rights and development dollars'.

Nepal's internal political status is one important factor in the recent drive to more, and more overt discussions of ethnicity and identity in the Hyolmo diaspora communities, although Nepal's relationship with neighbouring territories is also worth considering. It was not until the 1960s that the northern border with the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was formally codified, and for many years the border had been much more diffuse. The Himalayan region has historically been a zone of transitions rather than clear boundaries (Owen-Smith and Hill 2014), and Tibetic peoples have always seen themselves as belonging to a larger area bound by shared geography, history, language and religion. The formalisation of the border meant that people living in that area became more conscious of which side they lived on (Shneiderman 2005). This formalisation of a boundary between Tibetan peoples living in the TAR and Tibetans living in

2 www.nefin.org.np

Nepal means that Nepali groups whose ethnic identity includes recognition of themselves as Tibetan have both a supranational identity as well as an identity that exists within a particular nation-state. These identities can be nested, with Hyolmo ethnic identity felt to be part of a larger Tibetan identity, and an even larger Mongol identity (see Lecomte-Tilouine 2009: 292), or they can overlap, such as identifying both as ethnically Hyolmo and also as Nepali citizen. There are other identities that individuals in these communities hold; I touch on some of these below.

A history of migration

The migrations to Lamjung and Ramechhap appear to have occurred around the same time period, at some point in the opening decades of the twentieth century. One Lamjung Hyolmo speaker who was born in 1920 (now deceased) reported that it was his grandparents' generation who moved from the Hyolmo homelands, so we can assume that it was around a century ago that speakers settled in the area. This means that the migration was long enough ago for there to be no living recollection of the events anymore. The migration from the original Hyolmo area is part of the communities' narratives of identification, however people also strongly identify as belonging to the villages and communities in which they currently reside. These are not the only stories of migration, with a similarly sized population also moving to Ilam at around the same period (Thokar 2009). I have met two members of the Ilam Hyolmo community (who refer to themselves as *Ilam Yolmo*) in Kathmandu, and we have discussed their language and culture, and how they choose to identify themselves. I mention the Ilam context in passing throughout this paper, although more sustained attention needs to be given to this community before anything of detail can be said. Finally, there are reports of sizable populations in Darjeeling, India, this last group appear to have more ongoing contact with the main Hyolmo community.

The Hyolmo origin story is often told as one of migration, with the population in Sindhupalchok and Nuwakot citing an earlier migration event for their origins. Some two to three hundred years ago their ancestors, Buddhist Lama males, made the journey from Kyirong in what is now Southwest Tibet across the Himalayas, to settle in the Helambu and Melanchi valleys, and married women from the local Tamang communities (Clarke 1980a: 83, van Driem 2001: 864, Desjarlais 2003: 7).

There is a great deal of lexical and grammatical affinity between Kyirong (Huber 2005, Hedlin 2011) and Hyolmo, which provides linguistic evidence to support this history.

Some speakers who migrated away from the Melamchi and Helambu areas recall the names of villages their ancestors are said to have come from. Hari (2010: 1) reports that Kagate speakers refer to the Pawa Kohmba area, and Hyolmo speakers in Lamjung have told me that their families originally came from Mane Kharka and Thola Kharka. Thola Kharka is not apparent on any maps, but given that *thóla* means ‘above’ in Hyolmo, it may have been a separate settlement in the Mane Kharka area. Ilam Hyolmo speakers I spoke to also identify themselves as coming from this area. Mane Kharka is east of the Melamchi valley, and Hari (2010:4) observes that the western language varieties, from villages such as Sermathang, are considered to be more prestigious. This is relevant to the discussion of social status in Section 5.

It is not known why these groups left the original settlements in the Helambu and Melamchi valleys. It would appear that the most likely reasons for migration were either to reduce population pressures in the area, or to seek new opportunities for those who migrated. Many references to diaspora communities note that there is often an element of not wanting to move away from the homelands (Clifford 1994, Butler 2001, Gilroy 1997). It would appear from the scant evidence and the recollection of community members that this was also the case for the groups discussed in this paper. Figure 1 is a map of Nepal with the Hyolmo homelands indicated as Melamchi and Helambu Valley Yolmo and the Lamjung and Ramechhap (Kagate) varieties also marked. The Ilam variety is also indicated. All of these diaspora communities live at lower altitudes than those settlements in the Helambu and Melamchi Valley from where they migrated.

The communities in Lamjung and Ramechhap do not have any direct connections to anyone residing in the Hyolmo homelands today. When I asked AM Lama from Lamjung about the Helambu area she opined that it was a ‘lovely place’³ where women still wore traditional clothing, and a preferable locale to Lamjung, although she had never visited there. This attitude demonstrates the idealisation of the homeland for this diaspora

3 Original in Nepali ‘Ramāilō thāū’.

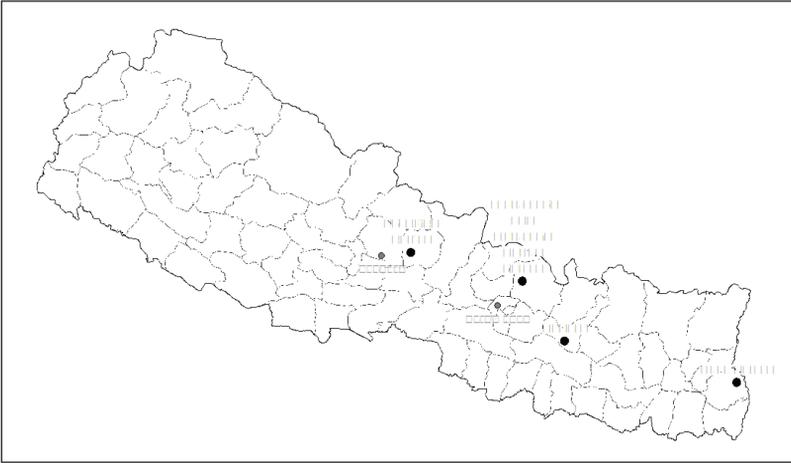


Figure 1. A map of Nepal with the different Hyolmo varieties marked.

community. In Ramechhap, the Kagate identity is more specifically grounded in their current location, suggesting a somewhat different relationship to the homeland area.

The earliest reference to Kagate in Western literature is in Grierson's (1909/1966) linguistic survey of India, much earlier than the first mentions of Hyolmo, which was not discussed coherently as a distinct cultural group until the anthropological work of Clarke in the 1980s and 1990s (1980a, 1980b, 1980c, 1983, 1985, 1990, 1991, 1995). Bonnerjea's (1936) survey of the phonology of several Tibeto-Burman languages also makes mention of Kagate. He refers to speakers as living in the east of Nepal and in Darjeeling, India. An initial look at the lexical items used in Grierson and Bonnerjea's work indicates that they are at least mutually intelligible with the language that is currently identified as Kagate. As I discuss below, the name Kagate is related to a profession-based status, so it should not be expected that all references to Kagate definitely have an origin in the Hyolmo language-speaking community. I have been in contact with Kagate speakers for the last six years, and for the last two years I have worked with them to record their traditional narratives and history.

Lamjung Hyolmo is a variety that was previously unattested in the literature. This variety has been the focus of my own documentation

work, which I started in 2009. There is a short dictionary of the language available (Gawne 2011) and a grammatical description (forthcoming). Although I have found little documented evidence to support the oral history of the Hyolmo speakers in Lamjung, there is corroboration of my findings in the field diaries of the legendary anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf. In 1957 von Fürer-Haimendorf spent a period of time in the prosperous Gurung village of Ghalegaun, which is one of the highest villages of the area near the Hyolmo villages and a regional centre. He recorded that '[o]n the land of Kapurgaun there are three Tamang settlements, only some 25 years ago... [t]he Tamangs came from the east of the Nepal valley' (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1957: 89). The villages he lists are the Hyolmo villages of today, and most probably the reference to Tamang relates to the Hyolmo population. There is no record that there were ever Tamang speakers in the Hyolmo villages, and as I discuss in Section 3, the reference to Tamang suggests that Lamjung Hyolmo speakers may share a common history with the Ramechhap Kagate, rather than any relationship with Tamang communities. The Kagate have been known to refer to themselves as Tamang when talking to outsiders (Höhlig and Hari 1976: 1). Von Fürer-Haimendorf's report would place the migration some time around 1932, whereas the report of the 92-year-old Hyolmo speaker I interviewed would put it around 1920 at the latest, and quite possibly earlier.

Von Fürer-Haimendorf (1957:306) writes in a later section of his notes that there are Lamas residing in Maling, who were quite different from Gurung Lamas, and came across from 'Yelmu' [sic] three generations earlier. He reports that some twenty to twenty-five households migrated but that there were around 120 households at the time he wrote. It is possible that von Fürer-Haimendorf received two different reports on the same community of Hyolmo speakers, but it is unlikely we will ever know for certain. Von Fürer-Haimendorf's notes also suggest that this was not a single migration event, but a slower process whereby more families arrived after an initial wave of settlers. This may explain why groups dispersed to Lamjung, Ramechhap and Ilam from the same area at around the same time, as different families sought opportunities in different places.

There appears to have been no contact between these groups of speakers until recently. As has been observed for many other communities

(Clifford 1994: 304), the rise in online communication, particularly for urban and educated speakers, as well as the ability to travel more within Nepal and spend less time on subsistence farming activities makes it easier for geographically disparate communities to interact. A growing interest in group narratives and identity means that members of different communities are also motivated to seek each other out. In recent years, Hyolmo speakers from Lamjung and Ramechhap districts have had contact with Hyolmo speakers from other areas through the Yolmo Social Service Association, which was formalised in 1998.⁴ This society distributes calendars and organises occasional events, in which members from Lamjung, Ramechhap and Ilam also participate. While the diaspora communities have connected with those Hyolmo who still live in the homelands, they have also spent a lot of time building relationships amongst themselves; they see a connection in their Hyolmo-ness but also in their migration history and diaspora status. As I demonstrate in Section 5, this is partly because these communities share some cultural practices that diverge from the communities in the homelands, and as I discuss in the next section, it is also a function of the labels their communities have been given.

Names and their social implications

The quotation in the title of this paper comes from a recording with a Kagate speaker from Ramechhap. At the start of the recording I asked her to state her name and village. Speakers of Kagate are currently going through a period of identity negotiation, meaning that the way they identify themselves and their language is in a state of change, and that different people will provide different names. Sometimes the same person will give different answers at different times; in a later recording the same woman introduces herself as Maya Lama. In this paper I talk about a number of different names that have been given to the people and languages of Lamjung and Ramechhap. Each name has its own connotations and associated values, and some are currently being used by some people but not by others. In this section I introduce these terms and their associated values.

The current fluidity of naming in the context of determining identity

4 www.hyolmo.org.np

is possibly best illustrated by Mitchell & Eichentopf's (2013) sociolinguistic study of Kagate. The study included a language usage and attitudes survey of 49 Kagate-speakers. The speakers were asked a number of questions about themselves, including their 'caste' as identified by themselves. The answers they gave are listed in Table 1, with spellings of Yholmo standardised.

Name of caste	Number of respondents
Yholmo	19
Kagate	6
Syuba	6
Tamang	5
Syuba Kagate	5
Kagate Yholmo	4
Syuba Yholmo	1
Kagate Tamang	1
Sherpa Yholmo Kagate	1
Langanga	1
<i>Total respondents</i>	<i>49</i>

Table 1: Self-identification of caste for Kagate speakers in Ramechhap, from Mitchell & Eichentopf (2013: 42)

I discuss all of these terms below, including their associated connotations and current patterns of usage among the groups in Ramechhap and Lamjung. The only term not included in the present discussion is *Langanga*. This is the name of one of the patrilineal clans that can be found in all of the Hyolmo communities, and is sometimes used as a preferred form of identification, particularly within Hyolmo society.

Hyolmo

Hyolmo refers to the area in the Helambu and Melamchi Valleys north of the high Himalayas, which cuts across the Sindhupalchowk, Nuwakot and Rasuwa districts of Nepal. The name Hyolmo has been used for centuries to describe this area as a hidden area of peace and fertility in Tibetan literature (see Gelle *inter alia*), and has come to refer also to the Tibetan peoples who settled there, as well as their language. There is some

orthographic variation in the spelling of Hyolmo in the Latin script, with *Hyolmo* (Torri forthcoming), *Yholmo* (Mitchell & Eichentopf 2013), *Yohlmo* (Hari 2010) and *Yolmo* (Desjarlais 1992, 2003, Gawne 2011) used by different academic authors. The forms that include ‘h’ do so to reflect the low tone of the word, which often has a breathy quality (Hari 2010: 1).

Helambu is said to be a corruption of the term *Hyolmo* (Hari 2010: 1), although Goldstein (1975: 69) and Clarke (1980b: 4) give a less reliable etymology, deriving from a combination of the Hyolmo words *hee* (potato) and *laphug* (radish), supposedly in reference to the main crops of the area.

Connected to *Helambu* is the term *Helambu Sherpa*, which is still occasionally used to refer to Hyolmo people from the homeland area, and this is the name linked to the ISO 639-3 language codes. This is a reference to the cultural and linguistic similarity with the relatively prestigious Sherpa of the Solu-Khumbu region. The Hyolmo people aligned themselves with the Sherpas in the 1970s and 1980s to benefit from this prestige (Clarke 1980a). With the rise of interest in smaller cultural groups in Nepal since the introduction of democracy (see Section 2), the Hyolmo people no longer identify themselves as Sherpa and see themselves as being a distinct cultural unit (Desjarlais 2003: 8), but the transitions over time indicate that Hyolmo identity is constantly being reevaluated.

As I illustrate with the discussion of the other terms in use, the diaspora groups have not always referred to themselves as Hyolmo, even though the majority of Lamjung speakers now do. This return to a rediscovered identification with a homeland is not uncommon. Hall (1993) discusses the communities of the African diaspora in Kingston in the 1940s and 1950s who did not reflexively consider themselves to necessarily be African, instead this identity was discovered in the 1970s along with their identity as children of slaves. In much the same way, the gap in Hyolmo-ness does not diminish the current claims to a Hyolmo identity for the diaspora communities.

Kagate

This term is still used to refer to the variety of the language, and its speakers, in Ramechhap. This name comes from the Nepali term for paper, *kagate*, and refers to the profession of papermaker that both the *Kagate* of Ramechhap and the Hyolmo of Lamjung often held, although neither group regularly produces paper today. The profession of papermaker is

considered to be a low caste occupation in Nepal. The Lamjung Hyolmo and Kagate populations were treated as Tamangs (and also sometimes called Tamang, as is discussed below), and as enslavable alcohol drinkers, one of the lowest of the ‘clean’ castes in the *Muluki Ain* (discussed in Section 2, see also Gellner 1995, Holmberg 1989: 26).

The speakers of Hyolmo in Lamjung and Ilam have also historically been referred to by other ethnic groups in their area as *Kagate*, like the speakers in Ramechhap, which, given their historical occupation, is not unexpected. Von Fürer-Haimendorf observes that the Lamjung group were ‘sometimes described as “Kagate Bhote”’ (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1957: 278),⁵ reflecting their occupation.

Speakers in Lamjung have actively tried to move away from this identity towards something with a less negative connotation. During a recorded group discussion I asked A. Lama (female, 50 y/o) about the name “Kagate”. She exclaimed, ‘For me, our forefathers they were Kagate... now we are Hyolmo.’⁶ During the conversation one man observed: ‘Now people are searching from where this language has originated. And now they have found that it is from Hyolmo. And so in this present time they are saying it is from Hyolmo.’ (14/09/2009). These two quotes demonstrate the conscious and active choices that members of the Lamjung community make to align themselves with a Hyolmo identity, with regard to both their language and their ethnic identity.

Even today the Hyolmo in Lamjung are occasionally referred to as *Kagate Bhote*, although even non-Hyolmo speakers consider this to be pejorative. I faced problems when I referred to Kagate in the blurb of a Lamjung Hyolmo dictionary; even this allusion to the Kagate was considered distasteful enough for the reference to be removed from the next edition (Gawne 2014). Ilam speakers also appear keen to distance themselves from this name.

Although Hyolmo speakers in Lamjung and Ilam have sought to distance themselves from an identity with a historically negative caste basis, and Ethnologue (Lewis et al 2013) now acknowledges *Kagate Bhote* to be pejorative, many members of the Ramechhap Kagate group I have spoken to

5 *Bhote* means ‘people of Tibetan origin’ in Nepali (Adhikary 2007: 270).

6 The first half of this comment was in Hyolmo: ḡála jí-i mème tà dì kàgat ná... (for me, our forefathers they were Kagate). The second half was in Nepali: āhile yolmoba (now [we are] Hyolmos).

are proud of their name and their heritage. There are many factors that may account for this difference with their Lamjung counterparts, which I tease out in the sections below, including previous interactions with linguistic researchers and a more secure social and economic position than speakers in Lamjung. Although Kagate is mutually intelligible with Hyolmo, it has its own ISO 639-3 code (SYW), thanks to an accident of history where they were identified prior to the main group of Hyolmo. Many Kagate speakers are proud of their small language and unique identity, while also accepting their Hyolmo origins. This is not unusual for diaspora communities: As Butler (2001) notes, they must have a connection to their homeland, but they are also their own unique communities.

It should not be assumed that everybody in Ramechhap is equally happy to maintain a Kagate identity. As can be seen in Table 1, many more people identified themselves as Hyolmo rather than as Kagate when asked. The village of Nobra upset some of the other villages five years ago when they decided that a recently built *gompa* (Buddhist temple) would be an explicitly Hyolmo *gompa* to build their links with the homelands, rather than a local Kagate *gompa*. It appears that particular preferences may be stronger in certain villages or families. People often engage in prolonged discussions of these matters, and it does not appear that a consensus will be reached any time soon.

Whether the name Kagate is a remnant of a historic social position within Helambu society or came about as a result of travels has not been established. Perhaps it was the non-landowning skilled papermakers who left their original settlements to move to Lamjung, Ramechhap and Ilam, and had to contend with a new social status in a new place. Speakers of Kagate from Ramechhap who have met Ilam Hyolmo speakers say that the Ilam community was also historically referred to as Kagate, but like the Lamjung community they have chosen to be identified as Hyolmo. If this is the case, it is interesting that the three groups that migrated from the Hyolmo homelands around the same time were all called Kagate.

To complicate the relationship between Hyolmo and Kagate in the historical narrative, earlier anthropological work by Clarke (1980a: 79) and Desjarlais (1992: xiii) also referred to Helambu Valley Hyolmo people as speaking Kagate, although as Hari (Hari and Lama 2004: 701) notes, this should not be taken too seriously as there was little ethnographic work at that point that established Yolmo as a separate group from Kagate.

As it is a name that refers to an occupation, it is possible that there are other groups in Nepal that have been given the exonym *Kagate*.

Syuba

The *Kagate* of Ramechhap also refer to themselves internally as *Syuba*, which in their own language, also means paper, like *Kagate*. This name has gained ground with many speakers of the language in recent years, as it asserts a unique identity that is separate from *H Yolmo*, without the negative connotations of the name *Kagate*. Several of the people central to the documentation of the language have also started to refer to the language as *Syuba*. The term has not yet gained any ground with the communities in *Ilam* or *Lamjung*, which appear less concerned with creating an identity that is distinct from *H Yolmo* beyond the inclusion of their own location, e.g. *Ilam Yolmo*, *Lamjung Yolmo*.

The fact that the Ramechhap community have their own endonym indicates a complex attitude to their diaspora status. As mentioned above for the term *Kagate*, having a separate name does not exclude them from their alignment with a larger *H Yolmo* ethnicity, just as being *H Yolmo* is part of a nested identity in a larger Tibetan ethnicity. It does indicate a more nuanced diasporic status than is found in the *Lamjung* community.

Lama

The people of *Lamjung* are often referred to as *Lama*, and their language referred to as *Lama Bhasa* in Nepali (*bhasa* being the Nepali word for language) or *pèepa tám* ('Tibetan people' and 'language' in *H Yolmo*). The name *Lama* is given on their official identification documents, is the most common local exonym now, and avoids the historical form *Kagate*, which they find to be very negative. This term is related to their Buddhist faith and is a term used for, and by, many other Buddhist groups as well. In *Ilam* this nomenclature does not appear to be used for family names, ethnic or language labelling. Ramechhap people take the surname *Lama* if they are patrilineal village lamas, or their family, such as *Maya* from the title of this paper. The village lamas are discussed in Section 5 below.

Tamang

The *Tamang* are a separate group with their own Tibeto-Burman language that is not mutually intelligible with *H Yolmo* (although there are many

lexical similarities, likely as a result of sustained contact in the Hyolmo homelands). Tamangs are found across Nepal's low hill-lands, and were historically mistreated as a convenient labour pool by the ruling classes (Tamang 2009). There are populations in both Lamjung and Ramechhap as well as in Nuwakot and Sindhupalchok near the Hyolmo homelands. In Ramechhap almost every Kagate speaker is given the surname Tamang in their national registration, even though they have never identified either themselves or their language as Tamang. Tamang scholars also note a lack of clear government acknowledgement of the distinction between Tamangs and other proximal Buddhist ethnic groups (Tamang 2009: 273), indicating that this is not exclusively a one-directional problem. It is not uncommon for small or under-recognised communities in Nepal to co-opt the identity of other ethnic groups when dealing with government officials who have constrained ideas and expectations of ethnic categories, as discussed by Shneiderman and Turin (2006: 103) in relation to Thangmi community members who often represent themselves as Rai or Gurung. When I asked the Ramechhap Kagate speakers why this was the case, I received a number of different answers. The first reply was that the government simply required them to have an identity, and as there were Tamangs nearby and they were similarly Buddhist, they were given the name Tamang. The other answer I was given was that they chose the name Tamang, as it gave them a better chance to enter the army than the name Lama (the rationale being that the name Lama might give the impression they would not be good at killing people). This anecdote may be apocryphal, but it is interesting because beyond this, references to Tamang are mostly negative, both from Ramechhap and Lamjung communities. Kagate community members are now moving to have their children identified as Kagate or Syuba on their identity documents.

Cultural practices in Lamjung and Ramechhap

Above I traced the names and labels that frame much of the discussion about identity for these diaspora groups, and the historical narratives that ground their understanding of their origins. In this section I turn to contemporary cultural practices, and how these influence understandings of identity. This section is not intended to be a detailed ethnographic description of life for Hyolmo speakers in Lamjung and Ramechhap, but a summary of features of life in these areas that relate to the themes of this

paper. Some of these topics have to do with conscious social actions on behalf of community members to align themselves with a Hyolmo identity, such as wearing Tibetic dress, even if some of those features are at odds with a larger understanding of Hyolmo identity, such as the practice of basket-weaving in Lamjung. Other features of their social life may not be consciously regarded as part of a Hyolmo identity by community members. Similarly, these two groups do not put emphasis on exactly the same things in their discussions and practices around ethnicity. As I have started to tease out above, the Kagate have a clear specific local identity as well as a Hyolmo identity that connects them to the larger Hyolmo group. The features discussed in this section are intended as illustrations of the social context in Ramechhap and Lamjung.

The Hyolmo diaspora communities retain practices from their homelands that demonstrate notable differences with practices from neighbouring communities. I highlight these practices to demonstrate how groups can be seen as diasporic even when migration occurred within a single nation-state. I also point to the ways in which Hyolmo practices have changed, or are different to those in other areas, which demonstrate the negotiation of their role both as modern Nepali citizens and as members of the dispersed Hyolmo ethnic group.

Local social status

The social environments in Lamjung and Ramechhap are quite different, and appear to have influenced attitudes towards speaking the Hyolmo language. In Lamjung the Hyolmo speakers are surrounded by Buddhist Gurung and Tamang villages as well as smaller numbers of Hindu Chetris and Brahmins. The Gurung have the highest prestige and live in the most elevated villages in the area. In earlier times, Hyolmo speakers in the area were not allowed to enter the Gurungs' houses. This may be because Gurung were afforded a higher status in the *Muluki Ain* as 'non-enslavable alcohol drinkers', or because of their own internal social stratification rules (Höfer 1979/2004: 120-121).

In comparison, the Kagate of Ramechhap live at the highest elevations in their area, with Hindu Sunwar, Brahmin and Chetri living in villages at lower altitudes. Although there are Brahmins and Chetris in the area who are of a higher social status, the Kagate of Ramechhap are not in direct contact with these groups as frequently as the Lamjung Hyolmo

are with the local Gurung, and they do not share a religion with them. The general effect appears to be that the Kagate of Ramechhap have had fewer direct social interactions that could have resulted in them considering Kagate to be a negative social status. It also allows them to construct their Buddhism as a positive point of difference with their neighbours. In contrast, renegotiating their identity as *Lama* or *Hyolmo*, instead of the caste-based *Kagate*, has allowed the community in Lamjung to reposition itself within a post-caste Nepal and align with a homeland ethnicity with greater social prestige.

Labour, food and village life

In Lamjung and Ramechhap, subsistence agriculture has mostly focused on millet, potatoes and corn. In Lamjung small quantities of rice are also cultivated in the lowest fields. These villages are not high enough for yak herding as was done in the homelands (Bishop 1989, 1998), although for many decades the Kagate in Ramechhap kept large flocks of sheep, until the Nepali government recently banned forest grazing. A move away from some features of traditional agriculture has been a necessary feature of agricultural survival.

The communities in both Ramechhap and Lamjung have moved towards a more general Nepali diet, eating predominately rice and lentils instead of millet meal. This involves transporting large quantities of white rice to the villages, since it does not grow at that altitude. Like people in other parts of the country, eating rice is seen as a positive attribute of being Nepali - N. Hyolmo in Ramechhap often admonished me for being unable to eat rice in the same quantities as his family, saying that Nepali people must eat rice to feel that a meal has been satisfactory. People in Lamjung and Ramechhap also drink sweet milk *chai* rather than the salted butter tea, as is traditionally found in Hyolmo villages further north.

In labour beyond agriculture, Lamjung people also weave bamboo baskets to sell. Today these are mostly made for people's own use and for selling in nearby villages, but previously this was one of the main forms of industry of Hyolmo speakers in this area. According to older speakers they also traditionally made paper for export to Tibet. In Ramechhap there is no tradition of bamboo basket-making, however the memory of being papermakers is strongly present, which is possibly part of the more positive associations of the Kagate name in this area. This form of

labour possibly facilitated the division of these groups from the primary Hyolmo area (see section 3), and is one clear difference between these communities and the Hyolmo homeland villages. Although these trades are not considered to be part of a broader Hyolmo identity, they are positively identified attributes of the local identity in the diaspora groups.

Dress

In the communities in Lamjung and Ramechhap married women are most likely to wear long, straight cotton *lungi* of Malay or Indonesian design, with t-shirts, cardigans or Nepali blouses. Younger women wear *kurta surwal* or readymade Western clothing. Some of the oldest generation of women in Lamjung may even wear Gurung style shawls and triangle back aprons, as for many years these were the most readily available clothes. Older menfolk may wear *durwa surwal* or *dhoti* while younger men are more likely to wear Western t-shirts and pants.

In both communities people have begun to acquire traditional Hyolmo costumes, particularly the long straight *chuba* dresses for the women. These dresses are usually only worn to weddings or other festive social occasions. As Lamjung speakers of Hyolmo become more aware of their roots they are beginning to embrace more aspects of their language and culture. At least one Lamjung Hyolmo woman in Besisahar is reported to have recently started a group for people to perform traditional *çapru <zhabz bro>* dance, including wearing traditional Tibetan dress.

For the communities in Lamjung and Ramechhap, wearing traditional dress is a conscious choice to engage with a symbol of their ethnic identity as Hyolmo. Access to these costumes has been facilitated in part because of greater access to cash through labour work, easier access to Kathmandu, where these dresses are purchased, and stronger interest in actively performing their identity as Tibetan peoples in Nepal. Wearing these outfits at weddings and other group events is a way for the community to build self-recognition of their Hyolmo identity.

Religion

When talking about Hyolmo religion there are two traditions that must be taken into account, the first is Buddhism and the second is Shamanism, the two having long existed in synchronism in Hyolmo society. In both Lamjung and Ramechhap there is an active practice of institutionalised

Nyingma Buddhism. As in the Hyolmo homelands, there are local *lamas* who inherit their role and title. Historically these were the only people in the community who would be sent away to be educated, in Lamjung they would most likely attend *gompas* in Manage, north of Lamjung. Today they are the only people in these communities who are literate in Written Tibetan, with all other community members gaining Nepali literacy through the national education system.

In Lamjung two small, non-residential *gompas* have been built; one shared between Nayagaun and Toljung, and an older one in Pondri. The Hyolmo in Lamjung are proud of their status as Buddhists of the Tibetan school, but it appears to be in a general sense, like their surname *Lama*, rather than specifically relating to their Hyolmo origins.

In Ramechhap there is one active *gompa*, but tensions have risen in the last few years as the village in which the *gompa* was built has decided that it will be a Hyolmo *gompa*, while other villages that assisted in the construction would like to see a specifically Syuba *gompa*. For the community that maintains the *gompa*, being Hyolmo is part of the prestige of being Buddhist, while for others their identity as Syuba or Kagate is part of a general pride in their Tibetan Buddhist heritage.

The Buddhist Kagate narrative is complicated by the fact there is a small, but sustained, group of Kagate who are practicing Christians since contact with Christian missionary linguists in the 1970s. This group is committed to the Kagate identity, in contrast with the wider Ramechhap community where some align more with Hyolmo. For this group, the Kagate identity is separate from any sense of being Buddhist (other than historically). This again illustrates the complexity of the relationship between the Ramechhap diaspora community and their conception of a Hyolmo identity. Although many members of the community see Buddhism as a central feature of their ethnic identification, not everyone believes that it has the same prominence.

As these diaspora communities make more links with the Hyolmo from the homelands, the Hyolmo *Gompa* in Kathmandu is central to this connection, and Buddhism is an important shared identity. Hyolmo identity also allows both communities to align themselves with a larger Himalayan-facing Tibetic identity. This is part of a larger ethnic identity, that in many ways goes beyond national borders, as it links the Hyolmo with Tibetic people in TAR and India. In other ways though, this is a local

identity, as it allows communities in both Lamjung and Ramechhap to have an identity in opposition to the overwhelmingly Hindu governing class in Kathmandu. In Ramechhap it is also a more immediately relevant identity demarcation, allowing them to contrast themselves to the Sunwar Hindus who live further down the hills from them.

Unlike the communities in Ramechhap and the Hyolmo homelands, the people of Lamjung do not maintain a culture of shamanism. Although they are aware of the idea of shamanism, the practice is restricted to the local Tamang and Gurung people, indicating that it is a feature of Hyolmo culture that did not make the transition when Hyolmo speakers immigrated to the Lamjung area. Indeed, the lack of shamanism is one feature they use to identify themselves as *Lama* in contrast to the other communities in the area. The absence of shamanism for Lamjung Hyolmo speakers is, for them, a positive signifier of their Hyolmo identity. While the role of shamanism in the Hyolmo homelands is contested (Torri, this issue), it is, for many, an important part of life in the region, and in Ramechhap people seek assistance from both the village *lama* and the village *pombo*. The different status of shamanism in each of these areas demonstrates that diasporas identify with an idea of an ethnicity, rather than the realities of life in the homelands.

Lamjung Hyolmo also participate in clan activities. One of these is a triennial prayer ceremony called *kàn púza*. Two men of the clan are trained to lead the day-long ceremony, which involves sets of chants in front of a prayer place set with white rice *tórma* statues, incense, unhusked rice, and jugs of water. This is the closest thing I have observed to the shamanic culture mentioned by Desjarlais (1992). In Ramechhap, shamanism is still very much active, with people seeking guidance from the local shaman, particularly in matters of health, as well as the local *lama*. Buddhist Kagate people see themselves primarily as Buddhists, but also actively engage with the local shamanic practice, and appear to be proud of the skills and knowledge of the shamans, who still participate with other community members in Buddhist funeral rites and other *pujas*.

Language

Language has often been seen as a powerful vehicle for identity construction, particularly in diaspora communities where it can serve as one of the most important links with the homelands (Carter 2013,

Coupland et al. 2003: 153). There is a strong level of similarity between the Hyolmo spoken in the homelands and those varieties spoken in the diaspora communities. Hari (2010: 1), who worked extensively with both the Hyolmo spoken in the Melamchi Valley and Kagate, observes that 'to quite a large extent they are mutually intelligible dialects.' This assertion has been supported by my fieldwork with both of the communities in Lamjung and Ramechhap and my brief interactions with speakers from Ilam. I have been present while speakers of the varieties from Lamjung, Ilam and Ramechhap carried out an extended conversation, and speakers report that when they gather for Hyolmo Society events everybody speaks their own variety to each other. As these previously isolated varieties of Hyolmo language come into more frequent contact it will be interesting to observe whether a preferred standard emerges, or whether each group will continue to speak their own variety and the small number of salient differences will remain and be tolerated.

My small-scale survey of the lexical similarity of the main branch of Melamchi Valley Hyolmo, Lamjung Hyolmo and Kagate, indicates relatively minor lexical variation (Gawne 2010). Ongoing documentation of these Hyolmo varieties also indicate that there are some variations in the verbal system and nominal morphology that would make it easy for speakers to distinguish between someone from Lamjung, Ramechhap or Sindhupalchok (cf. Gawne 2013). Everyone in Lamjung and Ramechhap is also proficient in Nepali, with younger speakers also literate in Nepali. Even when they speak amongst themselves, people Lamjung and Ramechhap include Nepali lexical items. They also speak or comprehend varying amounts of other local languages (Lamjung: Gurung, Tamang; Ramechhap: Sunwar), although they feel no ownership of these languages in comparison to Nepali and Hyolmo/Kagate. The prevalence of Nepali literacy and lack of Tibetan literacy means that the majority of speakers prefer to write their own language in a modified form of Devanagari. My interlocutors requested me to use this script when I published the *Lamjung Yolmo - Nepali - English dictionary* (Gawne 2011), and it is the script selected by Kagate speakers at an orthography workshop they held in 2013. Although this choice is one of convenience, as it expedites the number of people who can quickly adopt the orthographic standard through previous literacy, it is also a reminder that while these communities see themselves as Buddhists

of Tibetan origin, they are also contemporary Nepali citizens who are proud of their nation.

In both communities almost everybody is at least bilingual in Hyolmo/Kagate and Nepali, which is used for speaking to people outside the community. All Hyolmo in Ramechhap and Lamjung are educated in Nepali. Children enter early primary school around the age of 4 or 5, which for some children is their first sustained contact with the Nepali language, particularly in Ramechhap where there is stronger transmission of their own language to children. In Lamjung more parents speak Nepali to their children, citing ease of starting school as a major reason for doing this. Education is viewed positively in both communities as a way of economic self-betterment, however beyond 5th grade, students in Ramechhap have to travel several hours a day on foot, and it is unusual to complete high school.

While the language varieties are very similar, if easily distinguishable, there is obvious variation in language attitudes. Although people in Lamjung are not negative about their own language, nevertheless they increasingly speak Nepali with their children in the hope of improving their educational opportunities. I agree with Mitchell and Eichentopf's (2013) claim that Ramechhap speakers have generally highly positive attitudes towards their language and strong intergenerational transfer of language to children. Speakers of the Ramechhap variety see their language and culture as being separate from that of Hyolmo, but closely related. This is possibly the effect of contact with missionary linguists several decades ago. Although Kagate speakers can easily communicate with speakers of Hyolmo varieties, they often overstate differences between the varieties. When I was talking with S. Syuba about his language he said it was at best eighty percent the same as Lamjung Yolmo, which is a much weaker estimate than could be expected, indicating a desire to exacerbate linguistic differences to maintain a separate identity. While Kagate is mutually intelligible with, and from a linguistic perspective can be treated as a dialect of Hyolmo, the beliefs of the speakers in the different status and name of their language, and recognition as such in the SO-639 list have helped the shaping of their unique social identity. For researchers the linguistic status of Kagate is a good example of the need to weigh speaker attitude against evidence. Community members have a right to decide how they conceive of their language and their ethnicity,

but to understand the relationship between individual groups we also need to look at their linguistic practice. The similarity of Kagate and other Hyolmo varieties is clear. The claims of difference and the need for separate nomenclature reveal more about speaker attitudes than about the language itself.

A broader account of Hyolmo identity

These communities are good examples of Hall's (1993: 394) observations that while cultural identities have histories, they also 'undergo constant transformation' as they are subject to the continual play of time. Hyolmo in Lamjung and Ramechhap have not just recovered an identity from their past, but have drawn on their historical narratives of migration from the Hyolmo homelands to incorporate this into their own identities. Their construction of Hyolmo identity is not necessarily the same as it is for Hyolmo in the homeland areas. For example, in Lamjung the lack of shamanism is a positive identifying attribute for being Hyolmo, and in Ramechhap many see being Hyolmo as a larger set of which they are specifically Kagate or Syuba.

These identities are still being negotiated, within each group and, more frequently, within a unified diaspora including community members in Ilam and further afield. I have focused on how the communities in Lamjung and Ramechhap perceive and perform their own Hyolmo identities, and how in doing so, they are actively building a collective experience as a diaspora group. I have also touched briefly on how each of these groups is perceived in relation to its neighbours in their host lands. One group whose experiences do not feature in this article is those Hyolmo from the homelands around the Helambu and Melamchi Valleys. As the consciousness of a wider Hyolmo identity continues to be strengthened, and as the main Hyolmo group continue to push for recognition in a new federated nation, it remains to be seen how the diaspora groups are accepted by the Hyolmo from the heartlands, as authenticity is conferred both by the Hyolmo diaspora and also their audiences (Bucholtz 2003: 408). Recent cross-group interactions, such as social events organised by the Yolmo Social Service Association indicate that positive relationships are being built.

As Nepal negotiates its new political identity as a multi-ethnic federation, communities are also negotiating how they talk about and

demonstrate their identity, both in terms of their ethnicity as Hyolmo and as citizens of Nepal. Researchers need to be aware of local attitudes and practices, but also how these operate within the larger national discourse and the political climate. Hyolmo language speakers in Lamjung are increasingly looking to the Hyolmo homeland as part of their ethnic identity. Kagate speakers see their Hyolmo origins as an important feature of their identity, but they are building a new identity that is grounded in their circumstances as residences of Ramechhap.

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Yolmo women on the move: Marriage, migrant work and relocation to Kathmandu

Seika Sato

Introduction

For several decades the feminisation of wage labour in general, and the urban migrant workforce in particular, has been recognised as a remarkable trend across the globe. In particular the emerging international division of reproductive labour – in which women from the global south migrate to the global north to work as caregivers – has been discussed.¹ It should not be forgotten that women from many localities, both north and south, have actually been moving, not just in the last couple of decades but for a much longer time, and not just as (transnational) migrant workers but also in other capacities. We should broaden our scope beyond this narrow focus on recent transnational migratory wagedworkers, to grasp gendered mobility in its historical and socio-cultural depth, and situate it in the context of the social and cultural background of migrants, a background that in itself is presumably in a process of change, not least because of its members' mobility in various capacities.

This paper attempts to explore gendered mobility in the contemporary world through the particular case of women from Yolmo, Nepal;² how and why they have been moving, how they experienced these moves, what enabled or restricted them, and what impacts they have had on the gendered order of Yolmo society. In this endeavour, special attention will be paid to the inter-relationships between different kinds of mobility.

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- 1 Momsen (1999), Parrenas (2001), Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002), Oishi (2005), Cox (2006), and Lan (2006), to name a few. Nepal has emerged as one of those countries of the south whose economy heavily depends on the remittance sent back from international migrants since the late 1990s, the bulk of which arguably remains unaccounted for (Seddon, Adhikari and Gurung 2002). Of those emigrants, women constitute only a fraction in an official account to this day (5.6% in 2013/14, Ministry of Labour and Employment 2014), but the actual number of migrant women is presumably much higher and anyway rapidly growing (Adhikari 2006).
 - 2 People from Yolmo, a region northeast of Kathmandu district, who also call themselves Yolmo, are Tibetan Buddhists and constitute one of the indigenous nationalities of Nepal (*N. janajati*).

For more than a half century, migration appears to have been an integral part of the lives of Yolmo people, both men and women. As attested by a number of enclaves both within and outside of the Nepalese border,³ the exodus of people from Yolmo goes back much further than that, but recurrent migration presumably started after World War II. But if one considers the mobility of women in particular, it becomes clear that they have always been on the move, at one point or another in their lives. For as long as the imagination of the Yolmo themselves extends, women have experienced the spatial and social mobility associated with marriage. They might move to the house next door, or to somewhere two days' walk away; in any case, the move is invariably of profound social consequence for the women who make it.

We will place the more recent kinds of mobility of Yolmo women against the backdrop of this older form of mobility and try to elucidate how the various moves unfold in complex relationships with each other. To foreshadow the subsequent argument, the overseas migration of women for employment is a recent and conspicuous form of mobility that appears to have substantially contributed to the changing position of women in their families and in society. As potential contributors of cash to domestic economies, daughters are beginning to be regarded as integral parts of their natal families *on a par*. The change itself can be regarded as a step toward gender equality, but we cannot ignore other far-reaching repercussions entailed by out-migration. Its consequences so far appear far from entirely favourable for those women who do emigrate, not to mention for women in Yolmo in general.

My main sources are life story interviews of 23 Yolmo women mostly born or married into village A, conducted in Kathmandu, 2003-4,⁴ data

3 In Nepal, several Yolmo enclaves are known in Lamjung, Ilam, etc. (See Gawne 2011 for Yolmos in Lamjung). In India, Darjeeling is known to have a substantial number of Yolmo people, recognised under the category of Scheduled Tribe in the state of West Bengal.

4 Interviews were conducted by the author, mostly one by one or in a small group of people up to three, using Nepali or Yolmo language. At the time of the interviews, the average age of the interviewees was 49 years old, 20 of them were married (one divorced thereafter), 20 of them lived in Kathmandu, of which 15 relocated there on a permanent basis (= owning their family house there). 17 out of 23 women had migrated to India, whereas 4 of them went to overseas countries after the interviews and stayed there as of September 2013.

on the location of members of village A in March 2006 and March 2011,⁵ and other information gathered in the course of fieldwork among Yolmo people either in Yolmo or in Kathmandu, carried out on and off since late 1994. While experiences among the Yolmo may vary, my detailed ethnographic work among the people of village A provides a core set of data from which broader patterns can be extrapolated.

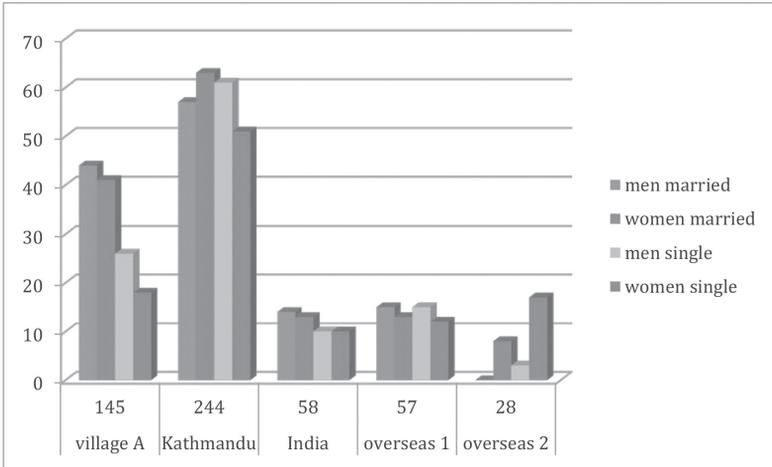
Forms of mobility among Yolmo women

Broadly speaking, three kinds of moves can be recognised as being practiced by Yolmo women. The first kind of move occurs upon their marriage; as Yolmo people would say, ‘women (must) go (to their husbands’ houses)’ (Sato 2008, 2015). This mobility has been the general fate, as it were, of women in the patrilineal and patrilocal Yolmo society, in which until recently nearly all women were married. The second kind of move is basically for earning money; despite the reliance of rural Yolmo on the productive and reproductive responsibilities of their women, it has not been uncommon for Yolmo women to leave their home to earn money, either in India or more recently further abroad, with or without a male companion.⁶ The migration of women to overseas countries (mostly to work as caregivers) has recently been gaining impetus. The third kind of move is relocation to Kathmandu. Since the late 1980s or even before that, a number of people from Yolmo relocated themselves in the Boudha area to form a Yolmo community in the capital city. Some began their life in the city in a rented room, not infrequently shared with fellow villagers; some obtained a house of their own and relocated on a permanent basis. Those who moved to Kathmandu permanently did so in a family unit, which naturally included women.

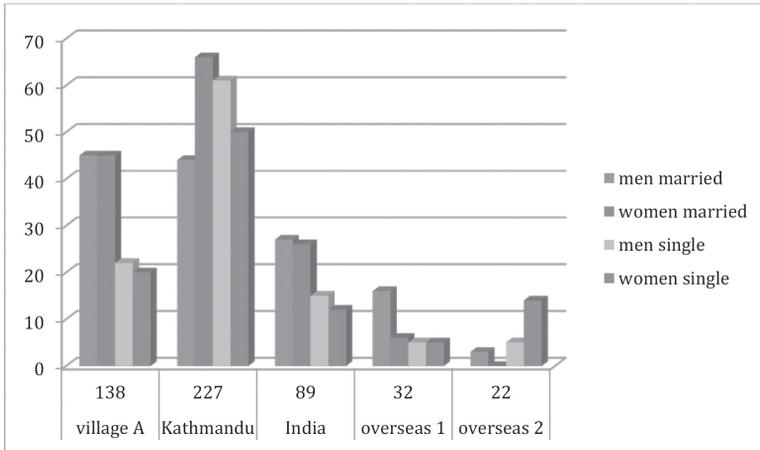
Graphs 1 and 2 show the locations of members of village A in 2006

5 The data was gathered from two specific members of village A and supplemented from other sources when available. Given the very nature of the phenomena to be grasped (= mobility), the accuracy of the data cannot help but be more or less compromised. Nonetheless, the data presumably represents the trend of migration (broken down by destination, gender and marital status) in people from village A.

6 Kathmandu was another possible destination to go to earn money, either for men or women. The late 1980s to 1990s saw a boom in the carpet industry in Kathmandu that attracted many workers from rural parts of Nepal (Graner 2001), including women from Yolmo. For an even earlier tradition of women from Yolmo working in Kathmandu, see below (II 1).



Graph 1: Whereabouts of members of village A in March 2006



Graph 2: Whereabouts of members of village A in March 2011

and 2011. The graphs show the recent trend of the latter two kinds of mobility, to which I will add several notes. Firstly, the place where the largest number of members from village A concentrate today is no longer Yolmo, but Kathmandu. With less than 30% of the total population now residing in their homeland, the trend of out-migration is more than

apparent.⁷ Secondly, the number of people setting out for India, once the single-most popular destination for men as well as for women to earn money, is decreasing rapidly,⁸ while overseas migration is on the rise. Overseas destinations include so-called developed countries ('overseas 1' in the graphs, including for example the USA, EU countries, South Korea, etc.) as well as others ('overseas 2' in the graphs, including for example Malaysia, countries in the Middle East). Thirdly, the number of men and women who go overseas is remarkably gender-balanced, compared to the normally skewed gender balance of overseas Nepali migrants. Moreover, the graphs suggest that women are coming to be in the majority, because of the dramatic increase in the migration of (predominantly unmarried but also married) women, in the capacity of caregivers (mainly in the Middle East).⁹

With this overall picture in mind, let us now proceed to examine different kinds of mobility, and the relationships between them.

Marriage and migrant work

Let us look into the first two kinds of mobility, marriage and migrant work and consider how these moves take place, how they are experienced, and how they are related to each other. We shall start with marriage.

As has already been mentioned, leaving their natal home for their husbands' homes was prescriptive for all Yolmo women (Sato 2008); one may even say that it was definitive for their position in Yolmo society, where women are deemed not to belong to the places where they are born – which can be taken to be either her natal home, possibly her village, or even Yolmo itself. Thus people often say, 'you never know where daughters will go (after marriage).'¹⁰ It is not difficult to see that this pre-determined

7 Out-migration from mountainous areas is not a singular phenomenon to this case, of course. Still, the magnitude of this particular case may be quite impressive; for instance, it is far more massive than the cases of Nubri, Thum, and Mustang, ethnically Tibetan communities in Himalayan highlands (Childs et al. 2014). In Nubri, the reported population staying in the village was 70% in 2012 (ibid. p. 90). The difference is attributed to the fact that while in Nubri and other cases out-migration is concentrated among children and the younger generation, in the Yolmo case all age ranges migrate.

8 This trend of decline in the relative importance of India as a migrant destination is in line with the trend found among Nepali migrants as a whole (Sharma & Thapa 2013: 11).

9 Women migrating to 'overseas 2' countries increased from 14 in 2006 to 25 in 2011.

10 This unpredictability often appears to have prompted decisions on the part of daughter's parents to marry her off when an offer came for her from within their own community.

move provides a rationale for the structurally marginal position of women in the Yolmo household (or society at large, by extension) in comparison to the position of men.

How do women move from their parents' house to their husbands' houses? Although the move is regarded as something that all Yolmo women must undergo at some point in their lives, it must not come about through their own initiative. As a rule, marriage in Yolmo has been seen as a transaction in which a woman is given by her parents to her husband's parents. Many women remember actively resisting marriage, or that it was consummated against their will (cf. Sato 2007b, Sato 2015: chap.2). For example, a 58-year-old married woman relocated to Kathmandu¹¹ spoke of the time when a marriage offer came as follows:

I said I wouldn't go. But (my parents) told me that I had to (laughs). I said I wouldn't go, (but) it appeared I had to, no way to avoid that. ... 'It is too early to get married, I wouldn't go', that was what I said at the time.

But note that the prescription does not necessarily preclude the possibility that some women get married in accordance with their own wish, if it happens to be in line with that of their parents. In fact, there were a small number of cases where women apparently wanted to get married, as can be seen from the excerpt below, from my interview with a married woman of 60, relocated to Kathmandu:

(Laughing) I must have thought I would (go). They (the suitor's family) must have thought that they wanted to have me, that's why they asked for me. Then my parents gave me away. I must have thought I would like to go, so I went, saying, 'Yes!', to get married (laughing).

Even if, for purposes of marriage, a Yolmo woman is defined as a gift, to be given and received between the two parties concerned, it goes without saying that a living woman can never be actually reduced to a gift. She has

Their reasoning appears to be as follows: Given that a daughter must go sometime, somewhere, all the better if she does not go not too far, and can stay among her fellow villagers. See also below.

11 All the excerpts are from life story interviews in 2003 and 2004.

her own will and desires concerning her fate, which are either expressed or unexpressed, and either comply or do not comply with what others expect of her; and what she herself thinks and how she behaves can influence how her fate unfolds. My point is that the rules of the game formally deprive a woman of the power to decide whether, or with whom, she marries. A woman must go (= get married), but she must not go on her own.¹² Put in another way, a woman is put in a difficult position if she refuses to go and stays on at her parents' home, or goes by herself. Her own wish, desire or initiative for the move is structurally denied here, and accordingly, more often than not ends up getting denied in reality.

What about migrant work? Who decides that a woman should leave home and work, and why? In this kind of mobility, the decision is normally made by the woman herself, or at least with her explicit consent. Those who are close to her might suggest, advise, or even order her to go, but in the end, in all the cases I heard of, it was apparent that a woman did not have to be coerced into doing so, as was often the case for marriage. In the days when going to India was the obvious choice for anyone to earn money (cf. Bishop 1993), it was not uncommon that the whole family or group of young village peers of the same gender would go together. In those days (even today, for that matter), setting out to earn money could be the preferred choice rather than just staying in the village and engaging in subsistence labour; given that women performed physically demanding labour in the village anyway, even the coolie work that the bulk of Yolmo migrants engaged in India was not unfavourable to them. The desire to set out could be quite strong, and women could even insist on going, against their guardians' will. A married woman of fifty, relocated to Kathmandu, reported

(My big half-sister) enticed me to come to India together with her. I said (to my mother¹³) 'I will go with my sister, she says she will give me (gold) ear rings and pretty clothes'. I had only hardships in the village, I had no money, I worked in the field and ate, that's all. It (the idea of going to India) was such a childish thought, as I look back. 'I will go

12 One can detect this resulting ambivalence in the nuanced, intentionally vague way the interviewee expresses her will to marry in the last excerpt.

13 Her father had been mostly absent from home, migrating to India to work for the police there.

with my sister, Mother', I said. Mother told me, 'I will (eventually) give you earrings, don't go'.

The contrast with cases of marital mobility is remarkable, in that there seems to be nothing that prevents a woman from straightforwardly expressing her 'desire to go' for migrant work.

What are the motives for women to migrate? Making money is the most obvious one, for women as well as for their families.¹⁴ Since women perform the greater part of subsistence and reproductive labour at home, they are not necessarily expected to leave home to earn money. Nonetheless, when women get the chance and are willing to do so, they seem not to be obstructed from doing so by their parents or other family members, unless they were concerned to marry the woman off at the time (see below).¹⁵

Actually there was a tradition of young women from Yolmo leaving home to work as maids at Rana palaces in Kathmandu.¹⁶ The willingness of many Yolmo women to migrate away to earn money can be seen in light of this tradition, which was extended to other destinations after the Rana palaces had mostly gone. This active engagement of Yolmo women with migration can be seen from yet another angle; after all, they have always been economically active, that is, their labour at home has always made a substantial contribution to ensuring their family's survival and well-being. When cash later became an absolute necessity for their family's survival and well-being, women from Yolmo did not appear to hesitate to make that contribution, even if it meant leaving their home.

At a more personal level, some women would also express their wish for modern urban amenities or material abundance (pretty clothes, jewelry, cars, etc.) as a motive for migrating. The last woman cited continued,

(A)t that time, I had never even been to Kathmandu. Friends said that houses were running in Kathmandu (= car). I couldn't wait to see

14 See KC (2014) for the detailed discussion of 'earning' (N. *kamaune*) as a reason for migration, which seems to be widely shared across various sections of Nepali society. KC stresses its gendered dimension: *kamune* is first and foremost what men should engage in to secure their masculine identity (pp. 16-19). In Yolmo, it is apparently not necessarily the case and the activity is not an exclusive domain for men.

15 Or the woman was regarded too young to migrate for work, as was the case in the excerpt above.

16 They usually returned to the village and married Yolmo men.

that! Also they said that people were going “*hurr*” sitting on two flat baskets (= bicycle). “Oh my,” I thought, “when can I get to see those things? When can I get to Kathmandu?” So I decided to go (with my sister) to see them.

Other personal motives can be related to the first kind of mobility discussed above: marriage. Either trying to avoid an unwanted marriage or joining a husband who had already migrated could also be a motive to migrate. We will deal with the further interrelationships between marriage and mobility below.

As we have seen at the outset, the destinations for migrant work are apparently in the process of shifting as well as diversifying: from those destinations predominantly and almost exclusively located in India to destinations in various overseas countries. While the conditions of work and life in destinations abroad that are scattered across the globe may be extremely diverse, there are some differences in conditions between destinations in India and elsewhere that we should note here.

In India, Yolmo migrants tend not to be isolated but concentrate together, forming patches of the greater Yolmo community, even if these groups are small in number. Also, it was relatively easy for migrants to move back and forth between their home village and India. These conditions facilitated marital ties within the Yolmo communities, either between or during migrations to India, and either with Yolmo fellow migrants staying in proximity in India, or with people staying back home.¹⁷ In overseas countries, on the other hand, locales with a substantial number of concentrated Yolmos are rather exceptional (so far such concentrations are only known to exist in New York and Israel). And after one migrates further abroad, one does not get to move back and forth; all the more so, if one stays abroad illegally. Thus, an overseas stay is likely to be prolonged without substantial contacts with other Yolmos. This means that if single women (or men, for that matter) migrate overseas, the chances of their marrying a fellow Yolmo are likely to be low while they stay there. They might remain single even after returning home, if they are regarded as already having passed the marriageable age by then.

As has been seen in the discussion above, these two kinds of mobility

17 See also Bishop (1993), for the situation of Yolmo migrants in India.

can be intertwined in many ways; they can facilitate, motivate, obstruct, or be used to avoid each other. Let us look at the synergistic effects first.

As was mentioned above in passing, marital ties can form grounds for women to migrate: they may want to join their husband who migrated earlier. This type of migration to India, Kathmandu or overseas has been happening for many years. There are also cases where husband and wife migrate jointly. On the other hand, under particular conditions, the migration could be a motive for getting married (or pretending to be married). Although I heard of only one such case (of migration to India¹⁸), there are presumably others.¹⁹ More common is for women to get married in the place to which they migrated. As has already been mentioned, in India, where substantial numbers of Yolmo migrants concentrate, more often than not marriage is contracted among those fellow migrants.²⁰ It is true that marriage might have happened at home anyway, and so the relationship between marriage and migration cannot be properly called synergistic. And yet, it may also be true that in places away from Yolmo where the potential risk of Yolmo daughters marrying outsiders (and becoming estranged from their natal family and community) is considered to be higher, the pressures for parents of grown-up daughters to make them marry Yolmo men promptly might be tenser than at home.²¹

So what are the trade-offs between marriage and migration? As already mentioned, it is not unusual for a woman to resist when a proposition for marriage is received. One reason for resisting might be her wish to migrate for work, a reason that was not infrequently brought out. Alternatively, a woman can attempt to migrate in order to avoid marriage. The husband of a 42-year old woman, talking about how they married, reported that she protested when her father accepted a marriage offer for her, saying:

‘(I)s that because you think you must feed me?! You may have thought

18 A woman told me that she and a Yolmo man pretended to be a couple in order to pass the border check to India. Later, she married him (age 75, relocated to Kathmandu).

19 Cases of women marrying as a way to migrate overseas are known from other parts of the world. For example, women migrated from other Asian countries to (especially rural) areas in Japan or South Korea, where there had long been a shortage of brides, to marry local men (Ochiai & Akaeda 2012).

20 Cases of marriage with men outside of Yolmo are known, of course, but seem rather few so far.

21 See Footnote 10.

that you have to give me food, fend for me. But you don't have to feed me. I will go to Kathmandu and live on my own, I will! Why did you give me away? Why in the world do I have to marry and settle in village A?!' – That's what she said - she argued fiercely with her father.²²

Attempts to avoid marriage in order to migrate, or to migrate in order to avoid marriage, seem rarely to have been carried through among these interviewees; they mostly ended up marrying instead of migrating.²³

But when faced with such choices, do people always opt for marriage? At the moment the situation is rapidly changing, as the opportunities for women to work overseas as caregivers are especially promising. Their capacity to work abroad and earn appreciable amounts of money (by Yolmo standards) is coming to be more and more valued, not only by the women themselves but also by their parents, and this appreciation seems to deter the parents' determination to marry them off early. This determination might also have been deterred by the growing trend of educating daughters (and sons) rather than marrying them off at a very young age, along with the concomitant empowerment of daughters to insist on their own desires.

As a result, a number of cases have already emerged where daughters migrated abroad and stayed single until they were well over thirty years old. It is difficult to say in individual cases whether women stayed single because they wanted to work abroad or whether they worked abroad in order to avoid marriage. In any case, it seems safe to say at the moment that when faced with the choice between marriage and migration, most women and their families choose migration.²⁴ A notable fact is that the

22 The wife was also present during this interview. I tried to arrange life story interviews with women alone, but this did not always succeed, as this case illustrates. It sometimes happened that the men (basically, husbands) present at the interview took over the interview and elaborated on what had happened to their wife.

23 See Sato (2007a, 2015: Chapter 4) for the detailed case story where this trade-off was resolved in favour of marriage – despite the woman's fierce resistance.

24 Married women can also experience conflict between their marital life and migrant work when they set out for migratory work by themselves (or alternatively, when their husband does so by himself). It is no wonder that the prolonged years of separated living, caused by the absence of a wife (or husband), could adversely affect their relationship. (I am aware of a more than one of divorce cases that resulted at least partly from such separation).

number of women staying single seems to be increasing – perhaps to the point that is difficult to regard them as mere exceptions to the rule that ‘women (must) go (for marriage).’

It would be mistaken to assume that when Yolmo women migrate, they are necessarily choosing economic independence over married life. None of them seem to aspire to live on their own with the money they earn. It is generally taken for granted by these women (and by their families) that the money earned by them (or the bulk of it) will be shared with their (natal or marital) family, and spent or invested according to its decision, in which they have a say. Pursuing income-generating activities and aspiring for individual economic independence are actually two different things; the women definitely migrate to earn money but the money earned is used to contribute to the sustenance, fortune, and honour of their families.

Relocation to Kathmandu

Let us proceed to examine the third major form of mobility of Yolmo women: relocation to Kathmandu. As we have seen, Boudha in Kathmandu is now definitely the area where the biggest Yolmo population – men and women – concentrates. It is said that it was in the 1970s that a few adventuresome Yolmos started to move to Kathmandu. But it was in the late 1980s and thereafter that the numbers of Yomo living in Kathmandu surged. Those who obtained their homes in Kathmandu earlier did so mainly with money earned from migrant work in India. Some others engaged in businesses in Kathmandu (e.g. running carpet factories), which in many cases was also started up with capital earned in India. Today, most wealth seems to be flowing in from countries other than India.²⁵

Obtaining one’s own house and relocating to Kathmandu (permanently²⁶) is generally seen to be made possible by successful migrant work. In other words, most current migrant labour is driven by the desire to make enough money to buy a house and relocate to Kathmandu.²⁷ But

25 Note that the investment necessary for migrating overseas was made possible, in many cases, by money earned in India (and later, overseas).

26 Actually, many Yolmos moved temporarily before they obtained their house in Kathmandu. On the other hand, this permanent relocation generally does not mean that they moved to Kathmandu and left village home in Yolmo once and for all. See the discussion below.

27 It is not unusual that money sent back home is spent on the day-to-day needs of the

who decides to move to Kathmandu, and why? What kind of move is this for Yolmo people in general, and for Yolmo women in particular? And how do they evaluate the move and their lives afterwards?

Let us first examine who decides the relocation to Kathmandu. Generally speaking, it is made possible only by investing the available wealth of the family as a whole, earned by men or women. Accordingly, and without exception, the move appears to have been decided upon by the family as a whole. Actually, at this historical juncture, among Yolmo people it is rather inconceivable that someone, a man or a woman, would object to relocating in Kathmandu if they can afford to obtain a house there. It is definitely an aspiration pervasively shared by Yolmos (or, for that matter, the bulk of Nepalis) at the moment, even if degrees of enthusiasm for the move may vary from person to person (or from community to community).

Why do they aspire to relocate to Kathmandu? The move is understood to enable them to enjoy urban amenities, and to avoid the physically arduous work that must be performed in the village. It is also thought to give access to opportunities to educate the next generation and possibly to provide some chances for business. Above all, it is thought to entail a social status; what is happening in this trend of relocation is actually the division of Yolmo society into two 'classes' of people: those who have a house in Kathmandu and those who don't.²⁸

What this move means for the people from Yolmo themselves is actually much more complicated than a simple relocation with an upgraded social standing and urban amenities. For one thing, Yolmo never willingly left their villages forever. Already in the late 1990s, Yolmos who relocated to Kathmandu established their own Buddhist temple (Yolmo Gompa, as they usually call it) there, which is a focal institution for community-building. Because formal (village) community membership is defined by being a co-sponsor of the (village) Buddhist temple (Sato 2006), the establishment of this new temple and concomitant formation of a new community of Yolmo immigrants in Kathmandu made it possible for those relocated Yolmos to abandon their formal village membership. But so far not

family in Yolmo or Kathmandu, as well as to pay back debts incurred to cover the costs to go abroad in the first place.

28 Yolmos have never been uniform in terms of distribution of wealth, though. At the moment, differences in wealth are being refigured.

many have actually utilised that option – most of them are still formally ‘villagers’; they have retained their formal membership of the original village society, even though they do not spend most of their lives in the village anymore. Even before many started to obtain permanent homes in Kathmandu, long-time absentee villagers (staying in India) were not necessarily anomalies in Yolmo society. To this day many Yolmos residing in Kathmandu follow this tradition and retain their village membership along with their membership of Yolmo community in the capital.

Also, while the Yolmo village is definitely a place where modern amenities, the potential to earn money, and the means for living other than by doing physically arduous work (*Y. tukpu*, *N. dukkha*) are hardly available, still most Yolmos idealize their beloved homeland with fresh air and water as well as an abundance of potatoes and radishes, as a place where one has little need for money, and where one can obtain things that money can’t buy. Villages in Yolmo are not just places for rustic people from whom migrants wish to distinguish themselves. As a married woman of 59, who relocated to Kathmandu more than a decade ago, said:

However hard you work, you don’t get money (in the village). In our village, now or then, it’s the same. ... But you get plenty of food for yourself if you work hard. It is in your village that you can live joyfully (*Y. kamsaugbu*). You feel comfort (*Y. kipu*) there, for sure. It is your own village; you can do whatever you like. Your village is your village; it’s your fatherland (*Y. phayul*), after all. My mind attaches to my village – I stay around here (= Kathmandu) because I have to, there are things that should be taken care of around here, you know – (but) I want to stay in my village. ... (Even if I live in Kathmandu at the moment) I perform every obligation for the village temple. I went for *Ngyungne*²⁹ the other day, too. I keep on doing everything.

On the other hand, the Yolmo people’s view of Kathmandu, their newly acquired home, is far from total adoration. It is true that Kathmandu is a place where one can live with certain comforts (*Y. kipu*, *N. sukkha*).³⁰ But

29 *Ngyungne* is a Buddhist ritual centering on the practice of fasting, performed annually at many temples in Yolmo.

30 See Desjarlais (2003) for a discussion of how the *kipu* and *tukpu* dichotomy constructs the Yolmo perception of life.

that is only on one condition – that you have money to spend. The city is a world where you cannot live or do anything without money, which in most cases has to be earned by some family member's labour in migration. That means, especially for the older generation, that it is a place where you are prone to get bored (*Y. tserke*). If you do not enjoy spending money, which is the case for many Yolmos (partly because it is not their custom and partly because they cannot afford to do so), then you do not have much to do other than making the rounds of Boudhanath stupa, mornings and evenings.

Not only does having to spend money on a daily basis in order to live in Kathmandu make relocated villagers feel uncomfortable, but they also feel that Kathmandu is a place where living is far from comfortable anyway, with its deteriorating environment and dysfunctional infrastructure (polluted air, water shortages, electricity failures, traffic jams, congested public transportation, etc.), not to mention the skyrocketing price of commodities. Even more depressing is the fact that this deterioration seems accelerated by the massive inflow of migrants from rural Nepal, partly constituted of Yolmos themselves, and that this trend shows no signs of stopping in the foreseeable future.

Thus, Yolmo women (and men) who relocated to Kathmandu have mixed feelings about the move. It is definitely what they aspired and strived for through all the years of hard work in migration, and yet, they do not want to completely abandon their home village, either. The point of compromise for many is that they mostly stay in Kathmandu but from time to time visit their home village, either to attend ceremonial events, to tend to their homes or fields, or to simply visit their relatives.

Maintaining two homes is sometimes difficult, however. In the first place, going back and forth between the village and Kathmandu is burdensome.³¹ The maintenance costs of keeping up the village home on top of a city home, in terms of money or labour, are not negligible. In fact, the difficulties of maintaining a village home appear to be mounting, partly because of the very trend of massive out-migration from villages. Earlier, while they were absent from the village for longer periods of time people could easily find a fellow villager to tend to their homestead or

31 Motorable roads and routine bus services that have been extended in Yolmo area since several years ago have made the trip considerably easier.

their obligations as a village member to the temple at a cost. Now it is becoming more and more difficult to do so, because fewer people are still resident in the village.

With the dramatic decrease in available manpower in villages, maintaining village homes has become more difficult than ever, not only for those who relocated to Kathmandu but even for those who still live in villages.³² With a shortage of manpower, all households are likely to have difficulties fulfilling the day-to-day needs of subsistence. And addressing their needs by hiring wage labourers is also getting more difficult, for the same reason.

While it has long been a rule that only something that is not available locally would cost more in villages than it would in cities, nowadays items that are essentially obtainable locally can also be more expensive. A case in point is fuel for cooking. Recently, some villagers introduced propane cooking gas, because the costs of hiring a day-labourer to gather firewood or the price of firewood by the basket became higher than transporting gas cylinders all the way from Kathmandu.

With their mixed feelings towards the move from their home villages to Kathmandu, it is rather impressive that the Yolmo women I interviewed invariably evaluated the move (or the concomitant passage of time from the former times to the present) in positive terms. They favour the present, modern, commercialised world over their past in the villages of Yolmo, where nothing was ever available. It is much better today, they say, when you can go to school wearing nice clothes and do not have to shoulder heavy loads on your forehead. A fifty-year-old married woman resident in her village, whose children were living in Kathmandu, said

There was nothing in our day; no one got to study, wear nice clothes, or go to school – that kind of things never happened. Now, one gets to wear nice clothes immediately after exiting the Mother’s belly, goes to school when one has grown large enough, walks about to see many places, and doesn’t have to shoulder loads or carry foddors – such a big difference! ... It’s better, far better now than before – even to the extent I wish I could have been born these days (laughing). I do think

32 See Goldstein and Beal (1980) for the difficult situation for those left behind in Yolmo, especially for older generation, even before the massive trend of out-migration to Kathmandu and overseas set in.

so, you know! I really think I was born too early; I wish I had been born at the time when things were like they are now.

They even go on to say that they do not expect their children will stay with them in Nepal, still less in Yolmo. They say they just hope for a good future for their children, wherever they live. Another married woman of sixty, who had relocated to Kathmandu, said

Although I endured hardships myself (in the village), I would be very much glad if my children get to make a living in a good way (i.e. without enduring physical hardships). If my children stay with me and take care of me – what kind of life can they expect for themselves? I would be content, if they make a good living on their own. They will visit us here anyway, from time to time.

Many Yolmo women (or for that matter, men) have migrated to earn money, hoping to obtain a house of their own in the capital city. When they secured a house and relocated there, they appreciated their newly found urban life, while not abandoning their attachment to home village, either. At the same time, many do not expect their children to stay where they are – certainly not in the way they did, wherever they may live or go. Daughters (and sons) will migrate, perhaps not to India but even further away, possibly in a different capacity and in a very different milieu from their parents. And those children will find their old home not in Yolmo anymore but first and foremost in Kathmandu, or possibly, beyond.³³

Thus, Yolmo people are on the move and their society appears to be in a process of rapid change. We will turn to this topic in the next section, focusing on its gendered aspect, with special reference to the first kind of move we saw that presumably has defined the position of women in Yolmo society: marriage.

33 Some Yolmo emigrants to the US are known to have obtained green cards or even citizenship there. Whether they will come back to Nepal or not remains to be seen. Whereas Kathmandu seems to have been the goal of migration for many years, the city might be changing into a staging point for migration to cities in the US, UK, or elsewhere, especially for the younger generation. See Nelson (2013).

Impacts of migrant work / relocation to Kathmandu on marriage

So how have these more recent moves – migrant work, and then relocation to Kathmandu – impacted on the older form of women’s mobility in Yolmo: marriage? More broadly, how significant have these moves been for changing gender relations there?

The trend of migration, firstly to India, and then to other countries, has significantly contributed to the accumulation of wealth in Yolmo society³⁴. And the relocation to Kathmandu that this enabled shows a major shift in Yolmo society. Whereas before, the main form of wealth was land, including homestead and fields in one’s own village as well as paddy fields in lower altitude areas adjunct to Yolmo villages, real estate in Kathmandu has now come to be the major form of wealth, and a symbol of success.

An important fact to reiterate here is that with the rapid growth in overseas migration, women have contributed much to acquire this new form of wealth – on the whole perhaps no less than, and in some cases more than, men have. This fact seems to be prompting a feminisation of wealth in Yolmo society at large; while it is undeniably true that women as a whole still own far less property than men, what is happening now can be regarded as a sea change from the situation that was prevalent so far.

Traditionally, Yolmos practiced patrilineal descent in which sons inherited all parental property. This arrangement meant that women in Yolmo society were effectively property-less, despite their indispensable contributions to household economies through their (re)productive labour. Their contributions remained mostly unappreciated in economic terms. But their current, direct contribution of cash turns out to be greatly appreciated, especially when money earned is invested into real estate in Kathmandu and converted into a concrete and lasting form that brings social status.

The feminisation of wealth entails a different positioning of women in their family; it seems that it is now possible for daughters to be regarded as family members on a par with sons. With the recognition of daughters’ (potential for) contributions to the amassing of family property, a fundamental shift in the rule of property inheritance might be already

34 See Lokshin et al. (2010) for a statistical estimate of the (positive) impact of migration on poverty reduction in Nepal.

in sight³⁵. When I asked a married woman of sixty, who had relocated to Kathmandu and whose daughters, after working for years in Korea, had earned enough money to buy their family house in Kathmandu, whether the inheritance among Yolmos in Kathmandu was moving towards equal shares for sons and daughters, she said,

Yes. Before it wasn't like that. You do not give sons and daughters on equal terms. They say sons inherit property, while daughters receive only *mho nor*³⁶. Nowadays sons go abroad to make money, and daughters do the same. Thus we have to give them equally.

The upsurge in women's monetary contributions through migrant work might affect not only the position of single women in their natal families but also the position of married women. Yolmo wives generally have a say in monetary or other matters that concern the whole family; this is even more clearly so when they themselves earn the money, which remains family property. Under such circumstances, a married daughter may wish to send (a portion of) the money she earned back to her natal family – just as an unmarried daughter would do. This blurs the idea that she is a daughter and sister who is already 'gone', effectively an outsider. A woman in her thirties, who had been working for years in Israel as a caregiver, reportedly did just that. Just before leaving for Israel, she said, 'I have never regarded myself as a daughter who has 'gone' (to other's house)'³⁷. But now, according to her natal family members, she insists upon building a house in Kathmandu jointly with her brother, which would realise what she somehow always seems to have aspired to: remaining a part of her natal family, not leaving it for her husbands' family, even after marriage.

While this woman's case (i.e. trying to redefine her move from her natal home to her husband's through redirecting her monetary

35 The shift to equal property rights for daughters and sons was achieved in Nepal's legal system by amendments to Muluki Ain (General Code) in 2002 and 2006. In the latter amendment, it was stipulated that married or unmarried daughters and sons get equal shares of the parental property. How far this legal provision translates into practice, in Yolmo or elsewhere, remains to be seen.

36 Literally 'women's treasure' (Y.), signifying movable assets consisting mainly of jewelry (gold earrings, etc.) given to daughters by their parents when they are married.

37 See Sato (2007a) for this woman's life story interview. Its revised and updated version is included in Sato (2015: Chapter 4).

contribution) may be a rather isolated one, still the trend is undeniably clear: the number of women not 'going' till the later stage of their lives is increasing. That is, more and more daughters remain unmarried and still attached to their natal homes for longer periods of time, with many of them actively contributing to its economy. Many parents appear to appreciate, or count on, their daughters' contributions; they probably intend to marry their daughter to someone eventually, but since they need cash for the household, this may be delayed until the daughter is past her childbearing years. Such women may never be married, and might remain at their parents' (and partake of their natal family's property), as their brothers would.³⁸

Thus, when more and more women migrate, it may affect that classic form of women's mobility in Yolmo society: marriage. Daughters may stay at their natal home, or alternatively, the daughters who are 'gone' may retain economic links with their natal home, for life.

Another possibility for change related to marriage has to do with the agency of women: they may start 'going' by themselves. With their newly acquired power and experience through migration, they may be able to ignore or circumvent the structural prescriptions depriving them of the power to make the move on their own. And such practices may end up re-defining the position of "woman" in structural terms as well – from a gift given by her natal family and received by her marital family to an actor who chooses for herself. At the same time, however, it is undeniably true that the sanction against (or the actual risk entailed in) any sexual boldness on the part of women appears to still be there, more or less, and that this fact limits the possibility of women experimenting with new ways of negotiating this mobility from natal to marital home.³⁹

Overall, there is no denying that the direction of change has yet to be established firmly. The pressure for daughters to 'go' (but not on their own) from their parents' to another's house is still high and on the whole their status in the family (or in society at large) is far from equal to that of men.⁴⁰ And yet, it is safe to say that the status of women has improved in

38 This seems to be exactly the case for a daughter of the woman cited in the excerpt just above, who migrated to Korea.

39 See also Liechty (2010) for the difficult exercise by middle-class women in Kathmandu to negotiate with modernity.

40 There are a number of practices in Yolmo society, within individual households and

present-day Yolmo society because of their increasing migration abroad, if only in the very limited sense that sons and daughters are beginning to be regarded as being of equal value in terms of their earning capacity and to be treated accordingly with respect to money that they earn.

Conclusion

In this paper, I observed that various kinds of mobility as practiced by Yolmo women are embedded in their particular socio-cultural settings, and asked what impact these mobilities make on such settings, especially in terms of gender.

I discussed three forms of mobility experienced by Yolmo women: marriage, migration, and relocation to Kathmandu. In patrilineal and patrilocal Yolmo society, women have been required to move from their natal home to their husbands' homes upon marriage. On the other hand, Yolmo people have long been engaged in migration to earn money, and women have always played an integral part. In the more recent migratory move to overseas countries, the engagement of women appears to be on the increase, which puts them in the mainstream of wealth-accumulating activities in Yolmo society. The third kind of mobility, relocation to Kathmandu, entails and is enabled by a major shift in the manifestation of wealth in Yolmo society: from village lands to money (mostly earned through migratory work), often invested in real estate in Kathmandu. With their substantial contributions to relocation, the position of women in the Yolmo family in particular, and in Yolmo society at large, seems to be improving. The shape of their age-old mobility – marriage – seems to be in the process of being reworked. Yolmo women are now moving, as it were, from their position as 'daughters who go' leaving their natal families to that of 'daughters who stay on' with them, as was always the case with their brothers. In so far as migration has contributed to this reconfiguration, it definitely can be said to have had a positive impact towards gender equality.

But let me add some caveats before concluding the argument. My contention here is not that the move has been positive for Yolmo women's

beyond, which constitute unequal gender relationships, such as a heavier domestic burden on women, mundane practices that place women at lower seats, the exclusion of women from higher Buddhist practice, to name only a few. Those practices appear to be mostly unchanged to this day (see Sato 2015: Chapter 1).

lives overall, that is, for every woman in every aspect. Women certainly endure some negative consequences, apparent as well s potential, of out-migration.

I already mentioned the deteriorating living conditions in Yolmo villages (not to mention in Kathmandu) for those left behind. The burden will be especially heavy on those who have to oversee the day-to-day maintenance of the home, not infrequently, the women.⁴¹

On top of that, those women who migrate often endure many hardships there. Given that they generally had no choice but to work as unskilled migrant workers, located at the lowest level of the globalised system of (re)production, and presumably with no adequate institutional support or protection, it would not be surprising if they have faced exploitation or violence (possibly including sexual) in one form or another.⁴² A rather remarkable fact is that Yolmo women (and men, for that matter) do not generally talk of the hardships they endured during migrant work, when they are back home in Yolmo or in Kathmandu. The question they are perpetually asked is how much money they earned, and little else is talked about.⁴³ The exploration of this silence is a challenge that remains for the future; it most likely contains some memories of suffering or hardship that will not be easily brought out.

When these women come back home, their predicament does not necessarily end, especially if they are not yet married. Their economic contribution will be appreciated, but their presence as mature daughters living with their parents can still be difficult to deal with, even if it is no longer regarded as anomalous. After all, an unmarried daughter or sister can be problematic for some parents and brothers, especially if she cannot easily be excluded from the inheritance of family property as could have been done before. For the women themselves, remaining single for the rest of their lives may not be their choice (cf. Sato 2008). In a society where virilocal marriage is still the norm (unless one chooses to be a monk or nun), the newly acquired option of female returnees to remain members

41 See Gartaula et al. (2012), Maharjan et al. (2012) and Adhikari & Hobley (2015) for comparison.

42 See the literature mentioned in Footnote 1.

43 In private conversations, women might share the more difficult experiences, of course. But this is not what is heard in public conversations about migrant work among Yolmo people.

of their natal family could leave them in a state of limbo. How they would work their way out of this remains to be seen.

Thus, some women may enjoy some fruits of emigration, but others may not, and even those who do may have their share of adversities, depending on their broader personal, family or migratory context. So far, the overall consequences for Yolmo women of out-migration should be evaluated as mixed, apparently on the social level but often on the individual level as well.

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REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Studying Documents in Pre-modern South Asia and Beyond: Problems and Perspectives

4th – 6th October 2015

Simon Cubelic and Astrid Zotter

Although the “government of paper” (Matthew S. Hull) in colonial and post-colonial bureaucracies has received considerable scholarly attention in recent decades, practices of documentation in pre-modern South Asian societies are still largely unexplored. The study of such documents is not only challenging, but also opens up new perspectives on South Asian religions and societies. Around thirty scholars convened at Heidelberg in October 2015 to discuss recent research on documents.

The conference was organized under the auspices of the project “Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal” conducted by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities since 2014. Bringing together experts from various fields of knowledge, one of the main objectives was to contextualize the increasing production of documents during Nepal’s “long nineteenth century” (ca. 1768-1951) within pre-modern South Asian administrative and legal cultures, which are polyglot and draw upon several trans-local literary cultures. Digital aspects of document and archival research were also discussed.

The first panel on the first day, „Chronicles and Records“, was dedicated to Nepalese historiography and memorial culture, with Yogesh Mishra (Kathmandu) looking at the genre of medieval journals to call into question the nexus between chronology and history writing, and Alexander von Rospatt (Berkeley) investigating records of private endowments to renovate the *Svayambhucaitya* of Kathmandu during the late Malla period, with stress placed on the role of documentation in consolidating a specific Buddhist identity.

Panels 2 and 3 turned to legal practice. Focussing on the Nepalese Rana period (1846-1951), in section 2 Axel Michaels (Heidelberg) reconstructed the socio-religious context of a letter from 1863, in which the Nepalese Prime Minister addressed an assembly of scholars in Benares to decide on the question whether women should be permitted to establish a temple for Shiva or not. Rajan Khatiwoda (Heidelberg) discussed documentary

evidence for the application of the Nepalese code of law, the *Muluki Ain*, in juridical practice. Simon Cubelic (Heidelberg) looked at practices of assigning gambling licences against the backdrop of respective legal regulations, and observed that in implementing rules there was scope for negotiation.

Opening the third panel, Rosalind O'Hanlon's (Oxford) paper dealt with the impact of the paper revolution on the documentation of titles of private ownership in Western India in the early modern period. Timothy Lubin (Lexington) looked at formal conventions of pre-modern South and Southeast Asian inscriptions and postulated the existence of a diplomatic culture specific to South Asia and traceable back in time at least to the edicts of Ashoka (3rd cent. BC). Diwakar Acharya (Kyoto) reported on a 17th-century debt-clearance certificate for the Sanskrit poet Vamshamani, which attests to the implementation of the Hindu law of debt. Charles Ramble (Paris/Oxford) traced the history of the fingerprint as means of verification in Tibetan documents in the Nepalese Himalaya.

The fourth panel featured contributions on methods of and problems in treating documents digitally and physically. Georg Vogeler (Graz) asked to what extent the newly emerging discipline of Digital Diplomats is liable to impose European norms and terms on non-Western document cultures or if, on the contrary, there are universal patterns allowing one to establish a global framework for it. Christiane Sibille (Bern) introduced the digital infrastructure of the project "Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland". Axel Michaels, Christof Zotter (Heidelberg) and Oliver Hellwig (Düsseldorf) reported on the database and digital editing methods of the project "Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal". Experts from Nepalese archives including Prakash Darnal and Kumar Shrestha from the National Archives, Kathmandu, as well as Shamik Mishra (Kathmandu) from the *Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya* shed light on challenges in dealing with archival materials.

On the second day, in the panel on administration, Christof Zotter spoke about the role of ascetics in collecting revenues and fines in the context of the formation of the Nepalese state. Monika Boehm-Tettelbach (Heidelberg) analysed formal changes in documents on land endowments from 17-19th century Rajasthan under the influence of the diplomatic traditions of India during the Moghul period. On the basis of sources from colonial and local archives, Gisèle Krauskopff (Paris) reconstructed how

in the 19th century the Tharu living in the Tarai plain of Nepal managed to elude revenue collection by strategic settlement shifts.

The last panel of the conference addressed documents concerning the royal court of Nepal. Manik Bajracharya looked at the career of the royal scribe (Munshi) Lakshmidas, who managed to deploy the seizure of power by the Rana family to expand his own influence. Letters of Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana to the British resident B.H. Hodgson were the topic of Ramesh Dhungel's (Kathmandu) paper, which unearthed unknown details on the Nepalese-British relations of that time. Finally, with the example of royal Durgapuja Astrid Zotter (Heidelberg) characterized the significance of documents when trying to reconstruct ritual practices of the past.

The conference proceedings will be published by *Universitätsverlag Winter* in the series *Akademiekonferenzen*.

BOOK REVIEWS

Monastic and Lay Traditions in North-Eastern Tibet

Edited by Yangdon Dhondup, Ulrich Pagel, and Geoffrey Samuel. Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 244, 4 maps, 15 color photos, ISBN 978-90-04-25569-2, price €98,00/\$125,00.

Reviewed by Antonio Terrone

That Buddhism permeates most of Tibet's history, culture, and even politics in the past millennium is well-known. What is still not so well-known, however, is that Buddhist influence on local communities has been far from homogenous and rather diverse and dynamic. This is the case in the vibrant borderlands of Amdo in Eastern Tibet, where Buddhism co-existed with Bon communities and Gelug monastic dominance shared influence with Nyingma lay Tantric congregations since the sixteenth century. In this case, *Monastic and Lay Traditions in North-Eastern Tibet* is a much-needed contribution to the study of lived religion in modern and contemporary frontier lands of Tibet. The balance in the essays between historical, textual, and ethnographic methods of investigation emphasizes the contributors' diverse backgrounds and methodological approaches. The ethnographic explorations of religion-making experiences in Tibet offer increasingly important understandings of how people live the continually changing and challenging realities in their local settings, a point highlighted by Geoffrey Samuel in the introduction to the volume, noting that Rebkong is an area that since 2008 has seen a disturbingly high number of people who have immolated themselves in protest for their religious and civil rights (p. 16).

While all the articles deserve appreciation for their analyses and varied topics, the novelty of the volume lies mostly in its discussion of the activities of the noncelibate community of religious professionals (*sngags mang*) or the "Tantric Community," which is highly influential in Rebkong. Most of the contributors approach their study with an ethnographic interest and a focus on the politics of religion within both monastic and lay communities. The socio-political context of Rebkong is an interesting one as the whole region lies in a highly multiethnic area populated by Tibetans, Han Chinese, Mongols, and other ethnic groups such as the Hui and Tu (p. 9). It also hosts diverse religious constituencies including influential Gelugpa

communities amid Nyingma strongholds. Other characteristics that make the larger Rebkong area particularly interesting to scholars and sensitive to Chinese authorities is the proximity to the Fourteenth and current Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso's birthplace, Tagtsang, as well as the location of the Labrang monastery. In recent years some of the most dramatic acts of political unrest including self-immolations have taken place in this area. Paul Nietupski does an excellent job of unveiling the intersection between Buddhist authority, local economy, and politics in the Labrang Monastery region. Whereas Nietupski explains the "polythetic" nature of religion(s) and political dynamics in Amdo that are capable of representing diversity and yet maintaining uniform functionality (pp. 71-72), Gedun Rabsal narrates the vicissitudes and misfortunes of Losang Trinlé Luntok Gyatso (1916-1978), the Seventh Shar Kalden Gyatso. This influential local *trülku* was imprisoned (p. 59) despite resisting the temptation to leave for exile and embracing government work in China, which is a story reminiscent of other ones in Tibet, including that of the Tenth Panchen Lama.

By focusing on the Buddhist and Bonpo manifestations of Tibetans' sense of cultural and religious identity in Rebkong, the volume inserts itself in a growing body of research in Amdo studies, and also adds to the study of non-monastic and lay traditions such as the highly influential Tantric congregations well-known in the area which Heather Stoddard, Yangdon Dhondup, Colin Millard, and Nicolas Sihlé address in their essays. While Heather Stoddard brings new life to understanding the role that the Tantric community has had on eighteenth-century non-sectarian (*ris med*) approaches to religious practice through the life of Rigzin Palden Tashi (1688-1743) in Eastern Tibet, Dhondup discusses the significance and scope of monastic constitutions (*bca' yig*) for lay Tantric monastics in the area. Quite importantly and still in need of more study, Colin Millard addresses the local Bon community's struggle to return to its pre-Cultural Revolution shape. In his study of the economy of religious rituals among local householder Tantric professionals, Sihlé instead reminds us that beyond the spiritual and merit-making aspirations, quite often devotees go to rituals "to get a share" (p. 167).

The articles in this volume help readers to appreciate the origins and developments of Rebkong religious communities as well as the strategies adopted by their adherents to survive until the present day, thereby illuminating the roles these communities have played in Rebkong over the

past three centuries and in the recent post-Mao revival of religious practice in Tibet. In this regard, Charlene Makley's "politics of presence" (pp. 190-91) explains the demand for cultural, religious, and ethnic assertiveness as well as authority through her study of the annual harvest festival of *luröl* (*klu rol*). Jane Caple's observations on the "remembering" of the monastic revival among local monks as interpretative representations of the past (p. 24), offers fresh material for the appreciation of the meaning of the restoration of religious life among monastics and their understanding of change as response to global evolutions as well possibilities to negotiate the present and the future. Dawn Collins, finally, presents a fascinating account of public trance among ordinary people in the audience (not just the "dancers") of Tantric ritual dances (*'cham*) at a local Bonpo village in the Rebkong valley. While these dances are a popular religious ritual in numerous Tibetan monasteries, the phenomenon of trance or possession among those who enjoy the ritual dances seems to be unique to this region (p. 230).

This is an innovative collection of essays that sheds new light on the multi-layered presence of diverse religious traditions, monastic authorities, and ritual contexts in the background of a Tibetan society struggling to remember a glorified past to build a better future. The wide variety of case studies convincingly identify this binary trend—Gelugpa monastic enclaves and lay Tantric congregations—as the true religious and ritual identity of the people of Rebkong. Scholars as well as students of Tibet interested in the modern and contemporary history of Amdo in general will find this work informative and inspiring as it adds to a growing literature focused on this contested cultural area.

Tibetans who Escaped the Historian's Net: Studies in the Social History of Tibetan Societies

Edited by Charles Ramble, Peter Schwieger, Alice Travers. Kathmandu: Vajra Books. 2013, 255 pp., ISBN 978-9937-623-10-0, \$US 40.

Reviewed by David Templeman

As the first volume of the project 'The Social History of Tibetan Societies, 17-20th Centuries' this book makes a solid contribution to areas hitherto under-studied and contains contributions by twelve scholars associated with the project. I consider this to be a major contribution to the relatively recent studies of what have hitherto been regarded as minor areas of Tibetan interest. As this book so clearly demonstrates, these so-called 'minor' areas of study exemplify the larger world of Tibetan historical study as well as pointing to the importance of regional studies in the amplification of themes usually associated with more centrally located areas.

Despite being unable to demonstrate its actual implementation, Kalsang Gurung Norbu's discussion of the Ten-Point Edict prepared by the Amban Song-Yun in 1795 shows something of his apparent sense of concern for the Tibetan *mi ser* ('the ordinary people'). The author shows an ulterior motive in the desire to increase their welfare, leading as it would to the desirable outcomes of a broadened taxable base of people and an increase in centralization of the Lhasa government.

Christoph Cüppers discusses the role of torture as a rare legal recourse and notes that such ordeals had a textual presence in many of the Tibetan law codes, most particularly in the Tsang Law Code. The author has written more extensively on this elsewhere (Cüppers 2013), adding considerably to this discussion. He locates and discusses the Desi Sangye Gyatso's comments on the undesirability of imposing ordeal, preferring instead that parties relinquish certain of their claims, holding ordeal as a final resort.

In her examination of the (frequently oratory) law system of the Golok nomads, Fernanda Pirie notes certain important aspects of the Ganden Phodrang law system. In her reference to the symbolic function of such codes she touches on something of considerable importance – the

manner in which various *zhal lce* legal texts remind one of their function in recreating a past (and implicitly better) society in a sort of 'back to the future' movement.

The importance of a solid taxation base of *mi ser* is studied in Saul Mullard's contribution and reminds us of the need of Sikkimese rulers for both respectful and taxable subjects. The 1830 Covenant on tax exiles who fled Sikkim for eastern Nepal shows that the forgiveness meted out to those who fled was as much driven by economics as by mercy. Incidental to the fiscal basis for the Covenant, the ruler's magnanimity might well have been a more popular interpretation at the time.

Having located previously unused documents in Limi, Astrid Hovden supplements them with her own interviews to locate the source(s) of funding for the maintenance of local temples and their rituals. Based as they are on household membership, a sense of social cohesion becomes possible, although she notes that at times villagers may become 'tax refugees' (p. 215) that is, fleeing one's land and home to escape sometimes arbitrarily imposed or overly burdensome taxation. Of course this was a dangerous pursuit and one held for a long time in village memory, sometimes blighting the possibility of return for lengthy periods.

Basing his approach to a study of social opposition in the Baragaon area of Mustang, Charles Ramble demonstrates that what is said in the presence of power is not what is expressed in hidden transcripts. Locating such hidden texts Ramble finds that opposition to authority shapes itself into what he calls a 'thin end of a wedge.' The dislike of authority often sub-contracted to non-locals, was unable to be openly expressed except in these largely unknown and unstudied local documents. The author's examination and translation shows a hard pressed but resilient people striving to bring a sense of unity to their separate villages in the face of pressing imposts.

Jeannine Bischoff examines the depressed economic state of the Tibetan *mi ser* citing the Amban Song Yun's observation that in one case due to the inflexible tax rate eight households had to provide the tax previously garnered from fifty households. She stresses that a 'top down' view of the *mi ser* does justice neither to the people themselves nor to history, and that a judicious examination of the many available documents would likely serve to answer questions such as reasons for *mi ser* abandonment of their estates and other survival strategies.

In Alice Travers' well-argued study of the 'intermediate groups' in Tibetan society between 1895 and 1959 she shows that there was considerable change as the 'middle' was re-examined and re-defined. She counters the medieval reading of Tibetan society and history and permits a more fluid and aware interpretation of the various forces which brought about change. This group's links to aristocracy could be said to have encouraged their further education and therefore their desire for self-advancement.

Fabienne Jagou's chapter, which locates Tibetan language within the broader Manchu Empire, poses several major questions. Among these are how accurately were various promulgations expected to be translated into Tibetan, by whom was this accomplished and why it was wise for Ambans and lesser officials to distance themselves from being too proficient in that language? The author stresses that in 18th century Tibetan-Manchu relations, translation in itself shifts from a local act of word transfer towards one of interpretation and enactment, a far broader and more global context.

Linked closely to Jagou's chapter, that of Liu Yuxuan studies the urge of the Qing to 'know' Tibet through mastery of its literature, geography, trade etc. I was struck by the enormity of the work, the *Weizang Tongzhi*, which set out to master such knowledge in its entirety. The author provides an outline of its contents and development. It aimed at including '[a]ll documents and stories concerning Tibetan Buddhism written since the Han and Tang Dynasties' (pp. 61-2), which as only one out of forty-one recommendations suggests an inconceivably huge undertaking.

Peter Schwieger offers us a study of a now defunct Gelugpa lineage. The development of that lineage is discussed in more detail in his new work (Schwieger 2015), but here he traces its vicissitudes, in particular its manipulation through the complex and troubled period up to 1642 and its demise by 1816. Of particular interest are the details of the lineage's accrual of vast wealth through tax collection and new land holdings.

Monasteries in Tibet may be said to have suffered from much the same range of problems which beset secular society. Berthe Jansen examines a *bca' yig* text of the 5th Dalai Lama which outlines methods for taming recalcitrant monks. Perhaps the most heinous offences were those of misuse of monastic wealth and bribery and the Dalai Lama discusses this *in extenso*. In the section on the control of 'immigrant monks' Jansen cites some spectacular examples of monastic misbehaviour.

The book is part of an increasing number of high quality books from Vajra Publications, which are all of great value for scholars of the Himalayas.

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Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet

By Georgios T. Halkias. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 2013, 335 pp., ISBN 978-0-8248-3590-3, price \$49.00

Reviewed by Karen Liljenberg

Luminous Bliss examines in unprecedented detail the cult of Amitabha in Tibet. The book is divided into three parts. Part one examines early Pure Land traditions in India, Tibet and Central Asia. Beginning by outlining the development of the idea of Pure Lands in Indian Buddhism, Halkias suggests that this may have occurred because it 'offered a palatable alternative to the intimidating dialectic of the doctrine of emptiness' (p. 18). Early teachings on Pure Lands were denigrated by some Indian writers: Asanga, in his *Mahayana Compendium*, castigates them as a lure for the spiritually inferior (p. 19). Indeed, the dearth of material evidence suggests that 'Pure Land orientations' were a marginal phenomenon in India (p. 20).

Amitabha, whose name means 'limitless light', first appears in Buddhist literature around the beginning of the Common Era. His cult seems to have emerged as part of the early Mahayana practice of worshipping multiple Buddhas, imagined as inhabiting distant, purified worlds. Each of the cardinal directions was associated with its own Buddha, among which Amitabha was regarded as the Buddha of the West. However, the detailed circumstances of Amitabha's beginnings are still subject to scholarly debate.

After judiciously weighing various views on his origin, Chapter One looks at three sutras regarded as key to Amitabha's cult: the long and short *Sukhāvativyūha sūtras*, canonical in Tibet and also in China (where translation of the longer sutra began in the second or third century), and the later *Meditation on Amitāyus*, found only in the East Asian Pure Land corpus. Fundamental to the later popularity of his cult in that same region, the myth of Amitabha's vow to establish his own pure realm, where those with devotion to him can be reborn in a state of bliss, is contained in the long *Sukhāvativyūhasūtra*.

Chapter Two discusses historical developments in Central Asia

and Tibet during the Tibetan empire (ca. 630-841). It refers briefly to Amitabha-related scriptural and artistic discoveries and surveys the evidence, notably from Dunhuang, for widespread Tibetan translations of literature connected with his cult during the eighth and ninth centuries.

There follows a new translation of the *Immeasurable Life and Wisdom Sutra* (*Aparimitāyur-jñāna-sūtra*), a short *dhāraṇī* sutra extensively represented at Dunhuang (pp. 71-75). Another Tibetan text identifies Buddha Aparimitayurjnana's Buddha field as Sukhavati; for the Tibetans these two figures were interchangeable by the ninth century, if not earlier (pp.70, 141). The sutra declares that reciting its *dhāraṇī* can extend life, purify negative karma, and secure rebirth in Sukhavati. Nevertheless, it concludes by emphasizing the power of the Six Perfections, (*pāramitās*), thus also validating the gradual path of accruing merit.

Halkias next presents a translation and edition of a previously unstudied text fragment that was found bundled with Dunhuang copies of the *Aparimitāyur-jñāna-sūtra*. This intriguingly-incomplete work features aspiration for rebirth in a pure land which Halkias assumes to be Sukhavati because of the textual context and also, though less certainly, due to the repetition after every line of the interjection 'Amyitapur', interpreted here as an invocation of Amitayus in the vocative case (p.77). Like numerous other Dunhuang documents, the text also exhibits Mahayoga and Chan influences, such as its instruction to 'uphold the vows of a cemetery-dweller', to 'train in the discipline of sleeping in a sitting posture', and to 'meditate on the dharmas beyond concepts'.

Part Two, 'Pure Land Texts in Tibetan Contexts', comprises Chapter Three, a translation (with critical edition in Appendix I) of the Tibetan short *Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra*, and Chapter Four, which covers diverse commentarial works. These include a translation of *Praise to the Protector Amitābha: Opening the Door to the Sublime Field* (pp. 107-108) by the fourteenth-century Tsongkhapa, the principal guru of the Gelugpa school: a detailed summary of the *Sun-like Instructions of a Sage* by the nineteenth-century rNyingma scholar-lama Mipham, which emphasizes the importance of applying correct reasoning, as well as faith (pp. 123-130); and a dream-yoga practice by the non-sectarian master Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro, (1893-1959), *Abridged Sleep Meditation on Amitābha* (pp.135-136).

Part Three concerns Tibetan tantric practices related to Amitabha.

Chapter Five describes the eleventh-century *Dhāraṇī of the Essence of Aparimitāyus*; Aparimitayus was later subsumed into Amitayus, invoked in longevity rituals (pp. 141-142). Details are given of the five Aparimitayus texts in the Narthang Tanjur (pp. 143-144).

Chapter Five also examines the widespread Tibetan practice of *phowa* (*'pho ba*), the transference of consciousness to a Buddha field. This Vajrayana technique is claimed to have Indian Buddhist antecedents in the *Guhyasamajā-tantra*, although Sukhavati itself only figures in such meditations from the fourteenth century onward. It is practised in preparation for and at the moment of death, on ones' own or others' behalf. It aims at rebirth not just in Sukhavati but also in other Buddha fields. Chapter Five ends with a translation (pp.155-163) of *The Standing Blade of Grass*, a fourteenth century revealed text that was the core of a major festival known as the Great Drikung Phowa, last held in 1992 (p. 155).

Halkias plausibly links the paucity of Tibetan depictions of Amitabha's descent from Sukhavati to meet the pious deceased, compared to the theme's frequency in Chinese literature and art, to the great popularity of *phowa* (p. 154). The book could perhaps have done more to bring out such soteriological contrasts.

Chapter Six examines Amitabha-related Treasure (*gter ma*) texts; a representative list of these comprises Appendix III. They include what Halkias describes (p. 187) as the 'most comprehensive collection of Pure Land Rituals ever compiled in Tibet', the *Means of Attaining the Sukhāvati kṣetra*¹ from the seventeenth century and later *Celestial Treasure* (*gNam chos*) cycle; translations are provided of four of its component works, namely: the *Mahāsukhā Kṣetra Sādhana Prayers*; the *General Preliminaries to the Three Roots*; *Sukhāvati Realized: Empowerment and Oral Instructions*; and finally, *Invoking the Guardians of Sukhāvati*, a dharma protector ritual.

The epilogue raises wider Pure Land-related themes such as sacred space, both abstract and embodied in physical locations. There are copious end notes, as well as references and an extensive index.

In focussing exclusively on Amitabha, the book sometimes risks overstating this Buddha's role. For example, an isolated quotation

1 The book provides a list the editions of this cycle and also of the texts it contains in it in Appendix II

requesting Amitabha's aid from the *Bar do thos grol* or *Liberation on Hearing in the Bardo* leaves the reader unaware that the four other Buddhas of the Five Families (*rigs lnga*; Skt. *pañcakula*) are also each invoked for guidance in this passage. Again, the epilogue informs us (p.188-189) that Padmasambhava is linked (in a fourteenth century *gter ma*) to a 'hidden land' (*sbas yul*) called *mKhan pa lung*, said to 'resemble *Sukhāvātī* in all its delectable features, while also serving as a gateway to the Pure Land itself', but no reference is made to the fact that Padmasambhava is much more often represented as presiding over his own Pure Land, the Glorious Copper-coloured Mountain (*zangs mdog dpal ri*).

Halkias warns in the Introduction (p. xxvii) that 'nothing in... this book can be seen to imply or remotely suggest that there has ever been a sectarian, self-conscious movement of Pure Land Buddhism in Tibet'. His subsequent use of the term 'Pure Land' throughout the book is an understandably convenient way to compare Tibetan traditions with those of India and China. Unfortunately, and perhaps unavoidably, repeated references to 'Pure Land Buddhism', as well as 'Pure Land' doctrines, texts, beliefs, orientation, and even 'supporters of Pure Land' may leave some readers with an impression that runs contrary to his statement.

Nonetheless, Halkias' book is a groundbreaking and well-researched contribution to scholarship on the worship of Amitabha in Tibet and elsewhere. It presents interesting new textual material and brings together insights drawn from a wide reading of Tibetan Buddhist literature.

Naga Textiles: Design, Technique, Meaning and Effect of a Local Craft Tradition in Northeast India

By Marion Wettstein. Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Art Publishers. 2014, 368 pp., 287 colour photos, charts, and poster, ISBN: 978-3-89790-419-4, price 58 €.

Reviewed by Eva Fischer

Textiles constitute a key topic of material culture studies. Over the last three decades, the focus has shifted from interpretative narratives about aesthetics to theory-based approaches. *Naga Textiles* is Marion Wettstein's doctoral thesis, delivered at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Zurich in 2011 and supervised by Prof. em. Michael Oppitz (University of Zurich) and Prof. Toni Huber (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin).¹ The study treats Naga textiles, their production, and cultural meaning (p. 9). It reveals a striking congruence with numerous other analyses, using textiles as a vehicle for studying local, collective, individual, political, social and/or cultural identities. Besides being attractive to bibliophiles and an aesthetically impressive book, the volume hosts Marion Wettstein's 152 extremely elaborate colour-pencil drawings, all of them true art pieces, defined by herself as an integral part of the research. Nonetheless, my reflections here are limited to the publication's social and cultural anthropological aspects.

The book is structured in consecutively numbered chapters (from 1 to 24) grouped in five parts, including an unnumbered section of drawings, and rounded off by acknowledgements, lists and references, a bibliography, appendices, an index, and a design chart. The study's main question, approaches, and methods were explicitly omitted from the introduction (pp. 9-15) to be presented in different subsequent chapters (p. 12). For readers, this choice means working through a text that resembles a huge and meticulously elaborated mind-map that provides interesting perspectives but also many repetitions (see, for example, the discussions on regional history and myth, pp. 11-12, 56-59, 76-107, 116, 263-264, 265).

The first part ('Getting a Picture of Textile Design', pp. 17-50) treats the

1 Original title: *Naga Textiles: Design, Technique, Meaning and Agency of a Local Craft Tradition in Northeast India* (sic!, Dissertation thesis at the University of Zürich, 2011).

definition of drawings as an issue in visual anthropology (pp. 20-24) and the applicability of different visual media types for planned analysis (pp. 24-31). The following chapters briefly touch sign theory (pp. 33-35)², and describe colour use and formal elements (pp. 35-49), as in 'Vegetable and floral ornamentation' (p. 40). Finally a notation for textile description developed by the author and a formal design analysis (p. 47) are presented. Especially in these sections, the opportunities to both precisely define textiles as analytic entities and to elaborate on their implementation as iconic signs are passed over in favour of drawings as a visual data base (p. 35).³

The second part, entitled 'Weaving in History' (pp. 51-114), provides descriptions of the textile production process (p. 54). Supported by video stills (pp. 90-91, 97-105) and drawings (pp. 85-89), the text follows the logics of operative chains. It also offers descriptions of raw materials, spinning, plying, starching, dying, warping, weaving (pp. 76-104), and decoration (pp. 105-107). The sequences of warping gestures are described by musical notation, those of weaving and brocading by the notation already introduced in the previous section plus a 'formula' (p. 97).⁴ The last sections treat the future prospects (pp. 107-109) and the currently prevailing economic conditions (pp. 109-112) of Naga textile production. This part of the book passed up two opportunities: to subdivide operative chains, classify their gestures and link each of them to an image and a description; and to introduce structural textile analysis which goes far beyond description (Conklin 1997, Desrosiers 1984), thus preparing the ground for more refined analytical steps into formal analysis and design classification.

2 Referring to Majetschek's anthology 2005, Moriarty 1995, Eco 1973, Pierce 1931, Saussure without reference, Abel 2005, and Buysens 1943.

3 '[b]y trying to take advantage of the characteristics of the semiotics of the images ... the images themselves have as much part ... as possible. I tried to accomplish the visualisation of this argument with an analogy: by choosing a picturing technique...' (p. 35).

4 The author applied musical notation to describe the gestures which constitute the operative chain of warping (pp. 92-95). To describe those of weaving she combines music notation with sequences of capital letters, each of them signifying a subsequent part of the operative process (pp. 97-105). Similar formulae are applied to describe female clan skirts (pp. 171-176). Although the representation seems to be an interesting solution of the textile notation problem it is useful neither for the readers who wish to comprehend the creation of cloth and textile structures, nor for the textile experts who are interested to catch quickly textile structures for comparison.

The third part ('Reflecting Status and Social Structure', pp. 116-202) provides information on fashion and clothing (pp. 118-120), textile categories, their variations and use⁵, details on design elements in men's shawls (pp. 142-146), and textile markers of female status and kinship (pp. 151-160). The narrative then turns to Ao Naga clan structure (pp. 160-162), and the correlation of clan structure, skirts, and language groups (p. 163) to finally present a typology of female clan skirts (pp. 171-179). The concluding sections treat status perceived as a core concept of Naga culture, different appearance codes (pp. 183-197) and aesthetic production (pp. 201-202). The foci on textile markers of kinship/clans and status constitute interesting starting points which, unfortunately, are not supported by an in-depth analysis of their key topics; the kinship-network and the economic conditions of ritual practice and symbolic reciprocity (pp. 122-131, 161, 199).⁶

The unnumbered subsequent part (pp. 203-258) contains Marion Wettstein's impressive colour pencil drawings of 'Traditional Naga Textiles'.⁷ They constitute the starting point of her formal textile analysis and build on a threefold base: field-data collected with the support of an interpreter (p. 121) during different stays of altogether six months, data of historical textiles stored in museum and private collections (pp. 9, 205-230, 324), and photographs and drawings of textiles realized by other authors.⁸ Thus, 49 of 152 drawings or approximately one third are re-interpretations of already interpreted primary data.

The fourth part's title, 'Employing Effects' (pp. 261-306), sounds enigmatic, but the chapter 'What People do with Textiles and Textiles do with People' brings light into the darkness: 'It is this dialectical process of mutual influence between object and human that I am interested in' (p. 262). In the following sections different approaches are briefly discussed

5 See, for example, 'Shawls Not Only for Headhunters' (p. 131), and 'Loincloths for a Man's Biography?' (pp. 148-151).

6 'Marriage rules will be adjusted to everyday life according to needs, and thus some differences between mythological rules and daily life practice can be easily explained by the fact that social structures are not fixed institutions.' (p. 161).

7 It is subdivided between 'Ao Naga Men's Shawls' (pp. 205-213), 'Ao Naga Men's Textile Accessoires' (pp. 215-217), 'Ao Naga Women's Status Cloths' (pp. 218-230), and 'Ao Naga Women's Clan Skirts' (pp. 231-258).

8 See design chart Nos. 1, 2, 4-7, 9, 12, 15, 17, 25, 29, 38-39, 42-49, 55, 57, 60, 67-69, 72-73, 76, 78, 81, 86, 92, 97, 99, 100-102, 109-110, 116, 120, 131-132, 134, 137.

and mixed together, examples include 'Gell's notions of nexus and agency' (p. 263), 'Latour's ideas of an actor network' (p. 263), and Eco's 'concept of aberrant decoding' (p. 263). The author explicitly refrains 'from imposing the theories as such in general' and replaces the term agency with 'effect', 'an English term that is similarly neutral, as largely free of theoretical connotations' (p. 263). The concluding and empirically orientated chapters, replenished by Alban von Stockhausen's impressive photographs, focus on contemporary clothing like shawls, women's skirts and male waistcoats (pp. 267-279), fusion fashion, fashion shows (pp. 279-297), and finally present three Naga designer biographies (pp. 298-305).

The last chapter, entitled 'Performing Identity Roles – by Way of a Conclusion', is a short five pages (pp. 307-311)⁹ providing a brief presentation of different approaches to identity, including studies on culture and personality, ethnicity, and structuralist, social psychological, and cross-cultural access approaches.¹⁰ But then the author confesses to have another model of identity in mind 'which we like to call "the manifestation-model"' (p. 308) and presents the late hypotheses 'that those parts of identity which are important in a cultural context will be expressed in aesthetic production, while aspects that are not so important will not find their expression in this way' (p. 309). At this point she faces a dilemma. On the one hand, dress and textiles are linked to particular Naga identity elements, on the other hand, few traditional textiles form part of contemporary everyday clothes. She thus asks: 'Do they feel as if they had a different identity in other clothes? How strong is the effect of the textiles and their messages and meanings?' (p. 309). At least the question of identity change by dress change arises: 'one can "put on" identity like a dress and also "take it off" again?' (p. 309). Consulting Goffman (1956), the concepts of prescribed and collective office/formal dress codes are introduced, concluding that 'clothes perhaps less are linked to identity than to the performance of a role' (p. 309) and that 'this identity role ...rather represents an ideal identity' (p. 310). After the observation 'that there is no fixed relationship between ... Naga textiles (clothing) and identity' (p. 311), the text closes with a remark appearing to be the

9 In comparison with 'Acknowledgements' which comprises 11 pages (pp. 313-323).

10 Referring to Kardiner and Linton (1939), Du Bois (1944), Benedict (1946), Murray and Kluckhohn (1953), Kluckhohn 1962, Glazer and Moynihan (1975), Benoist's anthology (1977), Keupp (1999), and Mol (1978, pp. 308-309).

study's program: '[f]or further research, the enduring effect that such performances may have might be a starting point for the question as to what textiles (...) actually mean to people.' (p. 311).

Marion Wettstein's monograph gives the first overview of the social, ritual, economic, and political contexts of Naga textiles. It offers meticulously collected ethnographic data but nonetheless contains some problems. Throughout the book, primary data, secondary data, theory and the author's immediate interpretations are mixed without developing a discourse in order to bring together partial results and formulate conclusions. This approach prevents the cyclical and multileveled unfolding of the argument to prove the hypotheses of a probably existing link of Naga textiles to their 'core cultural and social concepts' (p. 9). It also creates a shift from this professed central topic to questions to do with identity representation (pp. 308-311) and to the commodification of culture¹¹ (pp. 262-305, Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). For a second edition, some passages should be worked over and are mentioned as examples below.

The visual approach by colour pencil drawings unites three source categories of two qualities, processed and unprocessed, creating thus a standardized data base but also leading to the loss of some data. It impedes the codification of primary data and distorts newly gained data-signs, providing data that are transformed into signs perceived as data. For the readers' better orientation, the enclosed design chart requires consecutively ordered and numbered images.

Surface analysis of textiles (pp. 78, 85, 111) requires completion by technical analysis. Naga textiles are dominantly warp faced plain weaves, plain weaves with paired warps and wefts, combined warp and weft faced weaves (Emery 1994:76, Nr. 86; 77, Nr. 8; Rowe 1977:34)¹², partially discontinuous warp weaves, and display supplementary warp floats. This leads to further inquiry beyond technical-material issues. In the text, warping is described exhaustively (pp. 85-96), but the hidden information lies in the resulting warp order, in the described case 'ababab', which indicates

11 Not defined as such by the author.

12 I wish to thank the director of the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zürich, Prof. Mareile Flitsch, who enabled the access to the Naga textile collection stored in the museum's depot. I also wish to thank the collection's curator Ina von Woyski, who provided time and support during my visit.

the absence of further manipulation before weaving and simultaneously defines the result as circular cloth¹³ (pp. 81-82, 86, Rowe 1977:94). Finally, the different notation systems require standardization (pp. 92-95).

Various citations on weaving need correction, as in the reference on Peruvian warping techniques.¹⁴ A look at the original text reveals that Wettstein's interpretation is based on a photograph showing an archaeological tapestry loom and leads to her conclusion that 'with this method the warps cannot be mounted continuous' (sic!, p. 81). Quite the contrary, the picture documents the Andean weavers' skills of continuous warping by using a temporary beam for that work sequence (Zorn 1977). The reference to the 'female craft of weaving' as 'part of a labour division constructed and installed by colonial intervention, as for example, in Peru' (p. 192) misinterprets Graubart's text on colonial economy and transformations 'to the point where spinning and weaving on the backstrap loom were considered "female" tasks.' (2000: 554).

The congruence of expression and meaning also needs improvement. Thus, 'basic cloth structure' (p. 36) customarily refers to textile bindings but in the text refers to cloth shapes and sizes. Similarly, the 'basic design elements in the background cloth' (p. 42) applied for warp and weft stripes composing plane designs are explained by the concept of multi-layered space. Some expressions could also have been reformulated, such as 'stripe structure' (p. 38), 'considered as fully grown warriors' (p. 145) and 'Mill's Clan-Structure Tested' which refers to structures documented by Mills and not to his personal clan-structure (p. 344).

Various remarks on theoretical concepts also need revision and completion.¹⁵ These include 'the web of meaning' formulated by Vygotsky (1986: 182) but ascribed in the book to Geertz, who originally wrote 'patterns of meaning or web of significance' (1973: 5). Important approaches are reduced to simplified phrases, such as 'everything can be (but does not necessarily have to be) a sign' (Eco, p. 33); 'a sign is an entity ... perceived as meaningful.' (Abel, p. 33); 'the notion of the seme is also

13 And not as indicated in the text, as 'turbular weave', a synonym for genuine double cloth (pp. 81-82, 86, Rowe 1977: 94)

14 '[b]inding the warps with an additional thread to the warp beam ... by always winding the additional thread around the beam in between the warps.' (Broudy 1993 [1979]: 82, p. 81).

15 An important point consists in rethinking the attitude characterized by: 'For our purpose here it is not relevant to follow the entire theoretical discussion' (p. 262).

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very useful when analysing the meaning of material objects in the local cultural context' (Buysse, p. 34).

The incorporation of a firm theoretical basis composed of currently developed approaches to material culture and artefact studies, namely, the works of Appadurai, Comaroff and Comaroff, Küchler, Miller, Schneider, Strathern, and Tilley, is also recommended. At least Marion Wettstein's thesis offers an overview of Naga culture and textiles. For readers unfamiliar with the topic it undoubtedly provides a useful narrative approach to Naga material culture and its producers.

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