Swargajyoti Gohain

Imagined Geographies in the Indo-Tibetan Borderlands

Culture, Politics, Place

Amsterdam
University
Press

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Asian Borderlands

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Many people have asked why I chose to work in Monyul. However, one's choice of a fieldwork site is overdetermined by so many factors that to construct a coherent narrative justifying the choice is a difficult task. The narrative I use is that I 'was sent there'. Between 2004 and 2006, when I was working as research assistant to sociologist Patricia Uberoi at the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi, the euphoria of the Look East Policy and border trade was at its peak in India. Professor Uberoi was interested in sociological data for the BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar) initiative for cross-border cooperation between the four countries which was carried out on the Track II diplomatic stage. She therefore sent me to conduct a pilot survey on the vernacular press and local opinion regarding the reopening of cross-border trade routes in the western part of Arunachal Pradesh. During this first trip to Monyul, I was impressed by the images of movement and circulation invoked by narratives of the border trade, which stood in contrast to the sleepy backwater feel of the place, and I kept returning to Monyul as a fieldwork location. I am thankful to Patricia Uberoi for sending me on the mission that eventually determined my first as well as continuing anthropological location, and for her constant encouragement of my work.

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Introduction: Imagined Places

In summer 2008, when I was conducting preliminary fieldwork in Tawang in Northeast India, I heard vague murmurings of a movement for local autonomy that was brewing among a section of the population – news of which had not yet made it to the mainstream national media. I saw posters heralding a 'Mon Autonomous Region in Arunachal Pradesh under the Sixth Schedule' pasted on the doors and walls of offices and residences, as well as market spaces. People told me that if I wanted to know more about the autonomy movement, I should meet the brain behind the concept: Tsona Gontse Rinpoche, head of Gaden Rabgye Ling (GRL) monastery – an influential spiritual leader as well as elected political representative. In fact, many Monpa people in Tawang referred to the demand for autonomy as 'Rinpoche's movement'. In 2003, he had formed an organization called the Mon Autonomous Region Demand Committee (MARDC) and mobilized a section of Monpas to demand autonomy according to the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution, which provides for local governance among marginalized minorities. Learning that Rinpoche was giving a public talk a few days later at the Kalachakra monastery in the nearby town of Dirang, I decided to make an unscheduled trip to see him.

The downhill journey from Tawang to Dirang, impeded by bumpy dust-tracks and abrupt S-turns, took around six hours; by the time I reached the monastery grounds, T.G. Rinpoche (as he was popularly known) was in the middle of his speech. He wore the yellow robes of the Gelug Buddhist order and was seated on a raised dais decked with silk streamers of yellow, green, red, blue, and white – the five Buddhist colours – surrounded by his monk attendees. An audience of around 200 people squatted on the grass, men and women with kids in their arms, carrying bags and hampers of food on which they would lunch, picnic-style, after the *wang* ('empowerment ceremony'; Tibetan Wylie transliteration: *dbang*) that was to follow. They listened intently to Rinpoche, some with their hands folded in veneration, as he spoke with impassioned gestures about the need to preserve the culture of the Monpas. Addressing the gathering, ironically, in Hindi, T.G. Rinpoche bemoaned the Monpas' use of Hindi – a language that is not their own – saying, 'Hamein [apne aap ko] Monpa kehne mein sharam aata hain' [We have forgotten how to be proud of being a Monpa].[1]

1 His statement could also be translated as 'we are embarrassed to call ourselves Monpa'. I have used the meaning that appeared most proximate to me. The Monpas and other Arunachalis

Later, sitting cross-legged on silk cushions in his private chamber, T.G Rinpoche explained to me that his plan was to secure autonomy for the Tawang and West Kameng districts, together known as Monyul, which are distinct within Arunachal Pradesh because of their Tibetan Buddhist traditions. As I proceeded with fieldwork over the following months and years, it became increasingly clear that this straightforward demand for local autonomy only touched the surface: multiple narratives of belonging clamoured for expression in the context of the autonomy movement. I realized that the demand for autonomy had potential to shed light on not just the Monpas' marginalization and identity politics *vis-à-vis* other, more dominant groups in Arunachal Pradesh, but also their new and renewed connections with other Tibetan Buddhist communities in the Himalayas.

This book is my exploration of the complex identities and transregional networks that shape contemporary politics in the Monyul border. I argue that the Mon demand for local autonomy is overlaid by transregional imaginations that are pan-Himalayan in nature. These do not manifest as a political demand for a homeland or a common political identity of Himalayan Buddhist communities, but are instead articulated in cultural, moral, and pragmatic terms by the Monpas and other Tibetan Buddhist communities in the Himalayan region. This transregional imagination is promoted most vocally by monks but supported in equal measure by educated youth, professionals, and political leaders, and acquires a concrete shape through forms of cultural politics that invoke the Monpas' Tibetan Buddhist heritage.

Mon is a Tibetan word meaning 'lowland' and *yul* roughly means 'settlement'; *Monpa* means 'the lowlanders' or 'people of *Mon*'. This nomenclature was initially used by Tibetans to refer to all Tibetan Buddhist populations distributed in the lower Himalayan altitudes on the borders of Tibet, but is now primarily used to refer to the ethnic minorities settled in Monyul. Wedged between Tibet and Bhutan in the Indo-Tibetan borderlands, Monyul is home to a number of ethnic minorities, among which the Monpas are numerically predominant.[2] West Kameng, covering an area of around

speak a pidgin Hindi that borrows words from the Nepali and Assamese languages and uses word combinations that are distinct from standardized Hindi. E.g., '*woh yahan baithta hain*' translates as 'he resides here', instead of 'he sits here', although *baith* means to sit down.

2 Colonial writers (Bailey 1914b&1914c; Kingdon-Ward 1940) as well as Bhutan scholar Michael Aris (1979b) locate both Tawang and West Kameng in the territory of Monyul. Neeru Nanda (1982: 2), however, states that Monyul only refers to Tawang and does not include the areas south of it. According to my information, Monyul includes both Tawang and West Kameng. The term Monyul figures more in anthropological, ethnohistorical, and local documents rather than in

7422 sq. km., is bordered by Bhutan on the west, Assam on the south, and Tawang and East Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh on the other directions, while Tawang, separated from West Kameng by the Sela Pass, is approximately 2172 sq. km. in area and bordered by Tibet and Bhutan. The combined population of West Kameng and Tawang is 136,963 (Batt 2011). Apart from the Monpas, these two districts house other groups including the Hrusso (known as Aka in pre-colonial and colonial times), Sajalong (Miji), Bugun (Khowa), and the Buddhist Sherdukpen.[3]

From the seventeenth till the twentieth century, for nearly three hundred years, the Monpas were under Tibetan political and spiritual control, and a regular traffic of goods, commodities, and pilgrims and tradespeople passed through the Monyul corridor (Aris 1979b) connecting Bhutan and Tibet. When British India expanded its rule to Assam in the nineteenth century, the colonial government did not initially map the frontiers. It was only in 1914 that, in reaction to suspected Chinese incursions into the Northeastern borderlands of Assam, the colonial government delineated the Indo-Tibetan boundary, separating Monyul from Tibet. They did not, however, extend regular administration there, and Tibet continued to exercise *de facto* control over the Monpas even after India gained independence from British rule; Tibetan tax collection, pilgrimage, and trade continued as before. Although conflicts about boundary alignment between India and China started to surface after decolonization, cross-border exchanges did not cease. Then, in October 1962, Chinese troops attacked several posts on the western and eastern parts of the India-China border (Lamb 1966), occupying Tawang and West Kameng for two months before eventually retreating. In the aftermath of the war, the border passages between Tibet and Monyul were militarily sealed, and the Monpas were more tightly integrated into the Indian state through development, education, and state-sponsored urbanization schemes. In postcolonial India, Monpas were ascribed the status of Scheduled Tribes, a constitutionally recognized category subject to state affirmative action. This tribal identity gives them common cause with other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, with whom they otherwise share little historical or cultural bonds.

administrative documents. Since the early part of the last decade, it has increasingly occurred on local signboards.

3 The Sherdukpen are an ethnic group concentrated mainly in three settlements, Rupa, Shergaon, and Jigaon, of West Kameng district. They are Buddhists like the Monpas, but are differentiated from the latter by their language. The Sherdukpen also have myths of Tibetan origin but, unlike the Monpas, did not come under the jurisdiction of the Tibetan state and only paid a nominal tribute to Tawang Dzong once every three years (Chakravarty 1973: 7; Choudhury 1990: 148).

I first visited Monyul with my family in summer 2005. Bomdila, the district headquarters of West Kameng, is 165 km from Guwahati, my home town in neighbouring Assam – a hot, humid, and haphazardly organized city in the plains with a relentless traffic of people and vehicles; as we crossed Bhalukpong, the inter-state check-post where we entered Arunachal Pradesh, the small hamlets on the roadside appeared still and remote in the quiet, gathering dusk. After eight hours of travel, we reached Bomdila, tucked away at 8000 feet amidst foggy peaks. Tawang, located at an altitude of approximately 10,000 feet, was a further eight hours away. Although tired from the journey, I was captivated by the serene beauty of the sleepy settlement, once described by a reporter as 'a land that the rest of the world has all but forgotten' (Ramesh 2006).

But this is not a place as remote and 'forgotten' as we are led to believe; indeed, it *cannot* be, as it constitutes a disputed territory in the prolonged boundary conflict between India and China, the latter claiming the region as South Tibet. Notwithstanding their mountainous topography that inhibits easy access, Tawang and West Kameng are high on the security agenda of the Indian nation-state, as the number and density of the military population here attests. The army camps and sprawling military settlements lying at every major bend of the road mark this region as a militarized borderland. The current political demand for autonomy thus offers an alternative image of Monyul: rather than engaging in existing regional conflicts, it invokes transregional cultural ties to project Monyul as a Buddhist region. Monpa oral histories of trade and pilgrimage and collective memories of past mobility further enable a view of Monyul as a trade conduit. Monyul's present spaces are therefore overdetermined by colonial footprints, postcolonial tensions, and global connections.

Although my ethnographic inquiries centred on the practices and narratives surrounding the autonomy movement during its peak in 2008-2013, I resist depicting my work as only an ethnography of a political movement. The larger questions that the fieldwork prompted me to address were:

1) How is the local always tied up with translocal networks in a way that ensures that the *politics of the local* is already embedded in and shaped by wider regional and global connections? The Monpas' demand for autonomy shows how localities are not bounded, but instead operate in the intersection of historical, regional, and global forces (Amin 2004; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). To articulate their political demand, the Monpas adopted the autonomous council model from the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution, which provides communities wishing to preserve their local culture with a template for local administration independent of the state administration.

Development is one of the main planks of the demand for Mon autonomy. In a region that lacks good public infrastructure, development becomes the common cause uniting Monpas and non-Monpas alike. However, while elaborating the goals of the movement, its leaders constantly refer to the preservation of Tibetan Buddhist identity in Monyul. Translocal networks and flows, of monks and monastery funds, as well as meetings, rallies, and activities promoting Tibetan Buddhist traditions, bring out this character of Mon local autonomy.

2) What 'new circuits of belonging' (Amin 2004: 33) can we identify when inter-linked networks of the local and translocal reconfigure traditional sites of community into transnational public spheres, organizations, and movements? What are the new cartographies that arise from such contexts? Memories and oral narratives of trade, pilgrimage, and kinship point to one way Monyul was, and continues to be, part of a Himalayan 'transnational circuit' (Shapiro 1994). More recent events have led to the reconfiguring of these transnational tendencies, especially since the 1962 boundary war. Yet, since the Monpas share these experiences with other marginal Buddhists of the Himalayan region, the forms currently taking shape in Monyul do not occur in isolation but rather as part of other cross-border processes. The discourses and practices of contemporary Monyul not only parallel but also, equally, participate in and contribute to processes unfolding not only in the Indian Himalayas but also in the regions beyond. These translocal networks, highlighted in the programmes to preserve the Tibetan language and medicine system in the region, shape the content of the demand for local autonomy.

In my discussions with both monks and lay people in Monyul, I frequently came across the term 'Himalayas' used to indicate not simply a physical terrain, but an imagined space of belonging: a geography held together by particular visions of and for Monyul as a Buddhist space. This imagined geography materializes through the statements, actions, and activities of actors who abide by a common programme of upholding Tibetan Buddhist traditions in the region. I call these new circuits of belonging – formed by networks rather than a circumscribed location – *a Himalayan imagined geography*. This encompasses not only the Monpas living in Monyul, but also Tibetan Buddhist people from the surrounding Himalayan regions, such as Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal. Although stemming from the discourse of local autonomy, the Himalayan imagined geography does not take Monyul as its only territorial referent; instead, it includes a number of politically discontinuous units spread across the entire Himalayan region. I therefore seek to theorize how the Himalayas are being reimagined in the new circuits of belonging.

3) What are the implications of an ethnography of contemporary cultural politics in Monyul for theorizing non-territorial identities – or, more precisely, politically non-contiguous identities (see Van Schendel 2002)? In other words, is a territorially bound identity the only possible way to imagine collective existence across political boundaries? If we can talk about nations as 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991), in what form can we imagine a community that is not territory-bound? This is especially pertinent in border regions, where transnational connections are a way of life for many communities. For example, the trans-border Zo (Chin) people of the Indo-Myanmar borderlands, historically divided into different administrative categories by colonial rule, are now finding new ways to revive relationships with each other (Pau 2018). When groups assert transnational allegiance with other groups across the border, should it be problematic in imagining them as part of the nation-state or reduce these communities' moral claim to being native citizens of the nation-state in which they reside? Clearly, this calls for theorizing new ways of imagining community. According to Michael Kearney, 'members of transnational communities [...] escape the power of the nation-state to inform their sense of collective identity' (1991: 59). What this means is not that it is easy for such groups to affirm transnational belonging, but that an ethnography of their practices – whether migration, kinship, or other forms of transnational existence – is therefore necessary to highlight the modalities of a post-national geography (Appadurai 1996).

The classic model of the nation-state, which links a national people with a territory, became the dominant system of sovereignties in the eighteenth century because it constructed a set of ethical assertions of what should constitute the normative political order – a 'moral geography' (Shapiro 1994: 482). Various military, cultural, and narrative strategies go into maintaining this moral order, and those living a political existence outside this normalized national order are deemed to be 'Other'. Michael Shapiro suggests that we explore an 'ethics of post-sovereignty' in the actions, experiences, and stories of ordinary people who do not conform to the nationalist narrative in order to address the changing spaces of our contemporary unstable global map (1994: 488). Arjun Appadurai (1996) similarly calls for a post-national geography emerging from the mobility of populations such as refugees, diasporas, pastoralists, nomads, and exiles, whose mobility and cross-border links have always been seen as a threat to normative national existence and order.

Anthropologist Akhil Gupta has provided two empirical examples of how one kind of post-national geography may be imagined: the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), launched in 1961 in Belgrade, which reflected a

commitment to non-involvement in the Cold War on the part of 120 participating nations, and had its formal institutions dispersed in Yugoslavia, Peru, and Cuba; and the European Community, replaced by the European Union (EU) in 1993, which, in the present period, is the most effective example of consolidating the power of nations through a transnational imagination. According to Gupta, the nation-state is a distinctively modernist institutional and ideological formation that emerged out of decolonization and the imperative for sovereignty. In postcolonial times, cultural imperialism on the part of the stronger nations forced the economically and militarily weaker nations to draw on interstate solidarity and community to protect their fragile sovereignty, and the NAM represented such a transnational geographic alliance (Gupta 1992: 187). Both the examples of NAM and EU demonstrate an exploration of imagined communities that transcend national boundaries, question the naturalness of the nation, and reinforce the nation-state's role as only one of several possible commitments to spatial formulae that bind people and territory.

Saxer and Zhang (2017) present another, more contemporary example of reconfigured post-national geographies in post-Cold War Asia. They locate their analysis within what one may call the 'archipelago' framework laid down by Willem Van Schendel (2002), in which the theorized contours of the post-war world map should privilege discontinuous regions, such as archipelagos and patchworks, instead of the prevailing regional schemes focusing on contiguous areas alone. The various chapters in Saxer and Zhang's edited collection show how, in the contemporary era, formerly peripheral border communities in contact zones between nations, from Siberia to the Himalayas to northern Laos, have reoriented themselves in relation to China through an 'art of neighbouring', thereby giving rise to new kinds of geographies (2017: 9). In a twist to the argument that international connections among less powerful nations stem from the desire to deflect individual marginal statuses by seeking common ground, Saxer and Zhang argue that the Asian neighbourliness displayed by border worlds is inherently dual – characterized by both intimacy and agonism, such that cooperation can also morph into conflict; and that decoding the art of neighbouring among these countries therefore requires an understanding of the constant negotiation, reinforcement, and performance of goodwill that go into neighbourly relations.

My intervention in this discussion lies in showing how a post-national geography does not have to emerge from physical mobility or migration. Rather, I conceive of the Himalayan geography as exhibiting a post-sovereign ethics or post-national geography through the discourse of cooperation and

collaboration between its different, inter-connected parts. The Himalayan geography offers a competing lens with which to understand moral and cultural visions that do not fit neatly within the political geographies that are approved or permissible within the global order of nation-states.

In putting forth the vision of a transregional Himalayan community, supporters of Monpa autonomy are not simply proposing or promoting long-distance nationalism or a nationalism across borders (Glick Schiller 2005). Instead, they are engaging in a novel endeavour of place-making. The Himalayan imagined geography is not constituted through physically contiguous areas; it does not rest on people's actual movement or contiguous habitation, but rather on the idea of alliance or unity among populations who otherwise live separate existences in conventional political units across different regions and even countries. Indeed, it is articulated through the idiom of alliance on a territorially non-continuous plane, as indicated by the fact that the different Tibetan Buddhist communities dispersed across the Himalayan region have not translated their call into a cry for a Himalayan homeland.

A criticism of this might be that, although claiming to be non-territorial, the Himalayan identity does have a territorial anchor, because it invokes a continuous stretch of a very physical entity, that is, the Himalayan mountain ranges. It is undoubtedly true that the Himalayan identity is tied to a particular geographical terrain, and almost all the people subsumed within this identity do inhabit mountainous terrain. However, while the Himalayan geography does have a territorial support, it is not a support that comes from an identification with the landscape or the character of the terrain. It is not a form of community inspired by livelihoods attached to the land. Instead, the notion of the Himalayas as a cultural space transcends the boundaries of physical space.

In the following chapters, I track the contents and shifting contours of the spatial consciousness binding the Monpas with other Himalayan groups, looking not at one activity or area of expression but rather at a number of practices that include oral narratives, the politics of renaming, battles on the linguistic front, and inter-ethnic relations between Monpas and Tibetans within Monyul. The bonds between the Himalayan communities exist as fragmented narratives in oral narratives and political discourse. The Himalayan cultural area is a representational space (Lefebvre 1991) based on claims to heritage, and is hence a moral and cultural geography rather than a territorial unity that maps perfectly onto an empirical space. While tracing this spatial consciousness, I also show – following the view that spaces do not have fixed, singular characters (Malpas 2004: 63; see

also Massey 1994) – that this imagined geography is not representative of Monpa communities as a whole, since its boundaries shift and shrink to accommodate the pressures of regional and national allegiances. In a disputed border territory such as Monyul, where state security and regional and local commitments compete with one another, homogenous imaginings of a translocal community are fractured by oppositional tendencies from within as well as from outside. Going beyond a physicalist notion of place as a location, I treat place and identity as interdependent: places are 'embodied identifications' (Boyarin 1994; Malpas 2004). Individuals, groups, and social movements give a particular *character* to space by projecting outward a particular ethos, sentiment, or political vision, thereby connecting place to memory and narrativity; because of this intersubjective dimension, places have shifting and provisional boundaries. The same place can be different depending on whose representation or whose sensibility it is, or who is staking a claim to it, and how (Keith and Pile 1993). While the concept of identity has been critiqued for remaining silent about internal differences (Hall 1996),[4] the notion of place as plural and intersubjective that underpins my argument in this book facilitates an understanding of the contested and emergent spaces in Monyul. I unpack these shifting geographies of Monyul through various moments of ethnographic encounter.

Imagined geographies

Imagined geography is a term used by scholars to describe different processes, but I invoke it to refer to non-territorial modes of imagining community. I use the word 'imagined' as Benedict Anderson does in his study of nationalism, *Imagined Communities* (1991) – not as fabrication or invention, but instead as projection, and re-invention: of taking something that exists and transfiguring it through the prism of narrative, memory, and practice. For Anderson, the nation was imagined into existence through the rise of vernacular print capitalism. Nationalism was a cultural artefact created through the conjunction of discrete historical forces, but once created it became modular, capable of being transplanted. The imagined community of the nation is a construct, in Anderson's formulation, but a highly potent one, for it drives people to martyrdom.

4 Scholars who have critiqued 'identity' for its implications of homogeneity and for silencing internal differences (Hall 1996) have proposed alternative terms, such as 'interpellation' (Hall 1985) or 'identification' (Cooper 2005; Hall 1996). But these are also heavily loaded terms.

Edward Said (1979) uses the term imagined geography to mean imperialist representations of the Orient that allowed one to 'see' the Orient through a variety of metaphors: feminine, emasculated, dark, savage. Orientalism as an imagined geography was thus about a specific place, but rather than *being* the place, it was an *idea* of the place – constructing it as childlike or vicious or sly – which was then put to use in colonial methods of subjugating the Oriental native. Thus, once imagined, an imagined geography becomes a monolithic entity that enables the power of control though the power of representation. Several scholars (e.g., Gregory 2004) have used this concept of imaginative geographies as spatial devices, which usually aid colonial or neo-colonial projects of domination.

In the Saidian sense, the continuing use of the term *terra incognita* for Arunachal Pradesh (including Monyul) in media as well as academic parlance, represents an imaginative geography in that, rather than pertaining to an empirical place, it rests on the idea of a place as empty, unknown, and isolated – and therefore open to military penetration. Anna Tsing (2005) defines this type of narrative as the 'frontier story': a national story that is firmly embedded in nationalist discourse. It is the myth of the lonely prospector making independent discoveries in a remote region. Using such a 'frontier story' in Monyul effaces older networks and histories of connection so that the region can be projected as a pristine space that requires state intervention.

Imaginative geographies are also 'normative geographies', insofar as they structure a normative landscape (Cresswell 1996: 9). By judging and labelling certain actions as appropriate for and belonging in a particular location, and certain other actions as inappropriate or out of place, normative geographies outline who can legitimately belong and who is an outsider. Such forms of normative possession of space are undergirded by power and ideology. I use the term *border-normative* to understand one kind of ideological appropriation of Monyul that happens through militarization. Border-normativity is the official vision of modern nation-states, sanctioned through international boundaries, treaties, and maps and defended by military surveillance and security technologies, which becomes especially forceful in conflict areas. From this perspective, Monyul is not just any border but a disputed one that is in danger and needs military protection. Border-normativity legitimizes military presence and defines the outsider by taking the border as a reference; accordingly, anyone who has transgressed the border physically, or even sometimes symbolically, becomes an outsider.

Unlike Said, however, I use 'imagined geography' as a tool to understand projects of both rule and resistance. In Foucauldian terms, one might argue

that if 'subject position' is the self-governing tendency or self-knowledge within individuals that makes them conform to an identity without being coerced through any external agency (Foucault 1994b: 130), then 'national subjects' are those who have successfully assumed a political identity that links them with a particular national territory. Many scholars (e.g., De Certeau 1984; Scott 2009; Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003) have since offered a corrective to Foucault by showing how there might be scope for creativity even amidst constriction. For example, Michel de Certeau (1984) shows how various street cultures might provide the liberatory face of an oppressive structure through clandestine, tactical, dispersed, and makeshift popular practices (Harvey 1989). In other words, it is not enough to show how specific rationalities of power create and maintain the subject effect, but also how the subject effect is in turn subverted, resulting in alternative subjectivities. It is on this basis that I consider the mapping of Monyul into a Himalayan circuit as representing a counter-geography to the border-normative imagined geography.

The new imaginings of Himalayan community must be understood against the backdrop of the border closure after the 1962 India-China war, and the reorientation that this event forced. While Monpas were not physically displaced after the war, they did face significant reorientation in terms of culture and political economy, as they were turned away from Tibet towards the newly formed Indian nation. Their transition can be understood as marking what Christian Lund defines as a 'rupture', one of the 'open moments' during epistemic and practical shifts in history – such as colonialism, decolonization, post- Cold War transformations, and so on – when categories, practices, and relationships are fundamentally re-ordered (Lund 2016: 1202). We can conceive of the imagined geography of the Himalayas as both shaped by and shaping the epistemic shift and reconfiguration that were made possible because of the historical dislocations of Monyul and the Monpas. Anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997) refer to the new kinds of geographical imaginings resulting from (mostly postcolonial) experiences of migration and exile as 'imagined places.' Imagination, in this view, is generative of 'new kinds of politics, new kinds of collective expression' on the part of ordinary people, and in turn, 'new needs of social discipline and surveillance on the part of elites' (Appadurai 1991: 198). This view is closest to my idea of imagined geography.

However, as Arjun Appadurai writes, one man's imagined community may be another man's prison, and resistance can also morph into reactionary movements if its essentialist claims are reified (1990: 295). The attempt to create boundaries between places and their outward connections, to present

them as the site of nostalgia and 'home/homeland', and to imagine one essential character as embodying 'us' versus 'them', are processes that can happen all the time. That is, resistance to essentialist representations may be equally essentialist in character. Like the border-normative geography, the Himalayan counter-geography is *also* imaginative and normative in character and does not sum up the empirical reality. Not everybody in Monyul is a Buddhist, and even among Monpas there are many who follow the older Bon faith or who remain on the fringes of Buddhism. The attempt to give the region a Tibetan Buddhist makeover is a normative act that defines who is an insider and who is not. It forces the representation of Monyul into one single spatial frame. If the border-normative geography of Monyul as a militarized border region is challenged by the Himalayan imagined geography of Mon, the latter is countered by transgressive behaviours that do not fit into the narrative of Monyul as an essentially Tibetan Buddhist region. Protests from both within and outside the Monpa communities against Buddhist dominance in the demand for autonomy, the split subjectivities of some Monpas who identify with a regional pan-Arunachali ideology, and the sometimes, uneasy relations between Monpas and Tibetan refugees living in Monyul, are all factors that rupture the projected normativity of a Tibetan Buddhist Monyul.

Taking all these dynamics into consideration, I do not conceive Monyul according to a single lens, but rather as constituting shifting geographies that are both subjective and normative, whose boundaries and contours change depending on who is included or excluded and how relations between self and Other are framed. In each imagining of Monyul, whether as an Indian border region or as a Tibetan Buddhist place or as an Arunachali region, there is a normative geography at work, which in turn is troubled by internal and external contradictions. I therefore favour an *anti-essentialist* mode of analysis (Massey 1994), which conceives of various spatial imaginations without essentializing any of them. Such a view of place destabilizes the marginality of Monyul without putting forth any theory of autonomous agency or itself constituting a stable image of Monyul. I also avoid reifying spatial representations that claim an essentialist identity and show that each representation of space is internally fissured or limited by outside forces (Laclau 1990).

Living under the spectre of war: State, security, and border

While the Himalayan geography is influenced by and indicative of translocal networks, the role of the Indian nation-state has not receded. The disputed

border status of Monyul influences government policies and decisions regarding this region, leading to a hyper-presence of the Indian state in what is one of the most militarized borderlands of the country. By *disputed* border, I mean not only a linear boundary line whose exact position is contested, but also an entire border region that is claimed by both nation-states between which it lies. Whereas *border disputes* figure along many international boundaries, where the alignment of the boundary is contested, the *disputed border region* offers a different case. So, while India has many boundary disputes with Pakistan and Bangladesh, it is only in relation to the boundary with China that questions about entire districts and states arise.

Contemporary politics and practices in Monyul serve to impress upon us that, even as borders are increasingly bridged in disputed border regions through cross-border migration as well as diplomatic cooperation between governments, the overt military structures in place lend a physicality to the border as a dividing line. I have characterized this particular spatial code as the *border-normative vision*, which is present in all nation-state imaginations but becomes intensified in situations of border conflict. Both India and China have stationed huge numbers of army personnel in the border areas, which are subject to constant surveillance.[5] The passages leading from Monyul to Tibetan areas are strictly monitored by military checkpoints. (This measure is not always in effect in other border regions, such as the Bhutan-Monyul passages, where some cross-border movement is possible and even condoned, directly or indirectly, by state agents). As a consequence, the impulses of transnationality existing in such disputed border regions are not curtailed but instead redirected towards new outlets and/or new forms and configurations that cannot be covered by common categories of physical border-crossing.

India and China have 2500 miles of common frontier – from northwest Kashmir to the trijunction of China, Myanmar, and India – and their border dispute concerns three main tracts along this frontier, amounting to 50,000

5 China has reportedly deployed thirteen Border Defense Regiments totaling around 300,000 troops. Six divisions of China's Rapid Reaction Forces are stationed at Chengdu city in southwest China, with 24-hour operational readiness and supported by an airlift capability of transporting the troops to the China-India border within 48 hours. India too has 120,000 Indian troops stationed in the eastern sector, supported by two Sukhoi-30 MKI squadrons from Tezpur in Assam, as well as a five-year expansion plan to induct 90,000 more troops and deploy four more divisions, and two more Sukhoi-30 MKI squadrons in the eastern sector (Goswami 2013). According to local reports, there are two army brigades stationed in Tawang district. Since each brigade has four regiments, and each regiment 600 soldiers, there should be an estimated 4800 troops in Tawang alone.

square miles of territory. In the Ladakh province of Jammu and Kashmir, there are approximately 15,000 square miles of contested territory along a 1100-mile stretch of boundary line (Sharma 1965). This is known as the 'Western Sector' (Aksai Chin area). Two-thirds of the boundary here divides Kashmir and China, and one-third divides Ladakh and Tibet. The second disputed area, the 'Central Sector', concerns certain border passes and specific points along the Indo-Tibetan border in the Indian states of Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, and Punjab. The most important area in the India-China boundary dispute is Arunachal Pradesh, called the 'Eastern Sector', where the Indian government claims the border is the colonially determined McMahon Line, while the Chinese rebut this claim.

Following India's independence from colonial rule in 1947, the Indian and Chinese governments signed a trade agreement in 1954 but did not engage in direct talks about the contested alignment of the India-China boundary. While India accepted the colonial boundary, the Chinese government considered it an unfair imperialist deal made by the British. Between 1954 and 1959, military incursions by both sides were reported at several points of the India-China frontier, leading to major debates in the Indian parliament that did not officially acknowledge the possibility of a border war (Bhargava 1964; Sharma 1965). In 1960, the Chinese premier, Chou En-lai, proposed a trade-off whereby China would recognize the McMahon Line as the Indo-Tibetan boundary if India relinquished claim over Aksai Chin (Gupta 1974: 33); however, this did not happen. On 20 October 1962, Chinese troops attacked several posts on the Tibet-Monyul border, and soon overran the entire Monyul region. The troops remained there for two months before they were called back.

My oral history interviews regarding the Chinese presence during the war showed how the Chinese soldiers, far from harassing the locals, adopted a benevolent attitude towards them while trying to convince them that they would be happier being part of China. In contrast with the popular depiction of the bellicose enemy soldier, the Chinese soldiers helped the villagers build houses and harvest crops, staged theatre shows in tents to entertain them, and carried their own loads instead of making use of local labour as the former Tibetan government and the Indian administration were wont to. People also recounted that even though the Chinese captured Indian soldiers, they did not treat them badly, and gave them meat and hot water; when they left, they put the dead bodies of soldiers in coffins and distributed blankets and sweets to locals before leaving. My conversations with villagers revealed goodwill and at times even admiration for the Chinese soldiers who travelled light, as opposed to the Indian soldiers who clumped about

in clunky gear, burdened by their heavy food packets. One elderly Monpa commented, quaintly, that those from the younger generation who decide to join the Indian army should wear the traditional dress that would mark them as Monpa, for this would protect them from Chinese bullets. The Chinese strategy was clearly to appease the local population, to convince them that they respected their customs, and thereby win them over (Guyot-Rechard 2017). It was a form of propaganda intended to demonstrate that they cared and could protect the local population where the Indian administration had failed to do so.

The India-China boundary dispute has now spanned half a century, and yet political leaders of both countries remain stuck in the same impasse as they were fifty years ago, especially since the border issue has now become entangled with matters of national prestige (Gupta 1974). From the perspective of the Indian government, it is considered inadvisable to even broach the topic of the McMahon Line in diplomatic meetings with China, for this would be read as an indirect admission of the boundary's disputed status and could signal India's willingness to negotiate (ibid.). Since the 1980s, the Chinese have been demanding that India give them the Tawang tract as part of a border settlement, while Indian representatives have been rejecting this demand. The Chinese policy works according to the circular logic that if Tibet belongs to China, then Tawang (as a previous offshoot of the Tibetan state) also belongs to China. Since 2005, the Chinese government has been also making claims on Tawang on the grounds that the Sixth Dalai Lama was born here. China claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of South Tibet – but most analysts agree that this term was first used by China in 2006 (Adlakha 2017).[6] China continues to grant stapled visas to residents of Arunachal Pradesh, instead of stamping the visa on their passport, to indicate the contested status of the region's sovereignty.

Tibet's own position in the border dispute has fluctuated over time. Despite the Tibetan agent Lonchen Shatra signing the Simla Agreement in 1914 – according to which Tawang became separate from Tibet – by 1935, the Tibetan position had reversed (Hoffman 2006). After the 1959 Tibetan exodus and the Dalai Lama's exile, however, the Tibetan government-in-exile seems to have aligned with the official Indian position regarding Tawang.

The Indian state's response to the Chinese claims has been to integrate the region. From a security perspective, the question is how to win over the border people. One method has been to physically enlist the local border

6 Hemant Adlakha, Roundtable discussion on 'China's stance on Recent Developments in Arunachal Pradesh', Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, 24 May 2017; See also Joshi 2017.

people in border security management. The philosophy behind the creation of the Special Service Bureau (SSB; later changed to Sahastra Seema Bal) in 1963, under the Ministry of External Affairs, was that the security of the borders was not the responsibility of the armed forces alone, but also required a well-motivated and trained border population. In a similar vein, many older Monpas who had been recruited into the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB) units at the district level reported in discussions with me about being involved in guerrilla and reconnaissance activities, and of crossing the border for espionage purposes disguised as Tibetans.

The other way in which the Indian government seeks to integrate the border regions is through cultural co-option. Co-opting the monasteries is a significant strategy here since monasteries have a huge influence in cultural life. This co-opting strategy includes a financial component – in the absence of funds coming from Tibet and traditional customary donations, monasteries have come to rely on grants from the Indian administration (Gohain 2017b). The promotion of cultural tourism and festivals showcasing local Buddhist traditions comprise another angle of cultural co-option. Settlement of people and military forces from other parts of India, national schemes for development and education, and the promotion of the Hindi language through popular media have all contributed to Monyul's increased acceptance of a mainstream national culture.

The border anxieties surrounding Monyul become palpable during moments when the nation responds to media-generated scares about an impending border war. 2009 saw some such moments, when China protested the Indian government's decision to allow the Dalai Lama to visit Monyul and the Indian media reacted by whipping up a frenzy about possible Chinese aggression on the borders. In the months leading up to November 2009, when the visit was scheduled, the media became a cacophony of rumours about military developments at the border, advances by Chinese troops, and anticipatory reinforcements by the Indian government.[7] The anxieties about an impending war even took on astrological dimensions in some rumour mills: an especially fanciful prediction that reached my ears was that, since 2010 was the Chinese year of the tiger – the symbol of

7 When I came to Guwahati during fieldwork intermissions, people were invariably curious to know about the situation near the border, but when I asked people in Dirang or Tawang about their fears they would reply, dryly, that the media was inflating the situation. Army trucks make their way regularly up the main roads carrying supplies for the soldiers and it had nothing to do with an impending war. Around the same time, however, the print media carried reports that the Indian government would soon be sending reinforcements of 50,000-60,000 troops to the border (Wong 2009; also, *The Economist*, 19 August 2010).

bravery – China would go to war with India in that year. A similar pattern emerged in 2017 when, reacting to the Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang, the Chinese government renamed six places in Arunachal Pradesh (mainly in Tawang) to reinforce its territorial claims, by standardising the names of these places in Chinese characters, Tibetan and Roman alphabet (Singh 2017). This, in turn, provoked a slew of responses from the Indian media and intense discussions in political and academic circles regarding China's intentions.

I have offered this brief background sketch since the border dispute will become a common theme in the following chapters. A Monpa government officer, now in his early 60s, once irately complained to me, 'When I go down [to the plains] people ask me, "You are from Tawang. Do you prefer to go with China or India?" *Arre* [come on], bullshit. In 1962, the Chinese tried their level best to convince the local Monpas, but could not. Nobody went with them. So what do you mean?' Whenever I mentioned my research to people elsewhere in India, I invariably encountered the question, 'So, do they consider themselves Indian or Chinese?' My reply – that after almost seventy years of being part of independent India with minimal interaction with the Chinese state the people of Tawang could hardly be considered less Indians than anyone else – did not always increase the confidence of my interrogators. Frequently forced to face questions of national belonging and loyalty, and exposed to constant military presence, the Monpas deal with the border dispute as an everyday reality.

This raises a methodological concern: given the disputed border location of Monyul, it is important to understand how transnational expressions are modified to suit the context. The adaptive strategies of border populations sandwiched between two hostile political powers are necessarily different from those of populations in regions where border crossings happen. In such controversial border regions, strategies of adaptation, defiance, or accommodation have a more veiled character and must be conceptualized accordingly. Smadar Lavie's 1990 study of the Mzeini Bedouins of South Sinai presents a classic case of a border people living under occupation. The Bedouins could only perform their nomadic, trans-border identity (as romanticized in travelers' accounts) allegorically: to openly confront the spatial and temporal boundaries of military occupation could mean beatings, jail, and even death (Lavie 1990: 7, 39). In the same way, I analyse contemporary cultural projects in Monyul as bringing to light 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1977: 132) that are not immediately visible but can be traced through analysis. We 'need to pay attention to the structures of feeling that bind space, time, and memory in the production of location' (Gupta

1997: 197), and the location or place thus formed may mean geographical units larger or smaller than nations or that crosscut national boundaries.

The cultural projects in present-day Monyul may also be seen as indicating 'formations' (Williams 1977) with trans-national, or rather, inter-regional scope and character. Formations, following Raymond Williams' definition, are not institutionalized structures (church, school, workplace, family, or neighbourhood) but rather processes in the making. For Williams, while these formations (in which he includes structures of feeling) are mostly affective – alternative tendencies and movements in the artistic, scientific, literary, or philosophical domains – they may later become oppositional formal structures (Williams 1977: 113-119).

The imagined Himalayan geography may not be universally acknowledged by all sections of Monpa society. In fact, many within the community challenge the idea, as I will show. This does not mean that it lacks empirical validity. Michael Hutt writes about 'shared consciousness' in relation to post-conflict Nepal [which is] traceable through literary forms like the novel: 'Because the insights provided by 'art literature' are intended for an elite audience, one immediate objection to a sociological approach to it might be that it has a limited readership and can therefore have only limited impact. […] However, the fact that a novel is not read by the majority in a society does not mean that it holds no meaning for them' (2014: 19, 26).

The chapters in this volume indicate how ethnographic analysis might tap into social and political practices as well as affective processes that both inspire and aspire to ideas of a spatial community. At the same time, by juxtaposing parallel and oppositional narratives and practices, I show that no spatial representation of Monyul is complete; rather, various negotiations and contradictions create shifting spaces that momentarily enhance or diminish the category in question. In her discussion of Tibetan ethnicity, Shneiderman (2006: 14) terms this kind of shifting presence as the 'now you see them, now you don't' phenomenon. It is also characteristic of spaces that exist as structures of feeling or are in the process of formation.

Localities unbound: Networks and nodes

> Spaces become localities because of how they are situated in particular networks with other people, places, and social entities. Localities are produced as nodes in the flows of people and ideas and are thoroughly socially constructed (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003: 12).

According to Kim Dovey (2009: 3), what distinguishes space from place is that place has an intensity that connects sociality to spatiality in everyday life. *Space* is given meaning and transformed into *place* through discourses, practices, and valuations that are attached to the former by different actors, and hence, place has an intimacy, often a felt immediacy of experience, that is not associated with space (Cresswell 2004).

In this book, I see places as embodied identifications. As philosopher Jeff Malpas explains, place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience (2004: 32, 177), thus making identities intricately place-bound. Since place is not founded on subjectivity but rather is that on which subjectivity is founded, we must talk about 'embodied spatiality' (Ibid.: 35). Jonathan Boyarin's 'embodied memory' (1994) offers a comparable concept: an understanding of memory as not superorganic but rather integrally bound up with identity, for both 'collective memory' and 'collective identity' result from inter-subjective practices of signification and are not fixed but instead constantly re-created (Ibid.: 23). Many scholars writing about place and space draw on Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of '*habitus*' as embodied dispositions – regulated practices that produce practices that in turn reproduce the objective conditions that produced the *habitus* in the first place – to understand the inter-relation between different levels of spaces, i.e., how perception can materially alter spaces and how imagination can affect the represented (e.g., Dovey 2009; Harvey 1989: 302).[8]

Viewing place as embodied identification does not reduce it to an essential identity, where a sense of place is rooted in a stable homeland. In fact, an inter-subjective understanding of place recognizes that spatial structures can never be a single space but, rather, are many spaces (Malpas 2004: 63).[9] Space

8 *Habitus*, in Bourdieu's conception, is not cognitively understood but rather internalized. It is the social order that inscribes itself on bodies. The concept of *habitus* is, therefore, a theory of power, for it explains how social divisions and hierarchies are reproduced. David Harvey, who is interested in understanding the political economy of place construction under capitalism (1989) and draws on Henri Lefebvre's social space framework to show how conceptions of time and space are created through material practices which also impact social relations and cultural forms, recalls Bourdieu's *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) to explain the dialectical relation between power and representation in the production of place. Kim Dovey also references Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* to arrive at a similar notion of place, although understanding place as *habitus* is less useful for conceiving of how place-identities constantly change (Dovey 2009: 33).

9 Theorists of space occasionally cite Foucault's reflections on space (Massey 1994: 249), especially his statement that while it has been common to see time as life – and therefore dialectical – space is seen as dead and therefore fixed (Foucault 1980: 149). While Foucault admits that the discursive study of spatial descriptions and of how objects are implanted, delimited, and demarcated would throw into relief processes of power, he notably attaches less importance to theorizing space in comparison to time, and does not undertake any archaeology or genealogy of

is plural because it is socially constituted, just as socialities (communities) are constituted by spatial imaginations (Dovey 2011). Geographers Keith and Pile (1993: 6) use the term 'spatiality' to capture how the social and the spatial are inextricably interwoven, and to conjure up the circumstances in which society and space are simultaneously realized by thinking, feeling, doing individuals. Similarly, Doreen Massey argues for an 'alternative view of space' (she rejects the distinction between space and place), in which space is configured through social relations and networks that are dynamic and imbue space with this dynamic potential (1994: 264, 265). In Massey's (1992) understanding, place is open, outward looking, and global, its character made of connections and interactions instead of primordial origins and enclosed boundaries – in other words, she privileges routes, rather than roots.

Building on these spatial theories, I privilege a non-localist mode of analysis. Localist approaches are seen, for example, in the older anthropological view of cultures as discrete, bounded, and ahistorical entities having no relation with each other, which Eric Wolf (1982) adequately captured with his analogy of cultures as 'billiard balls'. Today localist approaches often define both the terms and conditions, and the analysis of regional politics, which Ash Amin (2004) terms 'managerial localism'. Such managerial localisms articulate a politics of place in territorial terms through demands for the devolution of power to locally governed institutional structures. Despite these claims to localize economic development and priorities, however, managerial localisms usually function through widely dispersed networks of knowledge and resources (Amin 2004: 35, 36). In a world increasingly interconnected by various forms of media, even local public spheres – understood as the discursive critical arena in which any individual can participate through books, newspapers, social media, and so on – are by nature transnational (Guidry, Kennedy, and Zaid 2000).

spatial discourse. For him, space is a site where power unfolds, and different ways of managing space over time testify to the evolution of more effective ways to govern. For example, he talks about sovereignty, discipline, and security as different modes or economies of power that are exercised over different types of spaces (Foucault 2007). Thus, sovereignty is exercised over a territory from a center, disciplinary power over a deliberately designed space to enable total control, and security over spaces that have to take into account the unknown and uncertain (the term he uses is milieu). His theory of spatial transformations does not have an agent (Harvey 1989). Foucault's concept of 'heterotopias' (1967), real places that are also socially produced spaces, transformed through ideological projection into something other than themselves (Deshpande 1995), approximates to an extent the notion of transmutable space. However, while Foucault's notion of heterotopias is useful for understanding the social – or rather discursive – production of space, it does not explain how space comes to be multiply characterized.

Nina Glick Schiller proposes the term 'locality analysis' for the study of how the flows and processes of global capital restructure cities in which both migrants and non-migrants live (Glick Schiller and Faist 2010: 35, 37). Schiller's methodology adopts a non-localist approach because it pays attention to how locally placed residents and institutions are situated within regional, national and global networks, instead of understanding migration through simple binaries of native/migrant. With respect to the Himalayan borderlands, Martin Saxer's ethnographic study shows how in seemingly remote places such as Walung, Nepal near the Tibetan border, 'exchange, movement, and ambition congregate' along bundles of lines that he calls *pathways* (2016: 105). Pathways is not just an alternative term for trade routes: it also captures how terrain, infrastructure, livelihoods, and environment interact with flows of people, stories, things, and popular aspirations to give rise to specific kinds of mobilities that endure geopolitical shifts. Such works analytically show how the local, far from being a pristine space, is produced in systematic articulations of wider social, economic, and cultural processes.

In my work, I conceptualise imagined geography as formed from networks rather than as a bounded location, where Monyul is seen as a participating node. Bruno Latour, who propounded Actor-Network Theory (ANT), views networks as unlike conventional, bounded spaces: they overcome distance by connecting two or more disparate and dispersed actors, groups, or elements. In this sense, networks are not 'real' spaces but rather associations (Latour 1996: 371). The second point I take from Latour is that the notion of network allows one to dissolve the distinction between micro and macro and the idea that one can move scale from individual to family to region to nation. This is because a network is never bigger or smaller in scale: it is simply more intensely connected. The notion of network thus facilitates the imagining of a global entity that nonetheless remains very local (Ibid.: 372). The third take-away point from Latour is that unlike a network in engineering or mathematics, where the tracing of the network is done by some other entity (the mathematician or engineer), an actor network does the tracing and inscribing itself. It is an ontological definition. I find many resonances between Latour's notion of network – although when he refers to actors in a network he means both human and non-human actants – and my concept of the imagined geography as networked space. However, I differ from Latour's notion of network in one way. According to Latour, a network is a positive notion that does not require negativity to be understood, for a network 'is all boundary with no inside and outside' (Ibid.), and the space between its connections does not have to be filled. However, in my conception of imagined geography as a network forged

through connections and channelled through participating nodes, there is the possibility of imagined boundaries, such as Tibetan Buddhism becoming the boundary marker.

Further, my notion of the network privileges the *node* to show how the local is part of an interconnected system in which events, processes, and things are momentarily concentrated, but movement is not halted. In the physical and natural sciences, nodes are stops or transit points in a moving circuit, and are not static but dynamic. A node could be a point in a network connected by lines or links, or the point on a stem where a leaf or bud grows, or a small mass of tissue that forms part of the blood circulatory system in human anatomy. In each example, nodes imply connection. In urban studies, the nodal point of view has been prevalent especially in discussions of global and gateway cities – cities interlinked in a global network of finance and management (e.g., Amin 2004: 33, 34; Sassen 2005). Any particular geographical site is a nodal connection in a networked space that never coheres into a discrete physical space.

In this sense, I view local politics in Monyul as representing a node. Translocal networks and flows in the name of Tibetan Buddhist cultural preservation give content to Monyul's locality, and this locality equally contributes to these wider discourses and practices. To understand how the imaginations of inter-regional Himalayan community that are visible in Monyul are nodal developments connected to outside processes, we need an inside-outside vision, or bifocal perspective (Peters 1997) or extroverted gaze (Massey 1991, 1992). Himalayan geography is an extroverted concept that is both inside and also outside Monyul, for it relates to processes occurring inside Monyul but whose purview extends well beyond the locality. In other words, Monyul represents one dot in an emergent connect-the-dots pattern, one node in the larger system.

Several connected processes are now underway in Monyul. As I show in the following chapters, these include the construction of new monasteries, the restoration of older Tibetan toponyms and previously neglected sites as Buddhist sacred places *nas* (Wylie: *gnas*), the reclamation of ancient Buddhist and pilgrimage sites, as well as the rise of private schools and institutions of higher learning which promote Tibetan Buddhist education and cultural traditions. A number of trends indicate the involvement of transnational patronage in the revival of Buddhist culture in Monyul. Cultural traditions in Monyul are thus being given a new lease of life, partly supported by international donations. Like Anna Tsing (2005), who writes about the internationalization of the environment, I see the internationalization of Tibetan Buddhist culture as spawning a vibrant local cultural revival

in Monyul. The global circulation of money and resources in the name of Tibetan Buddhism has not left Monyul on the periphery, but has instead helped reinvent it as a node.

Chapter structure

In the following chapters, I show how the Tawang and West Kameng districts in Monyul are the locus for articulations of a local politics of place, while the trans-local agendas within the demand for autonomy simultaneously situate Monyul in wider networks of cultural and political-economic organizations. These networks are affected by concerns of border security, regional politics, and internal divisions in Monyul, and shape how actors selectively express or mute their trans-local identifications. This book attempts to convey the aspirations of a section of Monpas towards the formation of a pan-Himalayan identity, but is equally attentive to centrifugal forces that destabilize such unitary identifications and preclude talking about the Himalayan identity as a finished category. The Himalayan geography is a process in formation, which can be traced through particular discourses, practices, and social experiences. It may also change shape and direction with time.

Each chapter heading has a spatial framing, which I employ not to give a sense of fixed boundaries, but rather to write about competing, fluctuating loyalties in a volatile border region. I illustrate how these frames are themselves unstable, corresponding to shifting boundaries of belonging. Homogenous spatial representations constantly unravel as contradictory visions and internal conflicts surface. In each chapter I highlight both systematic efforts and unexpected encounters that either solidify or sunder unitary representations. Taking an anti-essentialist view, I show how in each case alternative imaginations pose contradictions or challenges: assertions to locality, for instance, are simultaneously something else.

Chapter One, Field, presents the anthropological location. Here, I give the historical background and ethnographic profile of West Kameng and Tawang and identify the past and present connections of these two districts and the people living there.

In Chapter Two, Locality, I discuss the demand for a Mon Autonomous Region that has been active since 2003 and show how the discourse of local autonomy is underpinned by the idea of translocal community. The autonomy discourse partly rests on the agenda of development, which addresses a space corresponding to the administrative contours of West Kameng and Tawang districts. At the same time, the parallel narrative of

Tibetan Buddhist cultural preservation undermines this construction of locality by including Tibetan Buddhist populations outside Monyul within its boundaries of belonging.

In Chapter Three, Connections, I trace narratives about transnational origins and migration. These stories are part of traditional Monpa oral lore but are now being shaped by contemporary politics as individuals express different modes of belonging by narrating stories of their origins. These oral narratives transgress the border-normative geography. Although not all acts of transgression, individually counted, add up to resistance (Cresswell 1996: 159), I argue that when origins narratives are articulated with the aim of countering the singular narrative of a 'national' origin, they count as resistance. At the same time, the controversial status of Monyul as a disputed territory introduces caveats in articulations of transnational allegiances with the Tibetan world: in the statements of many Monpas, declarations of historical and kinship affinities with Tibetans are accompanied by disclaimers regarding such ties in the present. Oral narratives of origins reveal how Monpa populations are pulled in opposite directions by their transnational histories and memories, on the one hand, and contemporary existence in a disputed border territory where constant military surveillance has led to a hyper-presence of the border in their daily lives and a creeping acceptance of the border-normative gaze, on the other.

Chapter Four, Periphery, focuses on contestation over place-names, and how it creates a politics of toponymy. The renaming of local places with Hindi names – mostly by the Indian army – symbolically maps Monyul as a national space, albeit a peripheral one. I argue that when Monpa individuals and organizations protest against the Hindi names and actively push for the restoration of older place-names, they constitute a resistance or counter to the nationalist production of space. This is paralleled by other activities in which local actors take the lead to materially reclaim space from the military, including the building of monasteries and Buddhist institutes of learning and the renovation of Tibetan Buddhist sacred sites.

In Chapter Five, Region, I explore the inter-ethnic relations between Monpas and the Tibetan community in Monyul, and how they complicate the Himalayan imagined geography. I show how Monpas are selectively drawn to a post-colonial Arunachali regional identity, formed largely on the platform of indigeneity and an anti-immigrant – including anti-Tibetan refugee – discourse. The Monpas' regional obligations are put to the test by their historical relations with Tibet, which include memories of harsh servitude under Tibetans as well as their present improved relations with

a now globally visible Tibetan diaspora community, whose primary base lies in India.

In this book, then, I place different spatial imaginations in tension with one another. Locality is not always a pristine space: connections are compromised, peripheries are contested, and regional obligations conflict with other affiliations. At the same time, I find it possible to distil a collective, emergent spatial consciousness that is gradually gaining ground in the Himalayan region, of which the current social processes in Monyul represent a localized effect. In the Conclusion, Corridors, Networks, and Nodes, I collate and revisit in more detail the arguments and observations from different chapters to make suggestions about this emergent Himalayan geography.

Note on methods

In 2005, I visited Monyul to conduct a survey of local opinion on the re-opening of trade routes as a young research assistant employed in the New Delhi-based Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS). I was encouraged in this project by the then-director of the institute sociologist Patricia Uberoi, who was keen to see how regional and vernacular literature represent cross-border cooperation, as opposed to the policy circles in Delhi, which can be dominated by the security perspective.[10] As an important trade route that once linked Tsona in the south of Tibet through Tawang to the Assam plains (Pommaret 2000a), Monyul was a valid candidate for re-opening cross-border

10 My survey in Monyul was funded by the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), headed at that time by sociologist and China expert Patricia Uberoi, and the report was later published as part of the institute's occasional study series (Gohain 2006). Under Patricia Uberoi's leadership and with support from Ambassadors C.V. Ranganathan and Eric Gonsalves at the Centre for Policy Research, Delhi, ICS led the Track II-level BCIM initiative, earlier known as the Kunming Initiative, which aims to promote rail, road, and water corridors to link China, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Manmar, Bangladesh, and China through India's landlocked Northeast region, by highlighting the commonality between South East Asia and Northeast India. Track II-level diplomacy consists primarily of collaboration between academics, policy experts, retired civil and military officials, public figures, and social activists, instead of directly involving government representatives (Uberoi 2014). This was a time when optimism for India's Look East Policy was still high. The Look East Policy, later renamed the Act East Policy, was conceived by former prime minister I.K. Gujral as a measure to improve social, cultural, and economic ties with the South East Asian countries. It was officially launched during the Narasimha Rao-led Congress government, and later upgraded to the Act East Policy in November 2014 by the BJP government (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region and North Eastern Council 2008). One of the primary goals of this policy was to revive ancient trade routes, currently fallen into disuse, between India's North East region and the South East Asian countries.

routes, though unlikely because of the security concerns clouding it. This initial exposure to Monyul later determined my choice of fieldwork location. Although I began by surveying trade narratives in Monyul during my pilot fieldtrip, I quickly moved on to the more pressing cultural and political narratives, of which border trade was only a part.

For this book, my fieldwork in Monyul took place between 2008 and 2013. I spent twelve non-consecutive months in Tawang and West Kameng districts of west Arunachal Pradesh, living primarily in the three towns of Dirang, Bomdila (West Kameng district), and Tawang (Tawang district), and visiting different villages for shorter stays. I made return trips to my field sites in 2017 and 2018, and kept myself updated with current developments through contacts in the field and by calling friends based there and, in the absence of a local press, following social media pages about events from Monyul.

My initial entry to the field location was facilitated to a large extent by the hospitality extended by the monk community at Gaden Rabgye Ling (GRL) Monastery. But in a small border region, where local politics and loyalties create sharp bifurcations between even husband and wife, I had to be careful not to expose myself to a narrow, partisan view. I therefore tried to maintain some separation between myself and my first hosts, since I did not want to represent only the views of the monastic establishment. I sought to diversify my sources and broaden my fieldwork database. The decision to move out of the monastery guesthouse and rent a room separately in the Bomdila College faculty quarters was also motivated partly by matters of finance and partly by a need for privacy. I deliberately took a random approach in selecting my chief informants and main leads in the different towns, so that my representative sample would be diverse.

My primary bases differ from one another in terms of dialect, local customs, altitude, and demography. Bomdila, despite being the district headquarters, was formed though the radial expansion of military quarters, and is peopled by migrants from both nearby Monpa villages and outside. In the ten years that have passed since I began my fieldwork, Bomdila has become connected to the cities of Guwahati and Tezpur in Assam through two major roads. Many government employees in Tawang seek job transfers to either Bomdila or other areas of Arunachal Pradesh so that their children can have access to better education and other resources. But the climate in Bomdila is extremely unpredictable – sunny one moment, cold and clammy the next, or even raining torrents. 'Bomdila ka mausam aur Bomdila ki ladki – ka koi bharosa nahin' [The weather and women in Bomdila are the same – fickle] is a popular, somewhat misogynistic saying among college-going youth. The rains also made scheduling fieldwork

interviews difficult. It was partly because of this climatic factor and partly because I was told that Dirang would offer me a better experience of rural Monyul that I diversified my base to include the latter town.

At approximately 4000 feet above sea level, Dirang, situated mid-way between Bomdila and Tawang, is lower in altitude than the other two towns, where elevations range from 6000 to 14000 feet; it also has a warmer climate and affords easier access to some old Monpa rural settlements. Yet, in its lack of infrastructure, Dirang is considered more remote than even Tawang, which at least has local travel agencies and regular traffic to and fro. The road connecting Tawang to Bomdila passes through the main Dirang market: a story goes that earlier Dirangpas (natives of Dirang) used to stop passing vehicles and forcefully (over)load them with passengers and luggage because passenger vehicles commuting from Dirang to Itanagar or the urban centres of Assam were so few and far between.

In Tawang, my experiences were richer as I stayed with a local household and enjoyed a more intimate interaction with my host family and their friends and relatives. Tawang, being nearer to the Tibet border and farthest in distance from Assam or Itanagar in terms of communication, is more likely to be cut off from road networks during landslides and snow, especially when the Sela Pass is blocked. Yet, situated at the confluence of both Bhutan and Tibet, and historically acting as an outpost of Tibetan rule in Monyul, Tawang is a focal point for both academic visitors and tourists.

As an ethnographer, my position in the field ambiguously lay somewhere between an outsider and insider. While my position as an Assamese cast me as an outsider, many people warmed up to me when they found out that I belonged to the Ahom community, the pre-colonial rulers of Assam of Shan ethnicity, who figure in the trade memories of the Monpas. In fact, many a time I was told that I look more Monpa than the average Monpa. Proper ethnographic fieldwork, according to the pioneering social anthropologist Malinowski, consists mainly in 'cutting oneself off from the company of other white men, and remaining in as close contact with the natives as possible, which really can only be achieved by camping right in their villages' (Wax 1972: 7). Though this kind of immersion was not my intention, I did not want to alienate local people by mixing more than needed with the Assamese society in Monyul or to give out the impression of being too provincially aligned. I thus consciously tried to avoid socializing too much with Assamese people, even though some of my primary contacts had been made through fellow Assamese. The fact that, unlike the average young Assamese woman, I willingly ate yak and beef and drank the local liquor often elicited comments to the effect that I was not 'like other Assamese'.

As a woman in the field, I only had the confidence to rent and travel on my own in Tawang and West Kameng because women are relatively safe there, compared to several other parts of India. This is not to suggest that it is an idyllic society for women. I witnessed quite a few cases where Monpa men who had acquired wealth and political power married more than one woman and maintained separate establishments for their different wives. Despite the dominant position of men in the society, women were quite independent and did all sorts of work – everything from housework to drudging it out in the fields and kitchen gardens, breaking stones on the roadside, collecting and carrying firewood from forests, conducting small trades and businesses in markets and fairs, and other activities. Their work makes the women of Monyul, and indeed, of many of the other states of Northeast India, visible and their presence accepted in public spaces in a way that is generally not possible for middle-class women in small towns of India, who are further burdened by an oppressive patriarchal caste structure.

My research methodology consisted of the ethnographic methods of participant observation, interviews, conversations, and oral history, as well as archival work in regional, national, and local libraries. Although I had begun studying the Tibetan language at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala just before fieldwork, I did not complete the course, and instead made do with Hindi – the main language in public spaces and the second language in homes in Monyul – to conduct my interviews. My basic knowledge of the Tibetan alphabet and vocabulary did, however, gain the confidence of many of my informants, who seemed impressed that I had at least made the effort! Most of the quotations and interview extracts used in this book are translated from Hindi to English by me. In some cases, they are translations from Tibetan or the local dialects. I had the help of friends acting as translators during interviews with senior Tibetan Buddhist monks and old people in rural areas whose Hindi was too pidginized for our mutual understanding. I also used English to conduct interviews with some informants who were comfortable in the language, and who used both Hindi and English while conversing with me. I have recorded and preserved digital copies of most of my interviews with the permission of my informants, although, as any ethnographer well knows, important ethnographic revelations are often made during casual conversations. I supplemented my ethnographic work with archival data sourced from the Indian National Archives as well as the Assam and Arunachal Pradesh state and West Kameng and Tawang district archives, and the British Library in London.

Fieldwork from the margins

A Monpa friend once joked, 'The other day, an officer came [to the monastery] and started asking me the names of the deities, pointing to all the small ones. Now how do I know what the names of all are [...] there are so many, although I know the names of a few. So I told him the names of all the kids in the village. The officer was happy. Before he left, he told me "very good"'. Deliberately dispensing this type of misleading information is, as I have seen, a fairly common response from most Monpas to the unwitting tourist or itinerant sightseer such as that officer. Many domestic tourists are usually unfamiliar with the religious and social life of the Monpas, and tend to ask what are, to the Monpas, irritating and useless questions. For example, if they see two young girls (perhaps in their early 20s) doing the chores around a guesthouse or homestay – a common enough phenomenon here – they tend to first assume that the girls are maids helping in the running of the guesthouse. Later, when they see the girls taking charge of payments, arranging accommodation and engaged in general supervision, they revise their views and start to think that the girls could be the daughters of the owner, which is sometimes a correct assumption. But if there is more than one girl running a guesthouse, it might not always be the case that the girls are sisters. The tourist who assumes this and puts it across as a question, however, would be told that yes, they are sisters, even if one is the daughter of the house and the other, a paid helper.

The problem is not with the Monpas but with the attitude of the inexperienced visitors who presume and then pose the query. In other words, it is a kind of subtle ethnocentrism where the general ways of life of the local society are seen with a kind of surprised paternalism – an attitude that is immediately understood by the 'native', and the expected answers given. Does this mean that telling the visitor what he expects and wants to hear is to conform to the stereotypes that propel the question in the first place? Hardly so. It is clear that the visitor, in the eyes of the average Monpa, is the object of fun and laughter for his/her obvious lack of knowledge. The second case is where the visitor asks apparently 'sensible' questions, such as the officer wishing to know what the names of the different deities were. But the Monpa who is asked such questions also knows that the officer is not really serious, and that his interest in the deities is transient. More interestingly for me, this anecdote brings out the seemingly innocuous but deeply loaded questions people ask when they only have stereotypes guiding them.

When I choose Monyul as my fieldwork site, I encountered a similar stereotype in anthropology, with a senior scholar advising me that good

research is not necessarily about going to places where nobody has yet done research. Once upon a time, research consisted of identifying empirical lacunae, so that if one researcher wrote a history, say, 'from 1857 to 1947', the next researcher would pick up from where the previous had left, and go on to write a history 'from 1947 to 1972'. While similar reasoning might have governed the choice of fieldwork locations in an earlier anthropology, where the least explored site could mean the most productive, after the 1980s cultural turn in the discipline, this anthropological convention has been subject to a critical gaze. My choice of location therefore appeared to be the old-fashioned, let us say, stereotypical, route to fieldwork.

However, by opting to do research in an out-of-the way (e.g., Tsing 1994) region, was I actually choosing an outdated route to research? The view that the relative absence of scholarly research in Monyul makes the latter an outdated site for research corroborates the official representation of Monyul as a remote margin. It is not only remote in a geographical sense, as being on the outskirts of the nation: it is also remote in terms of scholarly access. While some anthropological writing has come out of India (e.g., Dhar 2005; Dondrup 1994; Dutta 1999; Dutta 2002; Elwin 1959a &1959b; Jha 2006; Nanda 1982; Nath 2005; Sarkar 1980; Lama 1999), very few Western scholars – barring the colonial era ethnologists – have produced ethnographic studies of this region.[11] This is partly due to the difficulty for foreigners to receive long-term access to Arunachal Pradesh because of the inner line policy: foreign citizens require a Protected Area Permit (PAP) for entry into certain areas of Northeast India, including Arunachal Pradesh, for a stay of only up to 30 days. As an Indian citizen not from Arunachal Pradesh, I also had to procure an Inner Line Permit (ILP) to gain entry into Arunachal Pradesh.

Again, to speak of the 'minority state' of Monyul within South Asian anthropology is not so different from the codes of representation that depict it as remote, for both feed the same image of marginality. In perceiving Monyul as academically virgin territory, we might be succumbing to

11 Colonial ethnologies on this area include the reports of visits of or by the following: Nain Singh in 1873-75 (Trotter 1877), G.A. Nevill in 1912 (Arpi 2013), F.M. Bailey and H.T. Morsehead in 1913 (Bailey 1914c), F. Ludlow, G. Sherriff and K. Lumsden in 1936 (Arpi 2013), G.S. Lightfoot (Arpi 2013), Frank Kingdon-Ward (Kingdon-Ward 1938, 1940, 1941), and J.P. Mills (1947, 1948). After India's independence, Verrier Elwin (1959a & 1959b, 1965), Leo Rose and Margaret Fisher (Rose and Fisher 1967), Aris (1979b), and Fürer-Haimendorf (1982) have given us many interesting accounts of this region. More contemporary works include fieldwork-based accounts of the origins and migrations of the people of eastern Monyul and clan rituals (Huber 2012); on the cultural identity of the Membas of central Arunachal Pradesh (Grothmann 2012); the languages of Monyul (Bodt 2012); and a historical account of the India-China war from local perspectives (Guyot-Rechard 2017).

conventional representations of the margin. It is therefore pertinent to ask here, 'might it be possible to disentangle analysis of the rural and the remote from assumptions of the pristine?' (Tsing 1994: 282). Through a non-localist approach, I have tried to interrogate the supposed remoteness of the Monyul border by highlighting past connections and present politics and possibilities.

During interviews and conversations, people were quite willing to share information with me, since they saw me as a student of Monpa culture and history, but there were times when I sensed a certain curiosity about my real intent. I am sure many people initially thought I was a government agent, given that Monyul is such a politically sensitive area. One question that I frequently faced in Bomdila and Tawang was: Why did I choose to work on the Monpas? I particularly recall a conversation that took place between my host in Tawang, his friend, an English teacher from Nagaland, and me. The Naga teacher asked me why, if I was interested in cultural identity (the rubric under which I categorized my work), did I not choose to write about my own community? Why, he asked, couldn't the Monpas write their own history? Not expecting the critique, I blurted out that, as somebody from the Northeastern part of India, I was still an insider, and added that there were many Monpa researchers who *are* writing their own histories. My good-humoured host then came to my defence. Even if I put aside the inadequacy of my hasty answer, I have found that the question of who can represent whom, is deeply entangled with researcher position and subjectivity and equally with informant subjectivity, as well as ethics. Not even Monpas telling their own stories are necessarily able to present a complete or true picture, as my Monpa friends recognized. They would anxiously tell me, after I had come back from hearing stories of origins or migration, that I should not believe or write down everything I listen to.

By saying that I find representation to be a knotty issue, I do not wish to be tied down by the problem, but rather to move beyond to the solution. If we acknowledge Gayatri Spivak's argument that once we start talking about subaltern consciousness as a *thing* to be reclaimed, we objectify and essentialise subalternness (1988), or James Clifford's critique that the ethnographer constructs himself/herself by essentialising the native as Other, this does not mean that all ethnographic activity should be suspended. The subject has not disappeared; rather, the subject has been rendered difficult to represent owing to his/her diversity and polyvocality (Clifford 1986); ethnography must therefore be read as a textual site of contested meanings where many voices clamour for expression.

Suffice it to add here that my attempt is to foreground, interpret, and make sense of the representations that coincided with the course of my fieldwork in order to support my thesis. This, then is my aim: to bring out the contradictions and differences in Monyul's politics, perhaps not always by writing the ethnography as a dialogic text that reproduces the ethnographic encounter, but instead by bringing out in the best way I can the instabilities of identities, meanings, and geographies. Though my interpretation is only a partial interpretation, a partial truth (Clifford 1986) that omits, I hope it also reveals.

1 Field

A signboard at the Bhalukpong check point at the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh inter-state border reads 'Arunachal Pradesh: The Unexplored Paradise'.[12] Located in Northeast India, Arunachal Pradesh comprises sixteen districts, of which Tawang and West Kameng districts form the western flank.[13] Often described as *terra incognita* or no-man's-land, Arunachal Pradesh has a relatively low population density of 17 per sq. km., compared to the countrywide average of 382 per sq. km. (Batt 2011). However, the region has always been home to populations described in various literatures as 'hill tribes' (Barpujari 1970) or 'highlanders' (Furer-Haimendorf 1982). Rather than being a description of actual places, therefore, the term 'unexplored paradise' is a projection or, like the fabled Orient (Said 1978), a discursive construction that has the magical quality of expunging past histories and networks through a romantic, uniform, and static vision of space.

What is often forgotten in the use of such terms is that they are rarely indigenously deployed but are instead designations bestowed by external forces. The epitaph of 'unexplored paradise' given to Arunachal Pradesh, while invoked for its tourist appeal, encodes the asymmetrical power relations in which Arunachalis find themselves vis-a-vis the contemporary Indian nation. Its use highlights both the marginal status of this state in the national imagination and its contrast to developed, metropolitan, industrial centers such as Mumbai, often described in popular parlance as a 'teeming metropolis'. This image of a remote frontier attaches to all parts of Arunachal Pradesh, including Monyul, relegating to the background the latter's peculiar history that has returned to influence its present politics.

Monyul and North East India

In pre-colonial times, the areas now comprising Arunachal Pradesh, except for Tibetan-ruled Tawang and West Kameng, were never formally part of any

12 The term 'unexplored paradise', indicating pristine territory waiting to be discovered, is often used in relation to all of Northeast India in tourist brochures, particularly Arunachal Pradesh.

13 From west to east, the sixteen districts of Arunachal Pradesh are Tawang, West Kameng, East Kameng, Papumpare, Kurungkumey, Upper Subansiri, Lower Subansiri, West Siang, East Siang, Upper Siang, Dibang Valley, Lower Dibang Valley, Anjaw, Lohit, Changlang, and Tirap.

political state.[14] Relations between the Ahom state in the plains of Assam and the hill communities were marked by mutual dependency, embodied through customary law. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, the British colonial rulers annexed Assam – decades after other parts of India had already been colonized – and established a policy of loose administration in the frontier hill tracts. Concerned with protecting British commercial industries of tea, coal, and oil in the foothills and plains areas, the colonial government instituted the inner line through the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873. The inner line, roughly corresponding to the boundary between the hilly tribal tracts and the plains, prohibited all British subjects or any person residing in or passing through such districts from passing into the hills from the plains without a pass under the hand and seal of the executive officer (Baruah 1989; Sharma 2011). The inner line effectively marked the boundaries of the administration proper: beyond it, the British did not extend regular rule for reasons of economy and defence, for these frontier areas acted as a buffer zone between imperial China and the British territories in India (Gohain 2020). By ending previous customary relations between hill and plains communities and reducing contact between the two, the inner line eventually led to the isolation of those in the hills.

In 1914, in fear of Chinese expansionism, the British delineated the McMahon Line as the Indo-Tibetan boundary. While the British Foreign Secretary Sir Henry McMahon and the Tibetan agent Lonchen Shatra signed the boundary treaty at the tripartite Shimla conference (Goldstein 1989; Lamb 1966), the Chinese representative disagreed with some of the clauses and refused to sign the document, and hence, the British were reluctant to extend regular administration to these areas. 'North East Frontier Tracts' was the colonial designation for the political division corresponding to the present state of Arunachal Pradesh – not to be confused with 'Northeast frontier', the geographical term used to denote the frontier areas in the northeast of India.

The North East Frontier Tracts were initially divided into the Central and Western Section of the North East Frontier in 1913. In 1919, the Central and Eastern Sections were renamed the Sadiya Frontier Tract and Balipara Frontier Tract, respectively, and in 1942, the Tirap Frontier Tract was carved out of Sadiya (Elwin 1959b: 3). The North East Frontier Tracts were listed as the *Excluded Areas of province of Assam* under the provisions of the

14 The Ahom rulers, Shan migrants from Southeast Asia who governed the adjacent plains of Assam from 1228 to 1826, followed a conciliatory policy toward the frontier hill communities without attempting to bring the latter into their fold.

Government of India Act of 1935, which exempted them from the laws that were applicable in the rest of British India (Baruah 2003b: 49). Monyul, as part of the Balipara division of the North East Frontier Tracts, was also subject to this mode of 'exclusive governmentality' (Ghosh 2006); in the absence of a formal British state apparatus, a visible Tibetan state presence continued here (Verghese 2004).

Following independence in 1947, the North East Frontier Tracts were renamed the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1954, and administered by the Ministry of External Affairs, with the Governor of Assam acting as agent to the President of India (Verghese 2004: 220). The postcolonial Indian government gradually established paramilitary posts in the border areas and in 1951, an Assam Rifles expedition led by Major Ralengnao Khating reached Tawang and put an end to Tibetan tax-collection. Shortly afterwards, in October 1951, the Chinese state took control over Tibet, and in 1959 the Dalai Lama entered India through Zemithang as an exile, with many Tibetans following him through the border passages.[15] In the aftermath of the 1962 India-China war, these passages were militarily closed, and cross-border movement was curbed.

The boundary war significantly changed the landscape of the region. In the months before and between October and December 1962, when Chinese forces briefly occupied Monyul, many Monpas fled their homes fearing plunder and torture by the Chinese army, taking shelter in Missamari near Tezpur and other camps set up by the Indian government in the foothills. I learnt during fieldwork that those who were infirm, old, or did not and could not run, stayed back. Later, the ones who returned alleged that their property had been taken over by those who stayed behind. Many from Tawang subsequently went back to the new Bomdila township, and built settlements there – Sera and Pedung. People in these settlements told me that in the immediate years following the closure of border passages after the 1962 war, when essential supplies of oil, rice, and wheat stopped coming from Tibet and communications to the Indian plains had not yet developed, villages in Monyul had to become completely self-sufficient for a while.

Post the 1962 war, Monyul underwent a significant make-over as Indian political and economic institutions moved in and markets and civic

15 Melvyn Goldstein regards October 1951 and the signing of the Seventeen Point Agreement between China and Tibet as marking the end of the '*de facto* independent lamaist state', even though Chinese troops began moving into Tibet in the 1950s (Goldstein 1989: 823). The old monastic system continued for several more years until the Dalai Lama and his key officials fled to exile in India in March 1959, followed by thousands of Tibetans.

infrastructure gradually developed through state-enabled urbanization. As an increasing number of non-Buddhist people migrated to the region to fulfil functions of security, governance, education, and trade, local Monpas began interacting with people of different regional, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. In 1971, the North Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act declared NEFA a Union territory separate from Assam, to be ruled directly by the central government, and renamed Arunachal Pradesh – a Sanskrit term meaning 'land of the rising sun'. The first general elections in Arunachal Pradesh were held in 1978 and it was granted full statehood in 1987 (Verghese 2004).

Initially, both Tawang and West Kameng were included in the Kameng division of NEFA, but in 1984 Tawang became a separate district from West Kameng. Until 2016, a single road connected these districts to the new centers – Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh; Tezpur, the nearest plains city; and Guwahati, the capital of neighbouring Assam – while New Delhi remains the distant, often unseen, seat of power, more inaccessible perhaps than Lhasa was in older times.

While the Monpas are the numerically dominant community in Monyul, they consist of a number of groups divided in terms of territory, dress, custom, and speech, all sharing a common history of Tibetan influence through varying degrees of religious, trade, and political ties.[16] There are Monpas in Bhutan and China too, where they are listed as an ethnic minority called Memba or Monba, as well as in central Arunachal Pradesh, to where they migrated from Bhutan and Tawang (Grothmann 2012). Previously, the different groups identified with their immediate territorial community or settlement, termed *tsho* (Wylie: *mtsho*), rather than a broad Monpa identity. During the Tibetan period, settlements where different communities or groups of people lived, such as Tsok Sum, Pangchen Ding Druk, and Dagpa Tsho Gye in Tawang district, and Labo Tsho Zhi, now on the Tibetan side, were all called Mon – that is, low-lying areas. Mon also included areas that today fall within Bhutan, such as Mon-Bumthang. Present-day Monyul and parts of what is now eastern Bhutan were together called Shar Mon (eastern

16 There are at least five different branches of the Tibeto-Burman language family in Tawang and West Kameng: Dakpa, spoken north of Sela pass; Brokeh, the Bodic language of yak herders or Brokpas, high altitude dwellers practicing pastoralism throughout the region, but mainly in the three villages of Nyukmadung, Senge, and Lubrang; Tshangla, spoken south of the Sela pass and also the most widely spoken language in Bhutan (Bodt 2012); Kho-Bwa languages spoken by the Monpas of the villages of Khoitam, Rahung, But, Salari, and perhaps Lish, as well as non-Monpa groups like the Sherdukpens and Buguns; and Hrussish languages spoken by Miji and Aka groups (Toni Huber, Personal communication, February 2013).

Mon) by Tibetans. These settlements each had their own land divisions. Tsok Sum was divided into Shar Tsho, Lhou Tsho, and Seru Tsho. Similarly, for tax purposes Dagpa Tsho Gye was divided into eight divisions, Pangchen Ding Druk into six, and Labo Tsho Zhi into four. People were known by their territorial identity. Thus, for example, people from the Tsok Sum settlements were called Tsokpa, while people from Pangchen were, and still are, called Pangchenpa.

The compound administrative category of 'Monpas' first appeared in colonial documents pertaining to relations with the tribes in the North East Frontier. In British administrative and ethnological reports of the early twentieth century, the inhabitants of Monyul were termed 'extra-Bhutan Bhutias' (Mackenzie 1884 [2007]). 'Bhutia' was a catch-all term for communities under Tibetan Buddhist cultural influence; until 1915, the demographic lists of frontier communities in *Assam Administration Reports* (1915-1916) placed Monpas and Tibetans in the same category as Bhutias. The Monpas were subsumed under the category 'Bhutias subject to Tibet', and it was only in 1919 that they were listed as a separate category as 'Monbas' (*Assam Administration Report* 1918-1919: 3).

In postcolonial India, the former territorial divisions were reconstituted roughly into circles, or administrative sub-divisions within a district.[17] Pangchen Ding Drug became what is now known as the Zemithang circle, Dagpa Tsho Gye became the Lumla circle, Tsok Sum became the Tawang circle of Tawang district, and so on (Tsering 2010). Today, different Monpa communities have a common administrative identity and are listed as a Scheduled Tribe, and therefore are eligible for affirmative action benefits.

Through being codified in bureaucratic procedures and embedded in a legal complex of rights and benefits, the different Monpa groups have acquired a collective identity not only in the administrative sense but also in an empirical sense. This is not to say that the differences and internal conflicts between different Monpa communities have been erased, but simply that their common experiences and interactions, and their participation in local and regional administrative units for over sixty years, have slowly lent anthropological validity to the common term 'Monpa', not just as an

17 Monyul was traditionally divided into seven territorial divisions. During the postcolonial reconstitution of Monyul, these traditional divisions were taken into account while forming the district administrative subdivisions called circles in Tawang and West Kameng. However, these are rough approximations, for a few traditional areas are now on the Tibetan side while the Mago-Thingbu circle, now under Tawang district, was originally part of Tibet and some of the circles in West Kameng were traditionally non-Monpa territory.

administrative identity but also as a subjective one.[18] Since 2003, coinciding with the beginning of the demand for autonomy, terms like Mon-Tawang and Mon-Bomdila have become increasingly visible on public signboards and in documents and brochures produced locally.

Ties with Tibet

Monyul's Tibetan ties invest the region with a peculiar distinctiveness within Northeast India, prompting historian Alastair Lamb to remark, 'Tawang was as Tibetan as Phari at the head of Chumbi valley [at the intersection of Sikkim and Tibet]' (1966: 303). Oral traditions hint that Monyul came under Tibetan rule in the seventh century, when Srongtsan Gampo (Wylie: *Srong rtsan sgam po*), the 33rd king of the Yarlung dynasty of Tibet, extended his kingdom in all directions, including the southern borderlands (Sengge Tshering 2002).[19] However, the first official record of Tibetan state presence in Monyul is given in an edict by the Fifth Dalai Lama from 1680 (Aris 1979b: 15), in which he declares that all areas of Monyul, from Tsona in south Tibet to 'dung-sam' [a village on the Bhutan-India frontier] to 'Amratulla' [a village on adjacent Assam foothills], would henceforth be under the 'king [Dalai Lama] of Tibet' (Aris 1979b). In the same year, Mera Lama Lodre Gyatso of Mukto in Tawang, a disciple of the Fifth Dalai Lama, began work on the Gaden Namgyal Lhatse monastery – now popularly known as Tawang Monastery – to be used as a military outpost for Gelugpa Tibetan forces in the seventeenth-century sectarian wars between Tibet and Bhutan (Sarkar 1996: 6).

In those days, the areas under Tibetan rule were divided into zones, each placed under a zonal headquarters. Monyul was divided into three tax zones or districts – Talung Dzong at Kalaktang in southern Monyul, Dirang Dzong in central Monyul, and Tawang Dzong or Gyanghar Dzong in

18 In the contemporary context of powerful Hindu nationalist politics in India, it may be worthwhile to remember that 'Hindu' was not used as an insider or emic term prior to the nineteenth century. The name Hindu was given to the people living east of Indus by the Muslims as a way of distinguishing themselves. It does not occur in any Sanskritic text before the Muslim advent. The word was taken up by Hindu reformers in an attempt to unify a divided people under a common Hindu nation or race (Roy 2014).

19 M. Hasnain Sengge Tshering (2002) mentions that according to the Tang Annals, Srungthsan Gampo [Srongstan Gampo], whose minister was Thonmi Sambhota (ca. 617-650), the 33rd king of the Yarlungpa Dynasty, while expanding the Tibetan Empire, annexed the present day Baltiyul and Gilgit [of present day Kashmir], which belonged to the Palolas during the fifth century CE.

Figure 1 Tawang monastery from a distance

northern Monyul – where food grains or dairy products collected as taxes were stored; Tsona in southern Tibet acted as the zonal headquarters for Monyul. The different Monpa settlements were divided between several land divisions, and the *tsorgan* ('headman') of each *tsho* ('settlement') acted as the intermediary between the village people and the Tibetan government officials in relation to taxes or chores to be done. According to educationist Lama Thupten Phuntsok, Director of Manjushree Orphanage in Tawang, the land divisions and role of *tsorgan* were implemented for the purpose of making tax collection easy.

Taxes from the southernmost point of Monyul were carried by *ula* ('conscripted labour', Wylie: *u-lag*) from local villages in 'relay' (Roy-Burman 1966) form until they finally reached Tsona, from where a portion was sent to Drepung monastery in Lhasa. This meant that taxes in the form of food grains as well as yak products were carried from one village to the second by porters from the first village, who were then replaced by porters recruited from the second village, who would carry the supplies to a third village where they would be replaced in turn, and so on, until the supplies finally arrived at their destination in Tsona.

All areas from current Kalaktang on the Assam-Monyul border to Tsona in Tibet participated in this relay traffic, but yak-herding groups in some

parts of Monyul also directly paid taxes in the form of yak products to the agents of certain private families based in Tibet (Bailey 1914c: 40). Most of the villages in the Tawang valley, including those in Pangchen (current Zemithang), were under the jurisdiction of the *dzongpon* ('district officer') of Tsona *dzong* ('fort' or 'district'), while those further south, in Dirang and Kalaktang and up to the Assam foothills, were under the jurisdiction of Tawang monastery. Monpas in Tawang and Dirang remember the past role of Tsona in the administration of Monyul; Urgyen Tsering, Chairman of Lhou Secondary School, Tawang, told me that Tsona was the administrative centre for the Mon areas, and was in charge of appointing *dzongpons* to Gyanghar Dzong (Tawang), Dirang Dzong, and Talung Dzong. Referencing the three tiers of the judiciary in India's present administration, he compared Tawang to the District Court, Tsona Dzong to the High Court, and Lhasa to the Supreme Court.

Apart from its political ties with Tibet, Monyul also had connections of trade and religion with both Tibet and Bhutan: Monpas, Drukpas (Bhutanese), and Bodpas (Tibetans) participated in a trans-Himalayan trade in which Monyul played the role of a 'corridor' (Aris 1979b). Tibetan items also travelled to markets in Assam via Tawang, which was the shortest route from Lhasa to India (Gupta 1974: 30; Holditch [1904] 2005). Tawang, once described as 'a frontier market town not far from the Assam border' (Holditch [1904] 2005: 183), was an important channel for trade exchanges between Assam and Tibet (Devi [1968]1992: 250). Tibetan merchants came to the Assam border to buy tussar silk cloth, iron, and lac from Assam, as well as skins, buffalo horns, pearls, and corals, and to sell woollens, gold dust, salt, musk, horses, and Chinese silk (Mackenzie 1884 [2007]: 15).

The Monpas were what Pemberton (1835 [1991]) terms 'frontier trade agents' in the trade of goods between Assam and Tibet. They were certainly not the only tradespeople moving across the Himalayas, for in trade routes and markets that fell on the eastern side of present-day Arunachal Pradesh, other groups from the area acted as intermediaries. But on the present-day western side, the trade agents were chiefly Monpas, and in less numbers, members of the Aka, Daphla, and Miji tribes. Further, unlike in other parts of Arunachal Pradesh, where the terrain was not favourable for caravan trade, in the western part there was a vast caravan trade. The Monpas reared pack animals such as yaks, ponies, and horses and earned handsome amounts of money by engaging the animals in caravans on the trade routes between Assam, Bhutan, and Tibet (Dhar 2000: 242).

Monpas not only acted as trade middlemen, but also directly exchanged their indigenously grown rice, maize, millet, chili, *madder* ('vegetable dye'),

bamboo mats and baskets, and *chang* ('millet beer') for Tibetan items such as rock salt, dried meat, *churpi* ('yak cheese'), wool, and *betang* (the Tibetan silver currency), and for items from Assam and Bengal such as Assamese silk, pearls, coral, and iron utensils (Devi [1968]1992: 251; Dhar 2000: 242). There were three trading seasons in the Tibetan trade town of Tsona: the Yartsong or Summer Market in the fifth lunar month *Dawa Ngapa* (June-July), the Tongtsong or Autumn Market in the seventh month *Dawa Dunpa* (August-September), and the Guntsong or Winter Market in the tenth and eleventh month *Dawa Chukchipa* (December-January). The Monpas of Tawang and Zemithang used to undertake northward trading journeys to Tsona and to markets in Merak-Sakten and Trashigang in Bhutan, and southward, to the Udalguri, Rangapara, Lokra, and Charduar markets in the Assam foothills. Monpa people in their 80s recalled making seasonal trips lasting for more than a month to Tsona to attend the market held there thrice a year. Very few of the traders lived there year-round, mostly coming for the seasonal markets (Bailey 1957: 246). For reasons of thrift as well as security, it was apparently common practice for traders to seek and be given accommodation by Tibetan, Bhutanese, and Assamese families with whom they had hosting relations. During certain occasions, such as the popular annual festival at Gorsam Chorten,[20] the area would teem with traders from Tibet and Bhutan with items to trade.

Besides Tawang, the other frequented passage through the mountains was Kenzemani in Zemithang, used mostly by Bhutanese traders entering Tibet. Using Zemithang as a conduit, traders carried rice, jaggery, and oranges from Bhutan to trading fairs in Tibet, from where they would bring back ghee (clarified butter), *churpi* ('fermented cheese'), *nambo* ('sheep wool cloth'), and dried fish and meats. People from Zemithang also sold local wares such as bamboo baskets, rolling pins and other wooden crafts, and brooms made of bamboo leaves in Tsona, and locally produced rice, millet, ghee, and *churpi* in Bhutan. During these periods of cross-border traffic, some amount of trade would also be conducted in Zemithang. According to elderly inhabitants, while Monpa groups in the immediate Tibetan borderlands such as Zemithang and Thingbu conducted trade with Tibet and their neighbouring Monpa and Bhutanese villages, such as Lumla or Dirang, instead of coming down to lower altitudes, the items they brought from Tibet continued downward to the foothills via Monpa groups from

20 Gorsam Chorten is one of the largest, oldest, and most popular stupas (Buddhist dome-like structure containing relics) in Arunachal Pradesh, built in the twelfth century. http://www.bcpsociety.org/gorsam1.php (accessed 12 February 2016).

lower altitudes who attended the markets in the Assam foothills. Along with the circulation of trade items, ties of marriage and *netsang* ('hosting relations') were also forged between Monpas and their trading partners.

Religion and rule

Different Monpa lineages in Monyul follow different sects of Buddhism, while in some areas, the pre-Buddhist shamanic Bonpo faith continues (Nath 2005: 53). Although Buddhism was founded in Tibet by King Srongtsan Gampo in the seventh century (Mills 2003), its consolidation and propagation in Tibet and neighbouring tracts such as Monyul is credited to the Indian Tantric master Guru Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche, who was invited to Tibet by the king Thrisong Detsen in the eighth century. In the twelfth century Ugyen Zangpo, a Buddhist monk of the Nyingma (Red-Hat) sect of the house of Terton Pema Lingpa, the Great Treasure Revealer,[21] came from Bhutan to the Tawang valley and built three monasteries – Urgyeling, Sangyeling, and Tsorgyeling. Tsangyang Gyatso, the Sixth Dalai Lama, was born at the Urgyeling monastery, which lies at a little distance from Tawang town (Sarkar 1996: 54). A stone inscription in English beside a small copse of trees at the monastery entrance narrates the following 'tale of the plantation of the walking stick',

> Legend has it that at the time of leaving for Tibet, Tsangyang Gyatso planted his walking stick and prophesized that he would visit Tawang once again, when all three tree trunks that would grow of it would attain equal heights. Truly it happened, but unfortunately, one of the trunks broke in 1959 due to a strong wind, an ominous sign. Soon afterwards, the people of Tawang saw the Dalai Lama coming to Tawang once again, this time as the great Fourteenth, on his way to India in exile.

While the Nyingma sect persists among many Monpa lineages today, especially in the Zemithang region, it is the Gelug (Yellow-Hat) sect, founded in the fourteenth century by the scholar monk Tsongkhapa and to which the Dalai Lama belongs, that has widespread influence in both Monyul and Tibet. Thangston Gyalpo, a lama of the Gelugpa sect and disciple of the First

21 A *terton* (Wylie: gTer-sTon) is one who discovers or reveals a *terma* ('hidden scripture') of Lopon Rinpoche or Guru Padmasambhava, the founder of Nyingma, the earliest school of Tibetan Buddhism (Bhattacharjee 1983: 3).

Figure 2 Footprint of Sixth Dalai Lama, Urgyeling Gonpa, Tawang

Dalai Lama, visited Monyul during the first half of the fifteenth century and built an iron suspension bridge over the Tawangchu river, but did not introduce the Gelugpa sect in this region. It was Tanpei Dronme, a Monpa man from Berkhar village and disciple of the Second Dalai Lama (1475-1542), who built a Gelug monastery called the Talung monastery at Sanglem, Kalaktang in southern Monyul, and introduced the Gelugpa sect to many areas, including among some of the plains tribes of Assam (Sarkar 1996: 5).

The Gelugpa sect was consolidated and extended in Monpa areas after Mera Lama Lodre Gyatso, a disciple of the Fifth Dalai Lama, built the Gaden Namgyal Lhatse or Tawang monastery in 1680 (Sarkar 1996: 6). Under the leadership of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the Gelugpa followers in Tibet allied with Mongol military forces, leading to the sect's political ascendancy in the sectarian struggles against the Nyingmapas and Karmapas (Mills 2003). At the direction of the Dalai Lama, Mongol forces came to Monyul, and the Mongolian commander Sokpo Jomkhar (Monpas referred to the Mongols as Sokpo, and Jomkhar was the commander of the Mongol forces) destroyed the Urgyeling, Sangyeling, and Tsorgyeling monasteries (Sarkar 1980 11).

From 1680 onwards, after Mera Lama started work on the Tawang monastery, Buddhism became aligned with state-building, and all areas of Monyul came under the systematic control of the Tibetan state through the Tawang monastery. According to Lama Thupten Phuntsok, the erudite and soft-spoken founder of Manjushree School and Orphanage in Tawang, when Mera Lama founded Tawang monastery some villagers requested that *gonpas* ('monasteries') be constructed in villages for the purposes of spreading religion and for their general welfare, and asked Tawang monastery to send a lama to each of these villages. Some other villages had *gonpas* that had been built to consecrate a spot where a great lama sat in meditation, but had no caretaker; the villagers therefore decided to entrust them to Tawang monastery for better administration. In this way, several *gonpas* became the charge of Tawang monastery (Personal communication, 20 April 2010).[22]

The common peasants of Monyul were highly integrated into the Tibetan temporal-spiritual system through a monastic custom stipulating that every Buddhist household with three or more sons should send their second/middle son *Bu Sum Barma* (Wylie: *Bugsum barpa*) to become a monk, either to the Tawang monastery or the Tsona Gontse monastery in Tsona, Tibet, locally called Gonpa Tse. The breach of this custom resulted in community fines.

22 According to Sarkar (1996), Tawang monastery has twelve subsidiary monasteries and two nunneries. Nehru Gonpa, constructed in 1964, was added later as the thirteenth monastery under the charge of Tawang Monastery.

People in Tawang and lower regions, such as Dirang, sent their middle sons to Tawang monastery, while in Zemithang and the nearby areas of Hro and Jangda, if there were four sons, the second son was sent to Gonpa Tse and the third to Tawang. Many monks in Monyul eventually travelled to Lhasa and central Tibet for higher studies. Although this old custom has lost much of its compulsory character today, many rural families continue to send their middle son to either Tawang monastery or Bomdila's Gaden Rabgye Ling monastery (GRL), built as a replica of the Tsona Gontse monastery by the twelfth reincarnate of Tsona Gontse Rinpoche in 1965-1966, after the monk escaped from Tibet. Quite a few poor households in Monyul now send their sons to the Gelug monasteries in Mysore, Karnataka in southern India, since these monasteries have more economic resources.

Apart from monastic studies, pilgrimage constituted another important motive for the movement and circulation of people. Buddhist Monpas annually visited sacred sites in Bhutan and Tibet, such as the Tsona Gontse monastery during the monastic festival Drubchod Chenmo and the famous Chorten Kora in Trashiyangtse district of eastern Bhutan. For people from Bhutan and Tibet, popular pilgrimage spots included Tawang monastery during the Torgya monastic festival and the Gorsam Chorten in Zemithang.

Nawang, the headman of Lumpo village, Zemithang narrated to me the folk story of an *ani* ('nun') from Tawang who had gone to Bhutan for *kora* ('pilgrimage') and then dreamt that she would have to sit in meditation in the *chorten* for enlightenment. So she sat down in meditation inside the *chorten* until death befell her. This story also forms the plot of a popular film produced in Bhutan called *Chorten Kora*, although the headman of Lumpo alleges that the film is a more romanticized (i.e., commercialized) version of the story than what exists in oral lore. In the film, a Bhutanese merchant falls in love with a princess from La'og yul sum (Wylie: *lha'og yul gsum*) – the old name for Tawang. But the Nyingma master of Lho Mon (the old name for areas now in Bhutan) had already identified the same princess as the maiden of royal blood mentioned in his prophesies, who would have to be walled inside a *chorten* that would be constructed in a land under the pall of evil forces. Only by this supreme act of self-sacrifice could the evil forces be subjugated, and the spirit of dharma/Buddhism made to prevail in that land. The young princess agrees to give up her love and travels to the dark land in Bhutan and meditates inside the *chorten* as the last brick is laid, enclosing her within. She loses her life, but religious enlightenment comes to the land and the people of that land and all Bhutan deify her. The link between Bhutan and Monyul is thus sealed forever in the anthromorphised figure of the *chorten*, which preserves the spirit of the young Monpa princess.

Although India accepted important adjustments in the alignment of the Kameng (India)-Trashigang (Bhutan) sector of the Indo-Bhutanese boundary in 1974-1975 (Ram 1978: 99), many parts of the Indo-Bhutan border remain porous, with people crossing over to meet family or for trade. Movement between Bhutan and Tawang especially increases during religious festivals. People from Bhutan come to the Tawang monastery during Torgya and to Zemithang for the Gorsam Chorten festival held in mid-March. Many Monpas also visit Bhutan for festivals. I was told during fieldwork that every year, around late March, locals make their way to Nam Tsering, a hamlet near the Indo-Bhutan border that is the last motorable point, and then trek for three hours on foot to a fair in Bleteng, on the border between Tawang and Bhutan.

Another popular pilgrimage circuit, *rongkor* (Wylie: *rong-skor*) for people of Tibet, Bhutan, and Monyul was *Dag-pa Shel-ri* or 'pure crystal mountain', located in the south-eastern Tibetan borderland region of Tsari (Huber 1999). Pilgrims would come to this spot once every twelve months to circumambulate the difficult circuit of the mountain *rong* ('ravines'), for this pilgrimage was supposed to be particularly efficacious in cleansing one's negative *karma*. However, the last such pilgrimage procession to take place was in 1956, after which it stopped in the face of the continuing India-China border dispute (Huber 1997: 224).

Apart from these regular pilgrimage spots where Buddhists from Bhutan, Tibet, and Monyul used to congregate, there were other holy places that provided incentive for movement. The prophesy of Pemako (Wylie: *padma-bkor*), meaning 'the array of the lotus' (Bodt 2012), the Tibetan promised land or mythical sanctuary for persecuted Buddhists, encouraged movement across Buddhist areas. According to some sources, Pemako covers a large area on the frontiers of south-eastern Tibet and Upper Siang district of central Arunachal Pradesh, and includes the holy mountain Kundu Phodrang (Wylie: *kun-dus-pho-brang*) (Sardar-Afkhami 1996). Many people migrated at different points of time from Tibet, Bhutan, and Tawang in search of Pemako after fleeing taxes from the state (Bailey 1957: 35-36). Similarly, on the Tibetan side Monpas and Bhutanese settled in the Tsangpo valley after migrating in search of Pemako (Bailey 1957: 73).

From the 1970s onwards, the large-scale settlement of military forces, prominently of other faiths, as well as Indians from other parts of the country migrating into the region for jobs or trade resulted in non-Buddhist religious identities becoming increasingly visible. Hindu temples and festivals grew in number, as did Christian missions, which were already active among some of the other communities of Arunachal Pradesh. The American Baptist

Mission, for example, had started evangelical work among the Nishi, Adi, Miri, and Mishmi communities in the Sadiya border between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in the early years of the twentieth century (Sangma 1997). While foreign missionaries were restricted by the provincial government from proselytizing beyond the inner line, the work of Indian missionaries, Garo tribal preachers from Meghalaya in particular, led to a marked increase in conversions in Arunachal Pradesh since 1950 (Chaudhuri 2013: 260; Sangma 1997: 465-5). The missionaries learned the local languages and started medical work and schools for the communities in the central and western parts of this state well before the government of independent India began building roads and providing medical, educational, and other infrastructural services in these frontier areas.

Although Christianity could not gain much hold among the Buddhist Monpa communities due to the strong influence of the monastic system, a few churches such as the Christian Baptist Church, the Christian Revival Church, and the Tawang Assembly of God Church came up to cater to the mostly non-Monpa Christian population as well some new converts. A young Monpa man that I met in Bomdila, who had a Nepali father, told me that he had converted to Christianity around seven years back after he experienced a 'miracle'. He had been working as a taxi driver when he met with a terrible accident that left him with fractured ribs and several injuries, and he had little hope of surviving. He credits his eventual recovery to being introduced to and developing faith in Christianity through a friend. He met his wife, an Assamese Christian, in church, and is now engaged in full-time mission work, operating from his base in Guwahati in Assam.

However, a general attitude of avoidance prevails among Monpas with respect to Christian missionaries. Given the visibility of other Christianised groups in the power circuits of the state, some voiced the fear to me that these groups would try and convert their political and economic power into religious dominance. A few expressed reservations about the methods used to convert people, namely giving financial aid and services in exchange for their faith. In fact, one person told me that he had once stumbled across a loose sheet in a telephone booth that contained data regarding the target population, number of converts, future targets, and other objectives of a Christian mission in Tawang. In the last couple of decades, there have been a couple of stray incidents of aggression against the churches. For instance, I was told that during the tenure of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kapa Kholie (2002-2007) some unknown persons damaged and broke into the Christian Revival Church building at night and, under public pressure, the DC had to lock up the church for some time.

Security, connectivity, and selective development

Monyul remains largely cut off from the rest of the country during both the winter and the summer monsoon because of roadblocks created by heavy rains, snowfall, or landslides. I once experienced first-hand the repercussions of poor connectivity in this border region, when a power transformer in Tawang exploded during the monsoon and plunged the whole town into darkness. It took the local electricity board more than one week to repair the transformer because roadblocks apparently prevented both the expert technicians from Kolkata and the replacement transformer from reaching Tawang. During this week, the electricity board doled out power in measly portions of two to three intermittent hours per day. While the towns and most of the villages are electrified, the dearth of power supply in a cold region such as Monyul makes firewood a daily necessity, especially in the bitter winter months, which in turn has created massive deforestation in the region.

Food items are not locally produced and have to be brought from the nearest plains markets in Tezpur, and the prohibitive transportation costs make commodities either overpriced or simply unavailable. For example, poultry meat in Tawang is an item of luxury that even the rich can ill-afford, making do with beef or preserved yak meat mostly brought in from Bhutan.[23] The limited local produce from agriculture (paddy, maize, millet, wheat, apple, and potato) and livestock (goat, cattle, sheep, and yak) cannot be exported as long as transportation expenses far outweigh the profit earned from sales.

In educational terms, Monpas have been outpaced by tribes such as the Adis, Nishis, and Apatanis who benefited from missionary and government-funded schools and colleges. The first school and college in Arunachal Pradesh were established in Adi territory at Pasighat in central Arunachal

23 In July 2017, the district administration in Tawang and West Kameng issued an official order banning the slaughter of cows and prohibiting beef trade in the region, citing the religious sentiments of the majority Monpas. This coincides with the beef ban imposed in many parts of the country by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party government, which is also in power in the Arunachal Pradesh state government. The fact that the current Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh is a Monpa helped in getting such an official order approved. https://thewire.in/135646/arunachal-pradesh-tawang-buddhism-meat-ban/ (accessed 7 July 2017).
In 2017 and 2018, when I visited Monyul, the owners of the homestay where my husband and I stayed were reluctant to serve us yak meat and even fried fowl, until we expressed interest. I do not discuss the politics of food here, but I must note that while the stated reason for the yak/beef ban is conservation and environmentalism, the ban clearly is in line with the cow politics, or 'bovine nationalism' (Suresh 2018) of the present Indian government.

Pradesh, in 1920 and 1964 respectively (Blackburn 2004: 22). Even today, schools and colleges are more numerous in these areas compared to the two undergraduate colleges in all of Monyul – one of which opened in Tawang only in 2017 – resulting in the near absence of Monpas in top bureaucratic posts, and consequently their lack of voice in the state's decision-making process.

Dorjee Khandu, a Monpa from Tawang, was chief minister from 2007 to 2011, during which time he financially supported several proposals for promoting Buddhist culture in the region. His sudden death in a helicopter crash in April 2011 led to a series of different political regimes in the state over an extremely brief period of time. No less than four individuals held office as chief minister before Dorjee Khandu's son Pema Khandu was elected to the post in July 2016 after he joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which also controlled the centre. He was re-elected as chief minister in May 2019. However, most people would agree that the Khandu family's rise in politics does not represent a general pattern. Very few Monpas make it to higher administrative and political slots compared to members of the more dominant Arunachali groups, which adds to their feelings of marginalisation.

Connectivity also affects access to proper healthcare. Out of the 23 government healthcare facilities in Tawang, only one is a district hospital, rest being treatment clinics; the district hospital does not have amenities for surgeries or complicated medical procedures that require superior technology (*District Report, Tawang* 2009: 14). Due to the lack of medical infrastructure, patients have to be transported either to cities in neighbouring Assam or to the state capital Itanagar for both diagnosis and treatment. In several cases, patients traveling to a distant hospital, especially those with heart conditions, have died either on the long ride to Itanagar or while waiting for a roadblock to be cleared.

Bad roads further mean that every small bureaucratic procedure presents the people of this region with a disproportionate amount of physical exertion. Residents of Monyul are required to travel to Itanagar, the capital in the eastern part of the state, for minor official work such as getting an official signature on a document. Common people, who do not have the luxury of owning private vehicles, travel on chartered Tata Sumo cars that can carry a maximum of nine passengers, but usually squeeze in a load of eleven. A bus service operates between Tawang and Bomdila, but fatal road accidents of bus and Tata Sumo passengers are common on the road to Tawang, made doubly dangerous by the high prevalence of fog at higher altitudes. Usually, such accidents take place at blind-curve points where the road swerves sharply. Such sharp curves could easily be avoided if roads were built in a

planned fashion, or if the roads were made wider and flatter at turnings. A helicopter service by the privately owned Pawan Hans Helicopter Ltd. Company operates on a sporadic basis on the Guwahati-Tawang-Itanagar circuit; hardly a trusted means of transport, it is suspended during strong winds and heavy rains. I remember being half-amused, half-aghast when the lone flight attendant of the dingy fourteen-seater helicopter in which I was once traveling, unable to establish communication with the helipad in Tawang, desperately dialled relatives in Tawang on his cell phone for the latest weather updates. The helicopter service remained completely suspended for several years after the Monpa Chief Minister Dorjee Khandu was killed in a crash in 2011.

I argue that Monyul presents a case of selective development, which I describe as arising from a hypothesis of 'neither more nor less'. The Indian state sees to it that there is a balance of centripetal (oriented toward the state-centre) and centrifugal energies to keep a disputed border within the nation's gravity levels, and is motivated by security rather than welfare interests of the people. It allows the poor transportation conditions of Monyul to continue without completely cutting it off from the centre. Development in Monyul is focused on the military. Schools, shops, and hospitals are built keeping in mind the needs of the army. In the absence of public services, people are dependent on the military for basic infrastructural facilities, and often even for food supplies in cases of inclement weather. In 2017, when construction work began on an army hospital in Tawang, it raised the hopes of local residents, who knew that civilians would also have a chance to be treated there – even though only the salaried and privileged sections of the community with connections with the military would have access to it.

The selective development in Monyul can be traced back to colonial practices, when the British consciously excluded Monyul from regular administration after delineating the Indo-Tibetan boundary (Gohain 2019). Both the colonial and postcolonial government of India had the dual objective of, first, expanding its tenuous administration to hitherto un-administered territory; and second, through certain beneficial activities, signalling to the subject population who the legitimate authority in these areas was. The colonial state built schools and clinics while avoiding investing heavily in a region whose boundaries were still insecure. In the newly postcolonial Indian state, the policy of non-interference and gradual assimilation advocated by Verrier Elwin, missionary-turned-anthropologist and national advisor on tribal affairs, meant that tribal rights over land and forest and their indigenous customs and traditions were respected, and tribal groups were mostly allowed to develop on their own (Elwin 1959b).

Figure 3 Road at Thonglen, on the Tawang-Zemithang road

The government prioritised education and healthcare, and tried to boost agricultural self-sufficiency among the local communities primarily to reduce their dependence on Tibet (Guyot-Rechard 2017: 133). In this regard, the communities in Arunachal Pradesh with a history of prior access to the administration in the plains of Assam had a greater bargaining power when lobbying for development benefits, while the Monpa communities fell behind.

In the years leading to the 1962 war and in its aftermath, military activities were appended to development to establish a stronger state presence in the Northeastern frontier, with road construction the main focus.[24] The planning of roads was clearly selective, and mainly intended for state penetration into the border areas. The General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) and Border Roads Organization (BRO), which are the engineering and public works wings of the military, were formed in 1960 mainly to increase communication in border areas such as Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh as a defensive strategy, in light of impending Chinese aggression (*The Times of India*, 10 October 1985). The unit of the BRO in Arunachal Pradesh was known as Tusker, later renamed Vartak. The first motorable road from Tezpur in Assam to Bomdila, later extended to Tawang and up to the Chinese border, was inaugurated in 1959 (Guyot-Rechard 2017:108).

The government allocates a good amount of funds to Arunachal for road-building, and the GREF continues to build roads. But as recurring

24 'External Affairs, North East Frontier, 1946', Appendix I to Corollary, pp. 22.

landslides wash away or dig holes in previously constructed roads, this leads to an endless process of road-cutting and construction that compounds the worries of commuters but also, ironically, provides a never-ending source of income for private contractors working in collusion with army officers from Tusker (Rose and Fisher 1967). Then, as now, contract work in road construction constituted a prime source of informal income for many in this border region. In fact, people in this region realized the money-minting possibilities of development work quite quickly: the earliest job opportunities in the developing urban spaces of Tawang were grabbed by those associated with development works, such as employees of Central Public Works Department, border roads labour, and the *ghorawallahs* ('horse owners') who dominated the supply routes (Nanda 1982: 35). This trend continues even today, as road construction still enables a minority to siphon public money meant for welfare programs to their personal funds.

The security perspective continues to direct state development goals in Tawang. In 2016, a committee headed by retired army general DB Shekhatkar provided a report to the Defence Minister that advocated the further development of roads, railway lines, air fields, and helipads in the border areas of Northeast India for the easy movement of troops in case of war with China (The *Assam Tribune*, 12 April 2010). In February 2017, a minister in the Indian Ministry of Railways announced that the government was considering a rail network to connect Tawang with Bhalukpong, the last station on the Assam-Arunachal border (*Huffington Post*, 5 February 2017). It is not difficult to see the strategic and security concerns motivating proposals such as these, which try to rival Chinese progress on the other side. In the last decade, in keeping with the Indian government's Look East policy (later renamed Act East policy), a couple of international trade markets on the India (Sikkim)-China and India (Manipur)-Myanmar border were opened, and the blueprints for opening a number of others were sketched out. The trade routes of Arunachal Pradesh that lead to Tibet did not come into consideration because of the border controversy.[25] A scheme to build a road connecting Monyul to the valley towns in neighbouring Assam through Bhutan also lies buried underneath bureaucratic roadblocks.[26] Finally, the

25 In 2005, my survey in Monyul (Gohain 2006) on popular opinion regarding the opening of trade routes revealed almost unanimous support for reopening the ancient trade routes between Arunachal Pradesh and China. However, the sociological and human interests in reopening these trade routes were surmounted by the security perspective in policy decisions concerning this border trade.

26 The government of India has attempted to surmount climatic hazards through engineering innovations in other border areas. For example, a project to build a tunnel in the 13,044 feet

ambitious trans-Arunachal road project, begun in 2017 and estimated to be completed in 2021, plans to link Tawang through Dirang and Bomdila to other major towns of Arunachal Pradesh, but its initial phases of construction have already drawn criticism (Rahman 2019).[27]

Reorientation and local politics

Like the Monpas, other Tibetan Buddhist communities in India have similar perceptions of being marginalized in relation to the regional circuits in which they find themselves in the postcolonial context (Arora 2010; McHugh 2006; Middleton 2015; Shneiderman 2015; Van Beek 2000). Although they were always peripheral communities even with respect to the Tibetan centre, these populations became doubly peripheral as they were juxtaposed against largely non-Buddhist Indian milieus and incorporated as minorities into diverse state and regional networks in post-Independence India. For cross-border yak-herders, traders, and pilgrims, their familiar, well-traversed routes constituted roots; barred from previous trade or pilgrimage routes into Tibet, these once mobile populations were grounded, and hence paradoxically uprooted from their old routes. Geographical distance from Indian administrative centres, slow development gains, and perceptions of cultural distance from their Hindu, Muslim, or Christian neighbours have created a sense of dislocation for these minorities.

For most of the Tibetan Buddhist communities in the Indo-Tibetan borderlands living an enclave existence amidst non-Tibetan Buddhist populations, cultural belonging and citizenship are not givens but contested issues. Their cultural, and very often physiognomic, similarities with Tibetans frequently result in other communities mistaking them for, or sometimes unjustly labelling them as, Tibetan refugees, who are thereby situated outside the national order. In Arunachal Pradesh, Monpas are often clubbed together

high Rohtang Pass to facilitate all-weather connectivity to Leh, Ladakh, and Lahaul-Spiti in Himachal Pradesh has been in the pipeline since 1983, and in June 2010, drilling on the Rohtang Pass officially began. In Monyul, while people may wistfully talk of a similar tunneling project for the nearly 14,000-feet Sela Pass between Dirang and Tawang, the size and cost of such a project means that state agents will not be in a hurry to initiate such a plan any time soon.

27 The Dhola-Sadiya bridge, inaugurated on 26 May 2016, is expected to reduce travel time between the eastern parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, but does not benefit the western parts, which is unconnected with the rest. http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/dhola-sadiya-seven-things-you-need-to-know-about-indias-longest-bridge/articleshow/58852554.cms (accessed 5 June 2017).

with Tibetans by the other Arunachali groups. A comparable scenario was given to me by Drolma (name changed), a young co-worker in the Institute of Chinese Studies in New Delhi, where I was working in 2005. Drolma, who belonged to a minority Tibetan Buddhist community in Uttarakhand, a state in north India, complained to me about her marginality in Delhi where people often took her to be Tibetan, and hence, by implication, not Indian. She had added defensively that her community did not take part in the demonstrations by Tibetans for a Free Tibet, although in many other respects they followed Tibetan Buddhist customs and rituals. These border subjects often seek to deflect further marginalization by striking a position of disassociation from Tibet and Tibetans, who are marked as refugees in India. A similar ambiguity characterizes the Monpas's present interactions with Tibetans, and with their fellow Arunachalis and Indians.

Many among the older generation of Monpas, when comparing past and present times, are quick to praise the benefits of modern education, healthcare, roads, and other public works that have accompanied the transition from Tibetan rule to the Indian state. But they also reminisce about the old times when they had direct access to Tibet through trade, a past in which they might have been subordinate to the Tibetans, but their traditions did not cast them as different from the ruling group. The more recent generations, those in their 20s to 50s, have indirect memories filtered through the eyes and perceptions of the older people, but they are the ones who are frequently forced to negotiate regional structures of inequality in the context of studies and work, and are consequently more vocal in resisting their marginality within regional and national circuits. These historical and sociological factors provide context to the wider trends seen in the culture and politics of Monyul, to which I turn in the following chapters.

2 Locality

In imperfect but confident English, T.G. Rinpoche explained to me how the Monpas were being side-lined as a 'tribal community'. He claimed the Monpa are a very ancient community, originally spread across Nepal, Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Mechuka in Arunachal Pradesh, but now confined only to those groups in Tawang and West Kameng. '*Religion se hi civilization hoti hain*' [civilization begins from religion], he stated, concluding that if autonomy were granted the Monpas would be better able to maintain their identity and Tibetan Buddhist culture. This conversation took place during our first meeting on 19 June 2008. What intrigued me then was the use of the term 'Mon' instead of 'Monpa' as the label for the Mon autonomy movement. When asked, Rinpoche was quick to respond, in English, '"Mon" means area… "Monpa" becomes too narrow. Once you are inside Mon, you become part of it. It is territory that gives the people an identity.'

Like Rinpoche, in discussions of the demand for autonomy the office-bearers of the movement tended to suppress reference to 'Monpa' in favour of 'Mon' – the latter term supposedly more inclusive since it indicates a physical territory, Monyul, rather than a particular ethnic group or culture. Official documents and statements by leaders of the Mon Autonomous Region Demand Committee (MARDC) also refrain from using the idiom of ethnicity in describing the boundaries of the autonomous region, instead making appeals to a territorial area in which all ethnic groups of the region are equal stakeholders (*Constitution of Mon Autonomous Council* 2005).

This territorial ('Mon') rather than ethnic ('Monpa') nomenclature promises equal participation in the autonomy scheme to the non-Monpa ethnic groups residing in Monyul. The territorial categorization can unite people around issues of a political and economic nature such as uneven power structures, livelihood and employment opportunities, and the allocation of resources and infrastructure, while using the ethnic term may create exclusivist identities. Yet, 'Mon' does not consistently refer to current West Kameng and Tawang: its older connotation, to which Rinpoche and other supporters alluded, refers to an extensive geographical area spanning several regions on the Indo-Tibetan borderland. In this instance, the territorial boundaries of the local unravel as sub-texts of translocal geography unfold within the discourse of the demand for autonomy. Even the meaning of locality is never stable, for different individuals and groups define it in different ways.

The Mon autonomy movement rests on two main demands: development, and the preservation of Tibetan Buddhist culture in Monyul. While the

development narrative constructs a locally bounded collectivity of Monpas and non-Monpas through a common imagination of Monyul as a zone needing special development measures, the parallel narrative of preserving Tibetan Buddhist culture presents a different imagination of place, spatially mapping a Tibetan Buddhist geography where Tibetan Buddhists outside Monyul are included but the non-Buddhists of Monyul are not. The balance between these two narratives therefore becomes hard to maintain; as each narrative takes precedence, the boundaries between self and Other also shift. The local community projected by the development narrative is internally fractured by horizontal extensions that, on the one hand, cleave apart Monpa and non-Monpa identities, and on the other, draw connections between the Monpas and other Tibetan Buddhists of the Indian Himalayas. In this chapter, I pay attention to such incongruous strands and incompatible narratives to show the compromised realities and contested imaginations of the autonomy discourse.

The most vocal proponents of Mon autonomy are the traditionally powerful Buddhist clergy and returnee monks, who retain networks with their monastic institutes in South India, Dharamsala, and other Himalayan regions. They are supported by the political elite and the new 'petite bourgeoisie' (Michaud 1991), which is composed of intellectuals and young people educated in the Indian education system who have faced discrimination within the regional administrative circuits of Arunachal Pradesh and find the idea of local autonomy appealing.

The movement was at its peak between 2006 and 2008 – coinciding with the preliminary phases of my fieldwork – with the Rinpoche leading *Dilli Chalo* ('March to Delhi') campaigns and public rallies in Monyul. The autonomy demand rests on the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.[28] After India's independence, the tribal areas in the hills of Northeast India were initially placed in the Sixth Schedule, while the tribal areas in other parts of India were placed in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution (Baruah 2003b). While both the Fifth and Sixth Schedules provide for the protection of minority cultures and special development schemes in the areas they cover, only the Sixth Schedule has a provision for autonomy (Sonntag 1999: 422). The original Sixth Schedule areas were later revised and extended to cover Ladakh in Kashmir through the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Act 1995, as well as non-frontier, 'heartland' tribal areas such as

28 The Monpas are not the only ones in Arunachal Pradesh to demand autonomous councils. Three other groups in the state are demanding the same provision, but while the bill has passed in the state assembly, it is pending in the national assembly.

Jharkhand (formerly part of Bihar).[29] When it was still part of Assam as the North East Frontier Agency, Arunachal Pradesh was kept out of the Sixth Schedule at the discretion of the governor of Assam; and after that it became a full state (Mibang and Behera 2007: 210). T.G. Rinpoche's objective was to obtain Sixth Schedule status for Monyul.

The *Constitution of Mon Autonomous Council,* which was formally approved at an MARDC meeting held in Dirang, West Kameng on 30 October 2005, proposes the creation of a Mon Autonomous Council comprised of 33 seats, of which 30 would be filled by members elected from within Tawang and West Kameng districts and the remaining three nominated by the Arunachal Pradesh state government (*Constitution of Mon Autonomous Council* 2005: 6). The council would have administrative power over 50 subjects, such as land revenue, cultural affairs, rural and urban development, customary laws, forest, tourism, and education, as well as decision-making power over job appointments and trade permits (Ibid: 11, 12). (*Constitution of Mon Autonomous Council* 2005: 55). Norbu Lama of Gongkhar village, Tawang – the chairperson of the Panchayat *gram samiti* in 2008[30] – described to me how the Panchayat leaders of each constituency in Tawang were mobilized for the first public rally on 9th October 2006 in Tawang, at which Lama Lobsang from Ladakh, then a member of the National Commission on Scheduled Tribes, was present as advisor.

By 2009, when I began my extended fieldwork, the movement had lost its momentum somewhat, although people continued to avow their support for it. Some said that the movement's decline was the result of objections raised by

29 The original Sixth Schedule was revised when some of the areas falling within its purview were reorganized into separate states – Nagaland was formed in 1962, Meghalaya in 1969, and the Union Territories of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, which later became states, in 1971. The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in West Bengal was the first autonomous council outside Northeast India. On 22 August 1988, the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) led by Subhash Ghisingh signed the Darjeeling Hill Accord, which created the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). Although it was technically set up by a West Bengal state legislative act after a tripartite accord between the centre, the West Bengal government, and the GNLF, it is modelled on the Sixth Schedule (Sonntag 1999: 426). The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council was replaced by the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration in 2012. There was talk of changing its name to the Gorkha and Adivasi Territorial Administration (GATA) in an attempt to make the statehood demand more inclusive of the considerable tribal *Adivasi* ('aboriginal') population in the region (Pradhan 2011). Since June 2017, the demand for a separate Gorkha state, long dormant, was reignited after the West Bengal government announced that Bengali would be a compulsory subject in all schools of the state (Gupta 2017).

30 The Panchayat Raj Regulation was introduced in Arunachal Pradesh in 1967. It comprised of a three-tier local governance structure, with *gram samitis* ('village committee') at the village level, *anchal samitis* ('regional committee') at the regional level and *zilla parishads* ('district council') at the district level (Mathew 1995).

Figure 4 Map of the proposed Mon Autonomous Region on the front door of a Monpa house

Figure 5 Tsona Gontse Rinpoche in his chamber at GRL monastery, Bomdila

other groups within Arunachal Pradesh, who feared that providing autonomy to Monyul would open a Pandora's Box of similar demands throughout the state. Others hazarded that it was suspended temporarily because of the state elections in October 2009. A few hinted that there had been a political trade-off between local actors and national leaders to maintain the status quo in a disputed border area. The Rinpoche himself maintained that it was only a momentary lull because the elections had diverted people's energies. He often appeared frustrated at the government's apathy, arguing that only bloodshed would spur the national government into action. 'If we come with weapons then they [Government of India] will come with red carpet', he once burst out, giving the example of the violent politics of the Gorkhaland movement, 'But our Buddhist people are too peaceful'. In December 2012, he and some Monpa representatives from the Arunachal Pradesh legislative assembly flew to New Delhi to discuss the demand with political leaders. Then, in 2013, he assembled a team of politicians and youth leaders to visit the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Territorial Council in Assam to gauge the achievements of the autonomy model there. By 2014, national leaders from Delhi had arrived in Monyul to dialogue with leaders about the possibility of autonomy.

On 16 May 2014, however, the Rinpoche was found dead in his New Delhi apartment with a suicide note beside him. According to some media reports, he had been suffering from long-term depression and insomnia. The Rinpoche's followers and people close to him refused this diagnosis and alleged that it was a political conspiracy. After his sudden, controversial death, the fate of the autonomy movement temporarily hung in balance. Now that he was no more, how will it be different, I wondered. In August 2015, Pema Khandu, the then-Minister of Tourism and Urban Development, and now, the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh led a delegation to meet Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh to continue the demand (*Business Standard*, 26 August 2015). However, the character and internal dynamics of the movement have shifted irreversibly with the loss of the Rinpoche. Today, the youth of Monyul speak longingly of finding another leader like the Rinpoche, who could make the demand for autonomy vibrant again. The Mon autonomy movement has refused to die[31] – its embers stoked by the yearnings of the people as expressed in conversations, gatherings, and in social media, as well as sporadic meetings in Monyul and Delhi.

31 There is an active Facebook page with the name Mon-Autonomous Region Demand Movement (last accessed 25 November 2019) that has Tsona Gontse Rinpoche in its cover picture. The posts and comments on the page show that people are still persisting in the demand and the hope of getting autonomy. Other Facebook pages on and from Tawang similarly post about Mon autonomy from time to time.

Indigenous returns and the politics of place

Since India's independence, many groups in different parts of the country have waged movements for autonomy. Ranging from outright secessionism to demands for separate statehood or autonomous administration within an existing state, most of these struggles have been motivated by a sense of discrimination by or difference from the majority communities in the area, and their arguments have drawn on discourses of cultural dissociation, ethnic homelands, and transnational connections. A few of these movements have also taken on the global idiom of indigeneity, with their leaders participating in international conventions on indigenous peoples (Karlsson 2003; Shah 2010).

While it is possible to view these movements as different aspects of a general phenomenon – that is, the disjunction between political and cultural belonging manifested through cultural politics and territorial claims – such a conclusion resists interrogating the particular subjectivities that are at work in each case. To the uninitiated, Northeast India appears to be a homogenous mass of non-Aryan people, living in a rural hinterland characterized by underdevelopment, militancy, ethnic violence, and state failure. The geographical separation of the Northeast from the rest of India (indeed, the scrawny strip of land connecting this region to the rest of India is aptly titled the 'chicken's neck corridor') has made it easier to view the identity of the entire region as uniform and undifferentiated. Such assumptions of regional homogeneity also lead to essentialist categorizations of the various political movements of the Northeast as all stemming from the same vicious cycle of underdevelopment and cultural alienation, and the structural conditions of 'internal colonialism'.

These factors do not provide the whole explanation, however: much remains unstated, and much awaits articulation. Seeing all movements of Northeast India as stemming from common causes not only does injustice to the particular problems voiced by the people involved, but also denies them their particular histories. In its generality, such an observation stands the risk of blinding the observer to the hidden trajectories, latent histories, and shades of grey that lie submerged within the manifest discourses.

When I told a college professor in Itanagar that I was studying the revival of Buddhist traditions among the Monpas, he appeared puzzled and suggested that I should study their continuity instead, since the traditions had never really died out in the region. I had used the word revival in an offhand manner, while he was probably comparing it to revivalist politics among some groups in Arunachal Pradesh such as Donyi-Poloism, meaning worship of the sun and moon. Since 1968, the Adis have been leading a movement to restore

Donyi-Polo rituals, prayers, hymns, and material constructions among the Tani group of tribes – so called because they believe in a common ancestor named Abotani – which had fallen into decay due to the expansion of Christianity (Chaudhuri 2013: 264). Since the Monpas never lost their customs in this sense, it appeared to this professor that I was looking for a topic where it did not exist.

In hindsight, I should have explained that the forms of cultural politics current in Monyul are not 'old identities' (Hall 1997) that can be studied as a continuity of tradition. These identities are new or renewed, in the sense that they were not visible in public spaces some years back and are now being articulated in novel ways in collaboration with international actors and in concert with global processes. James Clifford uses the term 'returns' to encapsulate the indigenous struggles for survival and renewal that continue to shake up a linear vision of modernity in different parts of the world (2013: 7). Such struggles signal a return of the native (Kuper 2003) and advance a vision of indigenitude (Clifford 2013) through politics and performances that selectively showcase traditions.

However, the Mon autonomy movement cannot be strictly understood as a struggle for indigenous rights. Rather than being about an indigenous Monpa identity per se, the cultural agenda of the autonomy movement is more about preserving the Tibetan Buddhist traditions with which T.G. Rinpoche chose to define a singular Monpa identity. While identity is the banner under which people articulate their politics, taking the representations or projections used by the leaders of the movement – who may wish to layer over the real ambiguities of social life – as the reality, is to fall into the objectivist trap (Hall 1996). I adopt a stance that is analogous to the concept of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1988), which recognises that a transitional solidarity based on group interests can form, while keeping the critique of essentialism alive. In discussions of indigeneity, terms such as 'strategic essentialism' (Lee 2006) and 'indigenous slot' (Karlsson 2003) have been used to describe the provisional consolidation of indigenous identity. Thus, instead of taking representations at face value, we have to see how the projected identity of Monpas is a provisional one, constantly 'destabilized by what it leaves out' (Hall 1996).

'Monpa' has never been a homogenous identity, and Tibetan Buddhism has never been the faith of all who call themselves Monpa. Unitary representations of Monyul as exclusively Tibetan Buddhist are further ruptured by the double consciousness (Gilroy 1992)[32] of Monpas who remember their cross-border past

32 Paul Gilroy (1992) uses W.E.B. Du Bois's theory of 'double consciousness' to speak of the trans-Atlantic hybrid culture among black diaspora populations, which is neither African nor

but have now participated for nearly five decades in the regional networks of Arunachal Pradesh. While many among the urban petite bourgeoisie as well as some in rural areas profess sympathy for the idea of autonomy built on Buddhist cultural traditions, there are also many who either refuse or are apathetic to this aim. Within the monastic community there are also differences and voices of dissent. These competing perspectives make it difficult to take any form of cultural identity in Monyul as wholly representative.

Histories of conflict

Viewed historically, definitions of 'us' and 'them' in Monyul have never been constant. Previously, 'Monpa' was a generic term referring to the mostly, but not exclusively, Tibetan Buddhist communities inhabiting the low-lying areas on the fringes of Tibet. The category 'Monpa' itself encompassed several territorial communities divided in terms of dress, custom, and speech, as I have described in Chapter One.

To Tibet, Mon connoted 'barbarian' spaces, where initiation into the Buddhist faith was the yardstick for measuring the civilized against the barbarian (Aris 2009; Shneiderman 2006: 10). In its ancient and original form, Mon – possibly derived from the Chinese 'man', which referred to 'barbarians' of the south – has a derogatory implication (Aris 2009; Pommaret 1994). In Tibetan texts of the eighth and ninth century, the term Mon/Mong is found to refer to all groups in the Himalayas with whom the Tibetans came in contact. This was in accordance with the Tibetan civilizational scheme in which Tibet was surrounded by various degrees of barbarism (Aris 2009: 18). Francoise Pommaret writes, 'here one encounters an aspect of the culture of central Tibet which has not been addressed much so far: a certain condescending and despising attitude towards the surrounding regions which did not in the eyes of central Tibet reach what they considered the epitome of culture' (1994: 47)

Lama Thupten Phunsok, founder of Manjushree School in Tawang, admitted to me that in the Tibetan spatial hierarchy, Mon was considered 'dark' or 'jungle' (i.e., wild/untamed) territory.[33] Although the dichotomy

American or European. I use this term mainly to refer to the competing allegiances of region, nation, and transnational identities that create conflicting subjectivities in the Monpa mindset.

33 Bhutanese historian Lopon Nado traces the etymology of the word Mon to mean people who were in darkness (*mun*) and considers being non-Buddhist to be the main criteria for being a Monpa (cited in Pommaret 1999: 64). Gyalsey Tulku's book ([1999] 2009), published in Tawang, contains a similar etymological explanation. But people I spoke to during my field research

between civilized and barbarian could have meaningfully lasted only up until the conversion of the latter to Buddhism, it still meant that there was a distinction between Tibet and its peripheries. There was a further division between Monpa and Lopa [Wylie: *Klopa*]:[34] the Lopas could mean any non-Buddhist tribe, from the Adis (formerly, Abors) in Subansiri to the Nishis (Daphlas) in Kameng of Arunachal Pradesh, who lived in the vicinity of Buddhist settlements. F.M. Bailey, the British officer sent to map the Indo-Tibetan frontier areas in 1913, writes that the term 'meant to the Tibetans what barbarian meant to the Greeks, pagan to the Christians and to Kipling "lesser breeds without the law"' (Bailey 1957: 74). British naturalist Frank Kingdon-Ward, who travelled extensively in the Tibetan and Indian Himalayan region, similarly notes, 'These Lopas dwell in the jungle, far down the valley, south of the Great Himalayan range. They are the people whom on the Assam side we call Daphlas or Akas, or possibly Abors – imprecise labels. But to the Tibetans, they are all alike, Lopas or Chachu, that is to say, savages' (1941: 69).[35] Monyul and Loyul ('the land of the Lopas') were not simply geographical borderlands of Tibet, but also marked cultural boundaries between Buddhist and non-Buddhist areas.

Despite the fact that both Lopas and Monpas were outside the civilizational order, from the perspective of the Monpas who had embraced the faith, they were higher in the scheme than the 'Lopa barbarians'. The difference between Monpa and Lopa was therefore a question of being 'more or less civilized compared to mainstream Tibetans' (Pommaret 1999: 64). Monpas inducted into the Buddhist fold, even if only nominally Buddhist, consciously made a distinction between themselves and those they call 'Gidu'. 'Gidu/Gido' and 'Lopa' were interchangeable terms, with the latter favoured by Tibetans and the former, locally, by Monpas. That is, 'Gidu' was the indigenous Monpa classification for the more generic term 'Lopa', both of which distinguished Buddhists from non-Buddhists.

The term 'Gidu' was recorded in the 1789 Tibetan text *Jig-med-gling-pa* or *Discourse on India* thus: 'In rocky mountains where the eastern borders of

were reluctant to accept this as the only explanation. Geshe Nawang Tashi Bapu, Principal of the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies, Dahung suggested that this etymological explanation is only one among a number of possible interpretations.

34 The 'Klopa' who remain in Chinese territories today are labelled 'Lhopa' by the Chinese government, meaning 'southerners', to avoid the pejorative meaning of 'barbarian' associated with the traditional spelling. Like the Monpa on the Chinese side, these Lhopas are accorded the status of a minority nationality equal to that of the Tibetans (Aris 1979b: 9).

35 Note that Assam at this period included the North East Frontier Tracts, which only later became a separate state called Arunachal Pradesh.

Assam come to an end [there live] the [tribes] of the Klo-pa called khaptra (khap khra) and Gidu (Ghri-dho)' (Pommaret 1999: 61). Monpas applied this term to all the non-Monpa tribes such as the Akas, Mijis, and Bangnis (from East Kameng district), and these cultural distinctions were heightened by their relations of hostility. F.M. Bailey notes the use of the word 'Gido' to refer to the non-Buddhist groups: 'there were two more Monba villages down stream, first But, about six miles down, and after that Konia. Below Konia was the country of the Lopas, who were called Torku by the people of Mago and Gido by the Monbas' (1957: 233). In the context of Monyul, use of the term 'Gidu'/'Lopa' separated Monpas from non-Buddhist tribes while uniting Monpas with other Tibetan Buddhist communities on the borders of Tibet (Bailey 1957).

Bailey brings out the relationality of these terms through his observation that in the Tsangpo valley in Tibet, inhabited by Monpas, Bodhpas (Tibetans), and Drukpas (Bhutanese) who had all migrated there in search of the promised land of Pemako, the distinctions that existed between these different groups were overcome by their common concern with being different from the non-Buddhist Lopas:

> The Bhutanese, called Drukpas by the Tibetans still considered themselves the subjects of the Trongsa Penlo (who in the time since their ancestors emigrated had become the Maharaja of Bhutan). Similarly, the people from Monyul, called Monbas by the Tibetans, called themselves by the name of the country from which their ancestors had come rather than by the place in which they are. They appeared however to be in the process of destroying the thin barrier which divided Drukpas from Monbas [...] *Their racial origins were becoming obliterated by their need to distinguish themselves from the Lopas, who lived in isolated villages throughout the same country* (Bailey 1957: 74, emphasis added).

During my fieldwork, Monpa people defined the term 'Gidu' to me as meaning '*jiska koi dharam nahi hain*' [one who has no religion]. During everyday conversations, Monpas refer to non-Monpa Arunachali groups somewhat condescendingly as barbarians (often using the English word) and give historical as well as contemporary anecdotes of harassment by the various Gidu groups who live in closest proximity with Monpas. One person recounted to me an interesting perspective on the *dao*, a large, sharp knife used for many everyday purposes. He said that while the Monpas might carry the *dao* around, they would only use it to clear their way forward in dense jungle, and never to inflict injury on any living creature. The Monpas

eat fish, yak, and other meat obtained from traders, but claim that their religion prohibits them from killing, hunting, or fishing for food – although scholars (Huber 1997, 2001) hold contrary views on this subject.[36] The Gidus, on the other hand, do use the *dao* as a weapon to inflict violence on men and animals, this person said. A common perception among many Monpas is that despite – or possibly because of – the influence of Tibetan Buddhism, which taught them to be peace-loving, they have been dominated by their more aggressive neighbours.

Thus, despite the internal differences among the different Monpa communities, they collectively share a history of opposition to neighbouring Gidu communities, especially the Hrusso (Aka) and Sajalong (Miji) living in West Kameng. Colonial records also recall traditions of opposition and antagonism between Monpas and Gidus (Pommaret 1999: 62). British colonial administrators visiting the region between 1914 and 1941 noted how the mild-mannered Monpas were frequently subject to raids and taxation by the more martial Aka and Miji. Captain Nevill of the British government, during his survey of Monpa areas in 1914, reports how Loba (here, referring to the Mijis of West Kameng) used to conduct blackmailing raids on the Monpas, whom they looked upon as their 'lawful prey' (Nevill 1914, cited in Reid [1942]1983: 286). He further describes the Monbas of But and Konia villages, who were considered lowly even by other Monpa groups since they practiced animist rituals, as being a 'miserable lot [...] entirely under the thumb of the Mijis who make them cultivate for them' (Ibid: 283).

While colonial documents cannot be an authentic record of empirical realities, popular oral lore provides support for this history of conflict. Territorial contiguity did not make for a greater sense of neighbourliness, largely because of the frequent raids that Monpa communities had been subjected to in the past by non-Monpas in adjacent settlements. Monpa communities regarded these groups, especially the Aka and Miji, with fear, having been victims of their raiding and plundering. The fortified defensive structures against past Miji raids can still be seen in Thembang, a Monpa village in West Kameng.

36 Huber (1997, 2001) has a different perspective on this, arguing that the representation of Tibetan Buddhism as a non-violent religion that prohibits the killing of animals is one largely disseminated by the Tibetan community-in-exile; historically, Tibetan societies practiced hunting for subsistence as well as commerce. In July 2017, after the district administration in Tawang and West Kameng banned the slaughter of cows and prohibited beef trade in the region, including the sale of yak meat, the consumption of these meats have dwindled considerably in the region. The beef ban caters to the same concept of the Tibetan Buddhist Monpas being against the killing of animals.

In the contemporary context the Monpas share a common political identity as residents of Monyul with the Akas and Mijis: to demand a separate regional unit be carved out of the present territory of Arunachal Pradesh, they seek new alliances with groups with whom they traditionally shared little sympathy or connection. Quite a few ministers and influential leaders belonging to these non-Monpa groups are members of the MARDC core committee, for example (*Development and Progress* 2008: 53).

MARDC leaders rationalize this compromise on the grounds that Monpas and their neighbouring Gidu groups are collectively marginalized in relation to the Adis, Nishis, or Apatanis, who have superior educational qualifications and constitute the 'creamy layer' of Arunachal's tribal populations. During pre-colonial times and much of the colonial period, the inhabitants of West Kameng and Tawang had only minimal connections with their Adi neighbours to their east (Mitchell 1883: 27). After independence, and especially through contact with Christian missionaries, many of the Adi groups moved up in material and educational terms, occupying important administrative positions within the state. The Monpas' loyalty to the state is severely tested during their visits to Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh, where they have to deal with a bureaucratic set-up dominated by the Adis and Nishis, and are repeatedly made aware of their marginality during such dealings. They argue that once autonomy is granted, they would not have to visit Itanagar for every little thing since all official processes would be routed through the local administrative offices.

This regional imbalance of power also applies to the non-Monpa groups living in Monyul, who are similarly marginalized. The official MARDC discourse highlights this regional disparity by splitting the category of Gidu into those who live within the Mon region and those who live outside it and drawing the former into the territorial identity of Mon. Tsering (name changed), a member of the MARDC, argues that non-Monpa tribal inhabitants of Tawang and West Kameng 'are more supportive [of the demand] than Monpas'. In this way, MARDC leaders attempt to overcome the paradox between a local territorial identity and an exclusive cultural identity by identifying an Other by which non-Monpa Arunachalis are also selectively excluded.

Selective development and autonomy

Zemithang, located 90 km from the district headquarters, is the last administrative division in Tawang before one reaches the India-Tibet border. Zemithang, also known as Pangchen, is a scenic valley along the

Nyamjangchu river overlooked by steep, lush-green hills. Once a conduit in the triangular trade between Bhutan, Tawang, and Tibet, Zemithang is now considered the rural backwater of the district, faring poorly in all development indices. Stories about the inhospitable nature of the inhabitants of Zemithang abound among the town-dwellers of Tawang, and many tried to dissuade me when I expressed a wish to make a field visit. 'What will you do there? It is so remote', I was told by my hosts in Tawang. When they realized that I was determined to go, they advised me not to touch any food offered to me in there. Pangchenpas ('people of Pangchen/Zemithang'), it seems, are considered to be compulsory poisoners, who habitually mix poison in the food of their unwary guests. In fact, almost everybody who learned that I was planning a visit to Zemithang cautioned me against eating in anyone's house there. Such associations with black magic add to the backwater image of this sleepy settlement. The bazaar line on the main road of New Zemithang, the sub-district headquarters, has a small number of shops and canteens serving limited fare, its daily torpor disturbed only when huge green-brown army trucks carrying supplies to the border posts rumble heavily past. Only a few of the villages outlying Zemithang can be reached by motorable roads – only the ones leading to the border, guarded by army camps. Few know that the Dalai Lama entered India through this route by crossing the Kenzemani pass in 1959. I visited a few households in Zemithang, including that of the headman of Lumpo village, Nawang Chotta. While briefing me about the past and present conditions of Zemithang, Chotta commented ruefully, 'Pahle zamane mein Zemithang center ho jata tha … business ka center ho jata tha […] 1959 se jab se yeh bandh ho gaya, border ban gaya, tab se kona kona ho gaya. Pahle main jaga tha' [Earlier Zemithang used to be a central point for business. After 1959 when the border was closed, this became a remote area. Earlier it used to be a central place].

Urgyen Drema, a woman in her early twenties who accompanied me in my travels around Zemithang, was the only girl in her roadside village of Khobleiteng to have completed middle school in 2010. She studied until the eighth standard and then left school because, as an only child, she could not leave her parents to go study in the secondary school at Lumla, 93 km away. She tends to her livestock and works part-time as an Anganwadi health care worker where her duties include escorting little children to schools, cooking mid-day meals for them, and generally taking care of the toddlers.[37] Since her chores leave her with ample time, she supplements her

37 The Anganwadi program, as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program is popularly known, was launched by the Indian state in 1985. Its stated objective was to improve

income with part-time work as a day labourer with GREF, which involves breaking stones and carrying loads. It is a common sight to see women and sometimes children toiling beside heaps of stones by the road. Like Drema, most children discontinue their studies after the eighth standard. There are very few primary schools and fewer middle schools in the area, and little children, as Drema said, could not be coaxed to walk the long distances to school. In the Zemithang area most people know how to sign their name, but that is as far as their literacy levels go. These primary school dropouts frequently resort to working as wage-laborers in road construction projects. Although Drema does not lack basic material necessities – the house in which she lives with her husband, infant child, and elderly parents has all the needed amenities – bright, intelligent minds like hers are denied proper opportunities for education and employment because of the infrastructural deficit. Without good roads connecting the rural areas to urban institutes for higher education, many Monpa children drop out before completing secondary school.

Although not destitute, people in the area are far from well-to-do. In the absence of government offices or industry, the main source of income is labour. Many engage in contractual labour work under NREGA, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (which provides 100 days of guaranteed employment at minimum wages for at least one able-bodied person in every rural household), GREF (mostly in road construction), and more recently the NORTHECH hydroelectric project, a Kolkata-based concern. A few from Pangchen engage in yak and cow husbandry and trade ghee and *churpi* for rice/crops. When I asked why people do not cultivate crops here since the land is a valley and fertile, I was told that that although the fields are good, the crops are destroyed by pests, wild boars, monkeys, and porcupines. These are factors that dissuade people from farming on a large scale. It struck me that the government or local development authorities should provide solutions for these problems, but apparently the absorption of the population into labouring is so widespread that the authorities do not feel the need to take any further steps.

Zemithang is an extreme microcosm of Monyul as a whole. All over Tawang and West Kameng, poor transport and communication create

the health of the national population by targeting the nation's children, especially those living in rural areas, by providing them with adequate government health care services (pre- and post-natal health check-ups, supplementary nutrition, inoculations, and day-care) before and after birth and during childhood. As part of this program, Anganwadi or primary health care centres were set up in rural areas and an Anganwadi workforce recruited primarily from within the rural populace (Gupta 2001: 65-69).

many everyday challenges. Monyul's geographical isolation due to issues of connectivity, lack of access to essential public services such as healthcare, and distance from markets, service industries, and state institutions have contributed to a perception of marginalisation among the local communities. People here, like in some of the other poorly connected border areas of India, regard development as a necessary good to be welcomed, rather than a state imposition that has to be thwarted or strategically resisted (Bhan 2008; Ferguson 1994; Li 1999). Development is a pervasive narrative in Monyul, the discourse through which people define their exclusion from the nation and mainstream modernity. The desire for development, especially for good roads, is a demand not only for better infrastructure but also for greater inclusion into mainstream networks (Finnis 2010). It is a powerful narrative through which popular support for a political demand can be built.

According to supporters of the demand for autonomy, climatic and topographic factors such as snow in the winter and rain and landslides in the monsoon make this mountainous region unfit for any kind of development activity for much of the year (*United News of India* 2008).[38] Hence, development projects in Monyul require special considerations that are not possible under the present administrative set-up; centrally allocated funds are either not adequately utilized for the development of this region or are delayed through red-tapism. Whenever there is delay in apportioning funds – resulting in waiting until after the season changes in Monyul – a non-Monpa bureaucrat or minister would be likely to say, 'Oh, its winter now, snowing, and so funds will be diverted to Itanagar', a supporter of autonomy told me . If Monyul were given autonomy, on the other hand, administrative offices would be relocated to the area and there would no longer be a need to travel to Itanagar for the slightest bureaucratic task. Development funds would therefore flow directly from the central government to the autonomous council instead of being routed through the state government. A local administration in control over development programs would be better able to ensure the proper and timely execution of projects, according to this argument.

However, some other areas of Arunachal Pradesh (with the exception of the capital Itanagar and a few others) are even less developed than Monyul. According to a non-Monpa government officer from the Nishi community posted in Bomdila, the demand for autonomy inflates the development needs of the region. He reasoned, 'If you think of it, people are much better off here. On the other [eastern] side, in Kurungkumey, Subansiri, it is all forest.

38 'Mon Autonomous Region demand gains momentum,' *United News of India* (Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh), 18 June 2008.

Here you don't find any beggars, and everybody gets regular meals. But on the other side, even today people have to forage in the jungles for food.'

As I have already observed in Chapter One, infrastructure and services are not entirely missing in Monyul. The selective nature of the development benefits means that they are visible in places where the military population and political elite reside, while remaining unavailable to the general public. By calling Monyul a case of selective development, I wish to stress the inequitable allocation and uneven access to resources that enable the politics of autonomy to make use of and thrive on a narrative of development – or its lack. Even in the discourse regarding autonomy, this selective access is masked as a complete absence of development.

I submit that it is through the idiom of development that MARDC leaders weld together groups with divergent interests into the autonomy movement: development holds an immediate appeal for lay Monpas and non-Monpas, while monks have greater stakes in the agenda of cultural preservation. When T.G. Rinpoche floated his idea of autonomy, autonomous councils elsewhere in the country had already become questionable as a model for meeting popular aspirations. The euphoria around the Ladakh Autonomous Hill District Council (LAHDC) – which served as a reference for the Mon demand for autonomy – was fading, as people started to express their discontent with development schemes (Van Beek 1998: 43). Another autonomous territory in Assam, the Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council, grabbed the national headlines in 2010 because of a financial fraud of 10 billion Indian rupees in which both Assam state politicians and council members were implicated. In 2013, when the Rinpoche organised a tour of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Territorial Council in Assam, the poor development performance of that district was common knowledge. I was naturally curious to know why he chose to visit Karbi Anglong when it had evidently not lived up to public expectations in development matters. His response to my question was significant: 'At least the autonomous council model had helped to preserve the Karbi cultural identity.' Grassroots supporters of the movement admit 'unka alag vichaar hain' ('they [religious leaders] have different ideas'): they know that the main reason for starting the MARDC movement was cultural (religious) preservation, but still retain the hope that it will also address the development needs for roads, education, healthcare, and so on.

I heard another interesting perspective on development from Dargye, a Monpa veterinary officer stationed in Morshing village in the Kalaktang circle of West Kameng. He stressed that development should be all-rounded, and that only autonomy, which grants the right to make policies to local

communities, can bring about all-rounded development. By 'all-rounded development', he meant cultural preservation. By merging development with cultural preservation, Dargye broadened the concept of development.

While culture and religion are potent weapons of mass mobilization, development acts as both a supplement and – in the absence of common feelings of cultural belonging – a unifier. In a region with multiple ethnic groups, religious and cultural grounds alone cannot justify the need for a separate administration. Highlighting cultural alienation or religious differences is also not viable, given Monyul's sensitive location. Since the leaders of any social movement must take into account the concerns of the common people and utilize popular idioms to gain mass support (Gramsci 2000), development makes the aims of the movement convergent with popular interests. Because the public text of the autonomy demand highlights the development narrative, Monpas in government service are able to defend the autonomy proposal without seeming disloyal to either the state or national government, for they can navigate the bumpy road of sub-nationalism using the argument of the need to provide better connectivity and security for a border region. The development narrative holds together the patchwork identity of the Mon Autonomous Region by muting the cultural and historical differences between Monpas and the non-Monpas living in Mon, and making the rhetoric of a non-Monpa Other subservient to the rhetoric of regional (under)development and backwardness. The cultural narrative makes a different point.

Culture and politics

In 1987, T.G Rinpoche returned to Monyul after finishing his monastic studies, and was dismayed to find what he perceived as a decline of Buddhist customs and traditions in the region. He founded the Buddhist Culture Preservation Society (BCPS) in 1987 with the aim to preserve Buddhist traditions in the region and to work for the economically downtrodden.[39] The BCPS conducts various outreach activities among the local population, such as running the GRL monastery school, a school for poor and orphaned children named the Shanti Deva Vidyalaya, and a Sowa Rigpa ('Tibetan medicine', Wylie: *gso ba rig pa*) health clinic, as well as overseeing other tasks such as the renovation of religious structures. It also helped establish the Central Institute of Himalayan

39 *Buddhist Culture Preservation Society: A Report*, 2008, published from Bomdila. I got a copy of this local publication from the office of the BCPS society on the monastery premises.

Culture Studies (CIHCS) to provide Buddhist studies at Dahung near Bomdila, as well as the Monyul Development Center that provides self-employment for local people through various crafts. In 1994, the BCPS began renovation of the Gorsam Chorten, which used to be an important centre of pilgrimage and ritualistic performances in the past but was completely neglected for about half a century after the India-China border war restricted cross-border movement in the area. Built by a Monpa, Sange Pradhar of Tawang district, in the twelfth century, it is a replica of the famous Boudhanath stupa in Nepal; another replica is the Chorten Kora in Bhutan. The Tara Devi statue at Lumla has also been renovated by a BCPS initiative.[40]

In 2003, when T.G Rinpoche launched the demand for autonomy, he made the issue of Tibetan Buddhist cultural preservation a central agenda. An official report of MARDC makes this clear by stating, 'Tawang is one of the few pockets where Buddhist religion and culture have survived *in its own form*. [...] Therefore, there is an imperative need to preserve Buddhist religion and cultural heritage' (*Development and Progress* 2008: 27, emphasis added).

While the term 'cultural preservation' can cover a huge spectrum, in the course of fieldwork I saw it acquiring concrete expression mainly through two struggles: first, to establish Tibetan or Bhoti as the official language in local schools and offices; and second, to gain government recognition for Sowa Rigpa, the system of Tibetan medicine. Neither of these campaigns independently developed in Monyul; they are part of larger nation-wide movements for protecting Tibetan Buddhist traditions in India. Yet, by symbolically marking Monyul as a legitimate site for the propagation of practices associated with the Tibetan Buddhist cultural repertoire, the Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa campaigns situate themselves as forms of cultural politics in which the Other is negatively marked by the absence of Buddhism.[41] In the following sections, I show how these two campaigns attempt to produce Monyul as a Tibetan Buddhist place.

Bhoti language

One morning, Pema, the niece of T.G. Rinpoche who was in charge of the Doe Gu Khil monastery guesthouse, led me to the Shanti Deva Vidyalaya

40 http://www.bcpsociety.org/gorsam1.php.

41 Apart from the common script and medicine system, Monpas share many cultural traditions with other Tibetan Buddhist areas such as the Tibetan New Year festival of Losar (Wylie*: Lo-gsar*), yak-husbandry, and archery. Some Monpas contend that the Indian government should encourage archery competitions during the Indian Independence Day, just as the Bhutanese government does during its annual festivals.

(SDV), a school located near the GRL monastery which is managed by the Buddhist Culture Preservation Society. The morning assembly began with children saying their prayers in Bhoti, followed by an oath in English which sounded like a pledge to be good citizens of India. After the assembly, Pema showed me around the school premises. The school has living quarters for teachers as well as accommodation for 120 boarders. Students from poor rural families are usually recruited by word of mouth, and the boarders, mostly from low-income Monpa families in interior regions, are given facilities, such as free school uniforms, shoes, socks, *aliphudung* ('woollen coats'), textbooks, notebooks, stationary supplies, and meals, and they also pay less in fees, at an annual amount of 7000 rupees compared to the 35,000 rupees paid by day students.

SDV is one of the few schools in Tawang that explicitly functions as a 'culture-based school for the promotion of culture', in the words of Krishna Chetry, the acting principal in 2010. 'Promoting culture' includes, among other things, the attempt to preserve and popularize Bhoti in the Mon area. Bhoti language is taught in SDV from kindergarten to eighth standard, and students participate in various kinds of activities aimed at promoting awareness of Tibetan language and culture. Until 2008, the school houses in SDV were named after the Tibetan rivers Zha chu, Dhe chu, Ma chu, and Ke chu, but in 2009 they were changed to colours: Nong po ('Blue'), Kar po ('White'), Mar po ('Red') and Sher po ('Yellow'). There is a weekly competitive event where students translate and present articles on current affairs published in Tibetan newspapers into Hindi. Other private schools in Monyul have also incorporated the study of Bhoti into their curricula.

Bhoti (as it is known in India) is the script associated with the literary Tibetan language in which the *Kangyur* or *Tangyur* ('Tibetan Buddhist religious canon') as well as various medical, historical, and grammatical treatises are written. According to Tibetan myth and early Buddhist-era historiography, the Bhoti or Tibetan script was invented by Thonmi Sambhota, a Tibetan scholar who was sent to India in the seventh century by the Tibetan king Srongtsan Gampo to learn the language and translate the Buddhist scriptures.[42] Sambhota invented the Tibetan alphabet by

42 The exact origin of Bhoti is disputed. While some Tibetan scholars use the term Devanagari, others use Brahmi, while yet others simply mention Sanskrit as the origin of the Bhoti script. The place where it originated also has been variously mentioned as Kashmir, Nepal, or Magadha. Since the script in use during the Gupta period was Siddhamatrika, a derivative of Brahmi, it may have been that Brahmi was the source. The translations were carried out from Sanskrit texts, and it is probably for this reason that Sanskrit is often mentioned as the source of the Tibetan script.

Figure 6 Morning assembly at Shanti Deva School, Bomdila

adapting the prevailing script of the Gupta period (Shakabpa 1967 cited in Thakur 2009: 39) to the needs of the Tibetan tongue, and developed four vowels and 30 consonants for Bhoti.[43] Literary Tibetan underwent many reforms and developments since the time of Sambhota, and a modernized Tibetan language corresponding to U-kay (Wylie: *Dbus-skad*) the spoken language of Lhasa and Central Tibet, developed. This is now taught globally to students who wish to learn the Tibetan language and is the standard Tibetan used in international Tibetology conferences as well as by the Tibetan government-in-exile (Tournadre 2003: 26).

Like different Tibetan communities across Tibet, as well as other border communities in the Himalayas, the Monpas speak 'Tibetan-related languages' or oral variants of what is now accepted as modern Tibetan language (Tournadre 2003).[44] Some communities speaking Tibetan-related languages in the Himalayan region have used Bhoti script to develop their oral languages into modern written languages. For example, following the unification of Bhutan in the seventeenth century an official national

43 Literary Tibetan is called *Yig-kay* (Wylie: *Yig-skad*), while vernacular Tibetan is called *Pha-kay* (Wylie: *Phal-skad*) (Tournadre 2003: 26, 27). Another term, *Choe-kay* (Wylie: *Chos-skad*) or 'the language of Dharma', used to refer to the language of religion and philosophy, is pure literary Tibetan. Tournadre (2003) identifies three categories of literary Tibetan: Old Tibetan (seventh to eleventh century), classical literary Tibetan (twelfth to nineteenth century), and modern literary Tibetan (twentieth century).

44 Nicholas Tournadre (2003) uses the term 'Tibetan-related languages' to include the mostly oral languages spoken in the India-Tibet border areas, as well as by groups in Nepal and Bhutan.

language called Dzongkha ('the language of the fortress', Wylie: *rdzong-kha*) was developed as a polished form from the village patois of Ngalong, the dominant language in Western Bhutan. Scholars worked to adapt the literary Tibetan script to the spoken form of Ngalong (Aris 1979a).

However, the linguistic variants spoken in Monyul still exist only in oral form. In the absence of a common Monpa dialect, the Tibetan dialect as spoken in Central Tibet acted as the lingua franca in Mon region while it was under Tibetan administration – effectively until 1950. Religious, administrative, and judicial documents and circulars were therefore written in literary Tibetan, and the latter functioned as a state language to consolidate the bureaucratic networks between Lhasa and Tawang. An elderly villager in Tawang remarked that people living in areas under Tibetan rule knew Tibetan because it was the language of the *raja* ('king'). Monastic recruits from these areas were trained in literary Tibetan, while many among the laity were familiar with spoken Tibetan – allowing people to mutually understand each other, if not communicate freely. Traditional Monpa folksongs contain many Tibetan words, and some are even sung in Tibetan, proving the pervasive influence of the language over Monpa socio-cultural life (Gohain 2012). Nari Rustomji, an Indian administrative officer who visited Monpa areas on official tours before 1950, recalls speaking with the local population in Tibetan (Rustomji 1983: 100).

In Monyul, village lamas taught the Tibetan script to children until the 1962 India-China war, but these were gradually discontinued as the Indian government started schools in the region, and introduced first Assamese, and later English and Hindi, into the schools. Assamese was taught for a period immediately after decolonization, when Arunachal Pradesh was still under Assam's governor as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). Assamese leaders promoted the spread of Assamese language for official and educational purposes all over the NEFA, citing historical ties between Assam and the hill people, and advised the central government to send Assamese officers to increase the speed of the hill peoples' integration into Assam (Rustomji 1983: 100). However, Assamese met with local resentment. While groups in the southern parts of Arunachal Pradesh that were contiguous to the plains had a history of contact with the Assamese people, groups in the northern parts, such as Tawang, were untouched by Assamese cultural influences (Chanda 1969). Convinced that 'no amount of fluency in Assamese would get them very far in the plains, where they felt looked down upon as inferiors because of their tribal origin' (Rose and Fisher 1967: 46), in the 1960s many groups of NEFA protested against the imposition of Assamese as the medium of instruction.

When NEFA was formally separated from Assam in 1972 following the North East Frontier Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971, Assamese was replaced by English and Hindi as the first and second languages of the state, respectively. According to an Indian government directive, education should be provided in three languages in each region: the first language could be the mother tongue or regional language; the second could be Hindi, English, or any other Modern Indian Language (MIL) or regionally recognized language; and the third could again be Hindi, English, or an MIL (Bhatt and Mahboob 2008). Despite English being the first language or the language of education, Hindi has become the *de facto* lingua franca for most Arunachalis, including Monpas, in the absence of a common *lingua franca* in the state.[45] With Hindi dominant in schools, offices, and marketplaces, as well as in domestic spheres, where parents converse amongst themselves or with their children and friends in Hindi, many Monpas, especially from the urban sectors, have become primarily Hindi-speakers in both the public and private domains.

Many people in West Kameng who are now in their late 40s to late 60s learned Assamese and Hindi in school, although their children are now learning Bhoti. I am tempted to call this generation 'the missing generation', although their experiences differ substantially from that of the so-called 'half-caste' children among Australian Aborigines who constitute the 'stolen generation' (Van Krieken 1999). While enculturation was not forced upon the Monpas following the change in government, there was symbolic mediation by the state, including the use of the Hindi language, to mould them towards a national consciousness. Those who were not born until the 1980s acquired modern education and a taste for all things (North) Indian, as popularized by the television or through their interactions with the new migrants from Bihar, Punjab, Bengal, and Assam who came as soldiers, civil servants, teachers, and government employees.

45 With the exclusion of the Khampti-Singphos, who adhere to Theravada Buddhism, and the Monpas – both of whom have their sacred scripts – Arunachali groups do not have a written language. While a few educated persons of the Adi, one of the dominant tribes, took the initiative to make the Adi language the Arunachali lingua franca by writing it in Devanagari script and using it in primers as early as 1958, their attempt did not succeed. In 1982, some Adi intellectuals and students revived efforts to build a modern Adi language based on the dialects of East Siang and Dibang Valley region of Arunachal Pradesh using the Roman script (Mibang 1998: 429-431), but were opposed by other groups of Arunachal Pradesh who feared an Adi linguistic hegemony. A similar hybrid language called Nagamese exists as the de facto lingua franca for the tribes of Nagaland, which are again similarly divided by mutually unintelligible dialects. However, a lack of consensus about Adi led to Hindi remaining the lingua franca in Arunachal Pradesh.

In schools, teachers often resort to teaching in Hindi, both because of their own inadequate grasp of English and to communicate with students coming from different linguistic communities. Since the children of non-Monpa professionals and soldiers form a large percentage of the student population, particularly in the towns of Monyul, teachers prefer to instruct in Hindi at the primary levels of schooling despite English being the official medium. 'Nowadays, people speak Hindi', older people in Monyul remark, implying that with the change of government Hindi has replaced Tibetan as the language of government and medium of communication.

T.G. Rinpoche was highly critical of the dominance of Hindi and began the demand to introduce Bhoti in schools right after his return to Tawang in 1987. The *Constitution of the Mon Autonomous Council* contains a proposal to make Bhoti the third language in all schools in Monyul. It further calls for Bhoti's inclusion in the list of 22 languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. If Bhoti were to become a scheduled language, it would attain the status of a Modern Indian Language (MIL) and the government of India would become responsible for its protection and development. It could then be offered from the primary levels onward in schools and as a course in higher educational institutions, and would therefore generate jobs for Bhoti graduates at both the school and university levels.

With the Rinpoche's efforts, Bhoti initially began to be taught in the middle levels (Class VI-Class VII) in 1996, and later expanded to the primary levels in schools in the Mon region. In 2010, Bhoti became a part of school syllabi from the primary level onwards in most of the schools of Monyul. I visited at least five private schools in West Kameng and Tawang – SDV, Tawang Public School, Guru Padmasambhava School, Dirang Valley School, and St. Lopon School – where Bhoti was taught in 2010. Dorjee Tsering, the founder and principal of Guru Padmasambhava school, Bomdila, claims to be the first graduate from West Kameng district. He named his school after Guru Padmasambhava, the Buddhist master, and also formed a Guru Padmasambhava educational trust. His main objective was to ensure that 'Monpa traditional culture' does not disappear, and hence, his school follows a 'culture-based' curriculum. I attended the morning assembly and saw the children singing in Bhoti.

After the Rinpoche's death, the state's Department of Karmic and Adhyatmik Affairs or DoKAA (Tibetan: *Chos-rig*), which he used to head, continued to promote Bhoti, and by October 2014, with the support of the Arunachal Pradesh state government, it had succeeded in introducing

Bhoti as the third language of instruction in the schools of Tawang and West Kameng districts and Mechuka, as well as in Itanagar, the state capital. (http://www.arunachalpradesh.gov.in/csp_ap_portal/bhoti-to-understand-budhhism.html; accessed 21 June 2017). Tsering Tashi, the Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Tawang, who had earlier started free Bhoti classes in various parts of the district that were attended by more than 200 people between the ages of 20 to 40, formally launched Bhoti language training for teachers in Tawang in 2014. (http://karmikadhyatmik.in/2014/10/09/bhoti-language-gets-the-much-needed-attention/; accessed 21 June 2017). In 2016, the current DoKAA chairman Jambey Wangdi led a delegation to meet the Union Minister for Home, Rajnath Singh, to renew the demand to list Bhoti in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The delegation included Lama Chospel Zotpa, president of the all-India Himalayan Buddhist Cultural Association and chairman of the Committee for development of Bhoti language and Ladakh Buddhist Association. (http://karmikadhyatmik.in/2016/11/24/inclusion-of-bhoti-language-in-the-8th-schedule-of-constitution-demanded/; accessed 21 June 2017).

It is important to note that the proposal to make Bhoti the official language of instruction in schools and offices did not begin in and is not limited to Monyul. Rather, it is a joint initiative between individuals and groups from different Himalayan regions such as Zanskar and Ladakh in the state of Jammu & Kashmir, Spiti and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Kashi in Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Kalimpong and Darjeeling in West Bengal. The Himalayan Buddhist Cultural Association (HBCA), a non-governmental organization based on Buddhist philosophy and working in the Buddhist areas of India with a headquarters in New Delhi, was officially registered in 1991. Lama Chospel Zotpa of Ladakh is the president and T.G. Rinpoche was also closely associated with its activities during his lifetime. The stated mission of the organization is to help the people of the Himalayan region 'from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh' to understand the teachings of the Buddha and to revive an interest in Buddhist culture and traditions (http://himalayanbca.blogspot.com, accessed December 2011).

On 6-7 August 2009, the Himalayan Buddhist Cultural Association took the initiative to organize a national seminar on education policy and the Bhoti language in Tawang. Lay and monk Bhoti teachers as well as political leaders attended the seminar, and a paper published as part of the proceedings uses the framework of minority rights and the rhetoric of mother tongue to argue the case for Bhoti, quoting Article 29(1) and 350(A) of the

Indian Constitution (Sridhar 1996).[46] While Bhoti has been acknowledged as a minority language in the Indian context, it is particularly applicable for Tibetan refugees in India. Article 30(1) of the Indian Constitution proclaims that 'all minorities whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer institutions of their choice' (Maslak 2008: 85). It is on the basis of this provision that the Central Tibetan Schools (CST), run by the Central Tibetan Schools Administration, an autonomous body regulated by the Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development, officially provides education for Tibetan refugee students in India in the Tibetan medium (Ibid.: 85).

However, what is at issue here is not the rights of Tibetan children to be taught in Tibetan but the claim of speakers of various Tibetan-related oral languages to have the same right. In 2008, before I understood the complexities of the matter, I asked T.G. Rinpoche why the Monpas wished to learn Tibetan in schools. The Rinpoche replied with some force that 'Bhoti is not Tibetan', and said that one should not link language with nation, for Bhoti is the classical script and does not belong to the Tibetans. Similarly, Monpa monks and Bhoti teachers avoid directly referring to Bhoti as Tibetan language. And yet, in Mon, as well as in other Tibetan-related areas of India, what is taught in schools as Bhoti is not the classical Tibetan script alone but also the modern Tibetan language (Gohain 2012).[47] Textbooks of Modern Tibetan language are published by Sherig Parkhang, the publication division of the department of education of the Central Tibetan Administration based in Dharamsala. The syllabus used in Mon is same as that followed by the Central Tibetan Schools (CST), except that the CST syllabus is downgraded by one class so that textbooks used in the first standard in CST are prescribed for second standard in schools in Mon. A handwritten copy of the syllabus that I acquired from SDV included alphabet for beginners (standard I),

46 'Article 29: Protection of interests of minorities. (1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. 350-A: It should be the endeavor of every State and of every local authority within the state to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the president may issue directions to any state as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision for such facilities' (Sridhar 1996: 333).

47 A comment in the online newsletter *Ladakh Reach* is intriguing: 'Moreover, the school texts in Lahaul-Spiti and Tawang are entitled as "Bhoti reader" and if you see inside the textbooks, colloquial Tibetan language is used, instead of *chos-kad* [the scriptural language], [...] it is just like 'promoting colloquial Tibetan language in the name of Bhoti.' http://news.reachladakh.com/news-details.php?&90371086891018325914115894 17&page=&pID=352&rID=0&cPath=5 (accessed 11 September 2009).

Figure 7 Children learning Bhoti in Lama Don's verandah

handwriting or *u-me* (Wylie: *dbu-med*) for standard II, moral lessons for standard III and IV, and grammar and literature for the higher classes.

Gelong Nyima Don or Lama Don, a popular figure in the streets of Tawang and an ex-monk who graduated from Drepung monastery at Karnataka, told me, '*u-kay* [Central Tibetan] has become the *yig-kay* [Literary Tibetan] today'. Inspired by the Dalai Lama's call to promote Bhoti, Lama Don began teaching Bhoti to both adults and schoolchildren, and my first memory of him is giving Bhoti lessons to children on the veranda of his small house in Lebrang village in Tawang.

There is also a pragmatic side to the revival of modern Tibetan. Monks have traditionally acted as Bhoti teachers, although the number of lay individuals acquiring formal degrees in the Tibetan language has increased. If monks have to be integrated into modern educational institutions, then the fields of their expertise should have income-generating values in a broad milieu. Until Bhoti is recognized in the Eighth Schedule, government institutions cannot hire Bhoti teachers for regular university positions and can only employ them through temporary government schemes that usually come with low salaries. As monks earn more by officiating in household or monastery ceremonies than by teaching Bhoti in schools, they prefer the former option.

However, there is more to the Bhoti campaign than the material factor of generating livelihoods for monks. In March 2010, when I visited the Deputy Directorate of School Education in Tawang, three Bhoti teachers were sitting in one of the office's rooms, designing Bhoti syllabi and illustrating textbooks for school primers. Yeshi Khawa, one of the monks entrusted with the task, said to me, 'All the knowledge of tradition that we possess are encoded here [in the Tibetan scriptures]'. He explained that it is the *lipi* ('script') that is paramount. It is significant that he stressed the importance of the script, for despite the variations between the Tibetan-related languages spoken in different regions of Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and India, literary Tibetan is common to all of them. Linguistic identification with Bhoti rather than the oral Monpa dialects unites the Monpas with the other Tibetan Buddhist peoples of the Indian Himalayas. Bhoti, here, is not simply a language, but is also tied up with the politics of Tibetan Buddhist culture (Chamberlain 2008: 120-121).

The success of the Bhoti campaign lies in representing an adequately large community of Bhoti speakers. That is, Bhoti can be constitutionally recognized only if it can be proven that it is spoken by a significant number of speakers. Lama Don from Tawang reflected that in the years after India's independence, the government failed to register Bhoti as an important (vernacular) language because during the initial census surveys, many people gave Hindi as their native language, while some gave Monpa; in Ladakh, people gave Ladakhi, and in Sikkim, Denzong – and in this manner, Bhoti got left out in the Himalayan region. He added that in the 2011 census Monpas as well as other speakers of Tibetan-related languages would be asked to list Bhoti as their mother tongue so that it would be included as a major language in the constitution. His statement – which I was unable to confirm – highlights how the politics of Bhoti is about mobilizing and representing community, in which self-enumeration becomes a 'weapon of the weak' (Appadurai 2012: 640). Such tactics of self-enumeration take the power away from state agencies and put it back with the communities, who desire to create knowledge about themselves as a means of self-empowerment. Bhoti speakers may use a state resource, the census, to make that kind of evaluation or enumeration, but it is a tactical manoeuvre to assert their linguistic presence in the national scene.

Sowa Rigpa

In 2003, T.G. Rinpoche set up the Mon Sowa Rigpa Centre, a clinic in Dirang that sought to both provide healthcare at affordable rates and promote the

Tibetan medicine system in the region. This centre was later moved to the campus of the GRL Monastery in Bomdila. Dr Ngawang Thupten Shakya, an articulate, well-informed monk who is fluent in both English and Hindi, currently heads the Sowa Rigpa clinic. He was a close aide of the Rinpoche and now looks after the research and development activities of the centre, as well as supervising the medical treatment of the patients, who are mostly drawn from the ranks of monks, students, and the economically needy. Once when attacked by a stomach flu, I sought his medical advice and was successfully treated in the traditional way. When he learned about my interest in Sowa Rigpa, he shared his personal copy of the proceedings of the national conference on Sowa Rigpa organised by the Himalayan Buddhist Cultural Association in Delhi in February 2004. It was mainly through him that I came to understand how the promotion of Sowa Rigpa was linked to the Tibetan Buddhist cultural politics in the region.

An outspoken advocate of Sowa Rigpa, Dr Shakya told me that when he received his medical degree from the Central University of Tibetan Studies (CUTS) at Varanasi, it was not called a degree in the Tibetan medicine system but *Ayurved Acharya* or 'Master in Ayurveda'. Later, the *Ayurved Acharya* degree was discontinued and degrees of *Kachupa,* or Bachelor in Tibetan Medical System (BTMS), and *Menrampa*, equivalent to MD or Doctor of Medicine, began to be offered. When the Himalayan Buddhist Cultural Association organized the first national conference on Sowa Rigpa in Delhi on 6-8 February 2004, it was attended by scholars, Ayurveda practitioners, and Sowa Rigpa practitioners from the entire Himalayan belt. It was here that the Sowa Rigpa Medicine Preservation Development Society, formed by supporters of this system, took the formal resolution to adopt the name 'Sowa Rigpa' or 'the science of healing' (*Sowa* means 'healing', *Rigpa* means 'science' or 'knowledge'), and recommended that the BTMS degree be termed BSMS (Bachelor in Sowa Rigpa Medical Science) (Gombu, Singh, Goyal, and Jampa 2005).

'Sowa Rigpa' basically refers to what is commonly known in the Western world as Tibetan medicine (Clifford 1990), but is known by different local names in the different Himalayan areas where it is traditionally practiced. It is known as *Bödmen* in China, *amchi* medicine in Ladakh and Nepal, *abba* in Kargil and Skardu, Mongolian medicine in Mongolia, and simply as *bhot chikitsa*, which is Sanskrit for 'Tibetan medicine', in some institutes for Tibetan studies for Tibetan exile communities in India (Craig 2012; Gombu, Singh, Goyal, and Jampa 2005). The theory of Sowa Rigpa relies on a twelfth century text known as the *Gyüshi* (Wylie: *rGyud bzhi*), translated as 'Four Tantras' (Craig 2012: 12), and is based on the principle of five fundamental

elements – earth, water, fire, air, and space – and their relationship with the three humours of bile, phlegm, and wind; good health is when the three humours exist in a state of equilibrium, and loss of equilibrium results in health disorders.

Sowa Rigpa has a declining clientele today, with Western medicine fast making inroads in rural areas of the Himalayas through improved connectivity. Florian Besch documents how the breakdown of village social structure through increased communication with distant urban centres, integration into a monetary economy, and introduction and state sponsorship of Western medicine clinics in these areas has resulted in the dissolution of traditional reciprocal ties between *amchi* practitioners and their patients as well as shrinking the power and authority of the former in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh. Contrary to the past, when learning medicine ensured economic and social standing, the *amchi* of today can no longer make a living solely through their medical practice (Besch 2006).

In India, apart from the *amchis* traditionally trained through the lineage system, there are also Sowa Rigpa practitioners who have undergone formal training through the six-year Bachelor in Tibetan Medical System (BTMS) course. The first institute in India to confer Sowa Rigpa degrees was the Men-Tsee Khang or Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute in Dharamsala, the seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile, established under the patronage of the Dalai Lama on 23 March 1961. Later, other institutes followed. Until 2010, only four institutes in India were providing the six-year BTMS degrees – the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies in Leh; the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh (both under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India); Men-Tsee Khang; and the Chogpori Medical Institute in Darjeeling, West Bengal – all of them regulated by the Central Council of Tibetan Medicine under the Tibetan government-in-exile (T.G. Rinpoche, Government Correspondence, 29 July 2010).[48]

Following several years of lobbying by Sowa Rigpa campaigners, in 2009 the Indian parliament approved a bill amending the Indian Medicine Central Council Act, 1970, to confer a legal status on Sowa Rigpa and lead to a government mechanism for regulating its teaching, research, and pharmaceutical development ('Recognition of Sowa Rigpa', 2009).[49] In 2010, the government of India formally approved the term 'Sowa Rigpa' (T.G.

48 I was given a copy of the government correspondence between T.G. Rinpoche and the Rajya Sabha Secretariat in Delhi.

49 'Recognition of Sowa-Rigpa Amendment of the Indian Medicine Central Council Act, 1970'. 10 September 2009. Press Information Bureau, Government of India (accessed 20 June 2012).

Rinpoche, Government Correspondence, 29 July 2010). By 2016, Sowa Rigpa had gained recognition as one of the Indian medicine systems, along with Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha, in the Central Council of Indian Medicine under the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India (http://ayush.gov.in/about-the-systems/sowa-rigpa).[50]

Like the Bhoti movement, the Sowa Rigpa campaign seeks to secure government recognition for the medicine system, without which practitioners do not have official license to practice medicine or legally market their medicine in pharmacies. Recognition would allow government institutions to set up education and research on Sowa Rigpa. Like the Bhoti campaign, the fight to gain recognition for Sowa Rigpa has been a collaborative venture by groups across the Himalayan region, with the Himalayan Buddhist Cultural Association playing a leading role. The advisory council of the Sowa Rigpa Medicine Preservation Development Society includes one member each from Spiti (Himachal Pradesh), Arunachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Leh (Ladakh), Gangtok (Sikkim), and Dharamsala (Gombu, Singh, Goyal, and Jampa 2005). Both campaigns mobilize Tibetan Buddhist groups across the Indian Himalayas.

In both campaigns, the leaders frequently gloss over the movement's Tibetan connections by stressing the Indian origins or contributions of Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa, even though both have considerably developed within Tibet through royal patronage and the infusion of indigenous knowledge and effort. Monks temper the direct Tibetan link in Bhoti by highlighting the contribution of the classical Indian script, Sanskrit, to the development of this language. Although the Tibetan script has undergone many adaptations, evolutions, and reforms in Tibet since it was invented by Sambhota, in conversations with me Bhoti teachers were at pains to prove that Tibetan was an Indian export. The impression they seek to give is that 'it all started in India'.

Supporters of Sowa Rigpa also stress the Indian origins of this medicine system, arguing that it was developed from Indian Buddhist medical texts and then taken to Tibet, and emphasizing the continuities with and possible scope for collaboration with the traditional Indian system of Ayurveda (Gombu, Singh, Goyal, and Jampa 2005). The inclusion of Sowa Rigpa as an Indian medicine in the Ministry of AYUSH supports this hypothesis.

50 The Ministry of AYUSH was created on 9 November 2014 for the development and propagation of Indian medicine systems. It was previously known as the Department of Indian System of Medicine and Homeopathy, formed in 1995, and was renamed the Department of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) in November 2003. *Ayush* is a Sanskrit term meaning 'life'. http://ayush.gov.in/about-the-systems/sowa-rigpa (accessed 2 June 2016).

However, like Bhoti, Sowa Rigpa has followed its own trajectory of development, not always deriving from its Indian corollary. While parts of the main text *Four Tantras* are derived from an ancient Indian medical text, *Astāngahrdaya Samhitā* written by the seventh-century physician Vāgbhatta, it is also interwoven with concepts of Tibetan Buddhism, without knowledge of which the understanding of Tibetan medicine remains incomplete (Besch 2006: 47; Finckh 1980; Janes 1995). The strongest correspondence between Tibetan and Indian medicine is seen in the humoral theory, but the doctrine of diagnosis in Tibetan medicine diverges from that of Ayurveda (Finckh 1980: 105; Craig 2012).[51]

Culturally, Sowa Rigpa draws on several different knowledge systems. Although, the Medicine Buddha Sange Myenla is viewed as the inspiration for the ethical conduct of Tibetan medical practice, the actual practice of Sowa Rigpa across different contexts is influenced by multiple sources, including Indian and Chinese ideas as well as pre-Buddhist shamanic rituals and healing rites of the Bon religion. The practice of Tibetan medicine in its institutionalized form among the Tibetan exile community in India, i.e., the Men-Tsee Khang at Dharamsala, is itself a modern form that evolved in the middle of the twentieth century through exposure to concepts of Western biomedicine, particularly after the 1980s. It does not sum up the heterogeneity of either the *practice* of traditional Tibetan medicine, in which pre-Buddhist religious elements (deities, demons, and spirits) underscored the social basis of illness, rather than the mind-body holism that institutionalized Tibetan medicine emphasizes, or its *practitioners*, which ranged from part-time village practitioners to lineage physicians, monk physicians, and private, secular physicians (Janes 1995: 11). Scholars have also written about the nineteenth-century interface between Tibetan medicine and modernity, when Western notions of science became attributed to Sowa Rigpa while the Sowa Rigpa was sanitised of its mystical, Buddhist elements – especially during the translation of its main text *Four Tantras* – to give it more legitimacy in front of a Western public (Saxer 2011).

A common element of the campaigns for Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa in Monyul and India in general is how they maintain ambiguity in articulating their relation to Tibet or a Tibetan identity. This is particularly evident in the

51 The system of Tibetan medicine can be compared to a tree with three roots, nine trunks, 47 branches, and 224 leaves; the three roots relate to (i) the arrangement of the body parts (healthy organism, diseased organism), (ii) the system of diagnosis (observation, palpitation, questioning), and (iii) the system of therapy (nutrition, behavior, medicines, external methods of treatment), respectively (Finckh 1980: 105).

selection of the nomenclature of the two – that is, in the designation of Tibetan language as Bhoti and Tibetan medicine as Sowa Rigpa. Similar cultural politics are also present in Nepal (Craig 2012: 11). These terms should not be taken for granted, for they are contested terms. It is useful to note an observation about Bhoti by Nicolas Tournadre: '*chőkā* [the language of the scriptures] is sometimes used for political reasons in order to avoid mentioning the word 'Tibetan", which refers to a nation and may therefore be less ideal in a religious context' (2003: 28).

The designation of the system of Tibetan medicine as 'Sowa Rigpa' became officially used only in 2010, and even then, gaining unanimous acceptance for the term in India was not easy as it faced opposition from several quarters. For a time, the government of India even proposed that it be called the 'Traditional system of Himalayan medicine'. The widely used term Tibetan medicine, as it is popularly known in the West, was partly responsible for stalling the official recognition of this system of medicine in India. While a section of government representatives had objections to the word 'Tibetan' and wanted a substitute, a section of representatives from the Tibetan government-in-exile objected to substitutes that they thought would dilute the Tibetan contribution to what is now a globally recognized healing system. The negotiated outcome was the term 'Sowa Rigpa', which translates simply as 'science of healing'.

It is noteworthy that the transition from Tibetan to Sowa Rigpa or Tibetan to Bhoti effectively deterritorializes the terms. From being medicinal or language systems which contain the name of a particular country, they are converted by a sleight of nomenclature into terms that are spatially appropriable by all practitioners, irrespective of national or cultural membership in Tibet. That the language movement operates under the banner of Bhoti and not Tibetan and that the Tibetan medicine practitioners regroup under the title of Sowa Rigpa suggests the negotiations made by India's Tibetan Buddhist minorities.

To secure the recognition of the Indian state, advocates of Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa have to blunt their transnational tendencies and focus on the community of Tibetan Buddhists living within the boundaries of the Indian nation. At the same time, the term Sowa Rigpa successfully gives the scattered healing practices a systematic character, and unifies its different, dispersed practitioners into a 'single' tradition from where further programmatic action is possible. Similarly, Bhoti brings together speakers of different Tibetan-related languages into one language community. The negotiated outcome of these manoeuvres is to offer a perspective of community that is Tibetan Buddhist but slightly removed from Tibet. The potentially sub-national is thus folded into the national narrativeof India.

Himalayas as a cultural geography

The programmes to promote Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa within the Monpa demand for autonomy show that the imagined community of the autonomy discourse is much larger than the territorial community within the Mon region. These shared plans of action, conceived in alliance with other Tibetan Buddhist peoples of the Indian Himalayas, do not express a longing for an ethnic homeland by Tibetan Buddhists within India. Rather, they outline an imagined geography, which is named, by monks in particular, as 'Himalaya', by which they refer to the Tibetan Buddhist cultural area. This named geography has the magical effect of making the represented real through discursive performance (Bourdieu 1991: 223).

Today, 'Himalaya' has transitioned into a discursive umbrella category for Tibetan Buddhist culture and people. The term 'Himalaya' appears in the names of many organizations and institutes working for the preservation of Buddhist traditions in Monyul. The Himalayan Buddhist Cultural Association itself has around fifteen branches across the Himalayan region. It is significant that, in parallel with changes in the status of Tibet, the word 'Himalaya' has emerged as a substitute for 'Tibetan' with less overtly political overtones. Many people in the field concur that several institutes of Tibetan studies are instead called institutes of Himalayan studies or culture because of the political implications carried by the term 'Tibetan'. As with the use of the names Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa, in the conceptualization of a Himalayan community, Tibet's importance as the point of origin is implied but not prominent. In this sense, the alternative labels of Himalaya, Bhoti, and Sowa Rigpa mediate the tensions between the national and transnational affiliations of India's Tibetan Buddhists. They are border effects (Van Schendel 2005) in which border denizens devise ways to accommodate their transnational identifications while engaging with agents and processes of the nation-state.

In 2003, the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies (CIHCS), under the aegis of BCPS, started holding classes on Buddhist culture at Dahung in West Kameng, at a temporary campus constructed on land donated by local people of the Bugun community, many of whom had become Buddhists in the previous decades. In 2010, the Indian government recognized the CIHCS as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture and took over its administration from the BCPS.[52] Lama Tashi, a native of Thembang village in Dirang who had finished his monastic studies from

52 http://bcpsociety.org/cihcs1.php.

Drepung monastery, joined as principal of CIHCS in 2004 at the invitation of T.G. Rinpoche. Before returning to Monyul, Lama Tashi had already acquired international fame as a Tibetan chant master, and was part of many monk groups touring America, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, and several Asian countries. I met Lama Tashi quite a few times during fieldwork and visited him twice at his staff quarters on the rolling Dahung campus, once with Pema, and the second time as part of an AIDS awareness college trip organized by the Red Ribbon club of Bomdila college on 22 November 2009. After conducting a routine street campaign on the roads of Bomdila to spread awareness about AIDS, the entire contingent of students and three faculty headed to CIHCS to meet Lama Tashi. I willingly accepted the invitation of Tashi Phuntsok, who taught economics at Bomdila college and was in charge of the trip, to accompany the group. It is worth noting that in Tashi's lecture to his students his stated purpose for visiting CIHCS was that, as Buddhists, they had to know their own culture. He stressed the need for students to understand their Buddhist culture, and regretted that he did not have the chance to learn Bhoti in school. In a later conversation with me, when I asked Tashi to rank his identities beginning with that with which he most identifies, he promptly replied that he is a Buddhist first. But then he paused. He continued saying that it is impossible to rank identities out of context. If he met a foreigner, he would say that he is an Indian. And if he was outside Arunachal Pradesh, he would say that he is from Arunachal Pradesh, because it 'is our state'. An intelligent and thinking person, Tashi was perhaps more able than the average Monpa, or for that matter, anyone, to articulate how he negotiates his multiple cultural and political identities.

That day in Dahung, Lama Tashi gently preached to the students of Bomdila college about the importance of Buddhism in the region and how they should inculcate the morals and values of Buddhism. Well-spoken and fluent in English, Lama Tashi had already explained his views to me in a different interview in the following words: 'If we look at the Himalayan people, we can see what they have cultivated in the last few centuries. The Himalayan culture has mostly been influenced by the Buddhist culture, and without knowing the Buddhist culture, you won't know the Himalayan culture.' In these words, how the reinvention of the Himalayas takes effect is visible. The Himalayas have traditionally been known as a geographical identity, mappable in a way that correlates loosely with the geophysical features of the landscape. The Himalayan divisions, which include northern and north eastern border areas in India, from Kashmir, Ladakh, and Zanskar in Jammu and Kashmir, Lahaul-Spiti, Chamba, and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh, Kumaon and Garhwal in Uttarakhand in the west, to Sikkim and

Arunachal Pradesh in the east, as well as the states of Nepal, Bhutan, and the Tibetan region, form a culturally mixed region with diverse linguistic, ethnic, and religious traditions, with Buddhist populations historically co-existing with Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and people of various indigenous traditions. In Lama Tashi's words, however, Himalaya does not remain a geographical signifier alone, but instead accrues a certain cultural capital, transitioning from a purely territorial marker to a symbolic and cultural geography through the selective appropriation of certain religious and cultural features.

The association between the Himalayan geography and the Tibetan Buddhist religious system is not new. For example, a noted scholar who has written about Nepali and Tibetan communities in South Asia describes the Himalayas as a 'Buddhist zone' and a repository of 'Buddhist culture': 'the entire Himalayas form a Buddhist zone [...] Despite a large number of Hindus in the region not many temples are to be seen around. Most hilltops are studded with chortens and monasteries [...] the entire Himalayas contain basically what is described as the Buddhist culture' (Subba 1990: 71-75). It is generally true that most of the communities who inhabit the Himalayan mountain ranges practice Tibetan Buddhism, while other communities in South Asia and South East Asia primarily follow the Theravada school of Buddhism. The Khamti and Singpho groups of Arunachal Pradesh are Theravada Buddhists, but they are Shan people who migrated from Myanmar in relatively recent times, possibly the nineteenth century. What I wish to highlight, however, is the contemporary and self-conscious use of 'Himalaya' by individuals and cultural organizations in Monyul to conflate a landscape (Himalayan) with a religion and cultural traditions (Tibetan Buddhism). 'Himalaya' does not remain a qualifying or prefixing term but instead becomes synonymous with 'Tibetan Buddhism'. Thus constructed, 'Himalayas' becomes both a homogenous and an exclusivist category, for it excludes those who live in the Himalayan ranges but do not practice Buddhism. This usage even excludes those communities broadly classed as Monpa who practice the pre-Buddhist Bon faith.

A similar discursive trend manifests in the writings and speeches of Tibetan Buddhist people living in other Himalayan states. One Ladakhi social activist writes, 'With the advancement of modern harsh and hostile civilization [...] the language and culture of the Himalayan region is disappearing, declining and degenerating very fast' (Dawa 2006). Many of these same ideas are found in the articles in *Monyul* (2010), the first newsletter on Monyul published and edited by Tenzin Jorden of Dhakpo Sherdupling monastery of Himachal Pradesh, a copy of which I acquired from Rinchin

Norbu, who runs Losel Nyinje Charitable Society library in Tawang. In one of the articles, the author, Dr Tashi Paljor from Kullu, Himachal Pradesh writes about the importance of Buddhist cultural preservation in the Himalayan region. He mentions various activities for reviving Buddhism, which include an increase in the number of publications in the Bhoti language, the construction of monasteries in both rural and urban areas, the establishment of Buddhist educational and research institutes, the proliferation of Buddhist arts and sculpture (Thangkhas, Manis, stupas, etc.), and the composition and collection of books on Buddhist studies.[53]

These examples demonstrate that while I describe what I have encountered in Monyul in this book, I cannot speak of the Himalayan geography as specifically produced in Monyul. The events from Monyul present a localized case of a general phenomenon, and the campaigns for Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa show how the objectives of these local movements coincide with wider translocal processes. In formal statements concerning autonomy, the actors generally articulate a geography that conforms to acceptable boundaries, that is, the two districts of West Kameng and Tawang. In other narrative formats, however, proponents of autonomy imagine a more expansive geography, which stretches outward beyond Monyul to include Tibetan Buddhist communities scattered across the Himalayas, sometimes even including Tibet. On many occasions, monks do not use the word 'Himalaya' explicitly, but stress the affiliation of Monyul with other Tibetan Buddhist spaces. Even though, Monyul physically forms only a small part of the entire Himalayan range, in discursive expressions Mon *becomes* Himalayan in terms of both terrain (montane and sub-montane) and cultural tradition (Tibetan Buddhist). I will return to this discussion on Himalayan geography in the Conclusion.

Autonomy and its discontents

At first glance, the Monpas' demand for an autonomous council appears to be an instance of a marginalized community speaking the 'cultural grammar' (Baruah 1999) of the nation-state to ameliorate their present

53 Some academic platforms are also beginning to use the term 'Himalayan Buddhism' to denote the Buddhism practiced by communities mainly inhabiting the 'Himalayan geographical region from Gilgit in the north-west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east: Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Mnga'-ris (Western Tibet), Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh'. http://www.iias.org/event/recent-perspectives-himalayan-buddhism.

conditions. In adopting a territorial formula prescribed in the Indian Constitution, champions of autonomy appear to be conforming to, rather than confronting, the constitutional provision, choosing to frame their demands in terms of local administrative changes rather than a territorial break from Arunachal Pradesh. However, I show that even though the autonomous council model encouraged by the Sixth Schedule is a widespread narrative for the political resolution of marginality in India, it can also be substantively remoulded to fit situational conditions. Much like discourses of indigeneity, which emerge and develop in dialogue with various social movements and non-indigenous actors instead of coming straight from an 'authentic tribal spokesperson' (Karlsson 2003: 406), the constitutional idea of autonomy is also a compromised discourse. The MARDC discourse contains many negotiations and manoeuvring within the constitutional model: the demand for an autonomous region is an outcome of a dialogue between the available options and the empirical ground conditions. While the proposal is for a Mon Autonomous Region, what actually emerges in various articulations of belonging is a translocal cartography. The political unity that patches together different ethnic groups living in Monyul under the rubric of development comes apart in the parallel text of cultural identity that has opposing criteria demarcating the boundaries between self and Other.

Although I have treated the demand for a Mon Autonomous Region as the local event, the locality or distinct territoriality of the Mon areas is itself a late colonial construct. The 1914 Indo-Tibetan boundary demarcation, even though it was not enforced until much later, made Tawang and West Kameng potentially detachable from the continuous circuits of trans-Himalayan trade, pilgrimage, and kinship of which these areas were part. Following independence in 1954, Tawang and West Kameng were made into a discrete locality as the Kameng sub-division of erstwhile NEFA. The MARDC employs this notion and form of a territorial locality to make claims for political changes (*Development and Progress* 2008). The MARDC performs what Amin (2004) would call managerial localism, where regional organisations call for the devolution of power to local administrative units, even though the local is not something that can be isolated from the intersecting elements of region, nation, and trans-national connections.

In the more than six decades of Monyul's postcolonial existence, new allegiances have created new alliances. In the college student body elections in Bomdila Government College, I was told that Monpa students from Tawang, who are greater in number, commonly side with the Bangni students from Seppa in the neighbouring East Kameng district, while the Dirang Monpas

are supported by non-Monpa groups such as the Akas and Mijis from West Kameng. Although not factually corroborated, this allegation of divided loyalties offered to me by a couple of college students shows how internal divisions within the Monpa communities might be expressed on multiple, unexpected registers that challenge the unity of a common programme for autonomy.

Their Buddhist affiliations notwithstanding, several non-Monpas who are new converts to Buddhism reject the discourse of autonomy because they are wary of Monpa dominance in the proposed autonomous region. In West Kameng, for example, there are many recent converts to Buddhism from the Miji and Aka communities, with some of the richer ones even donating land for monastery sites. These non-Monpa participants are aware of the anomalies associated with the name 'Mon' for the proposed autonomous region. While favourable to the idea of autonomy for development, they are critical of the term 'Mon' because of its dual associations with both Monpa ethnic identity and Tibetan Buddhist religion.

In one notable incident, an MARDC committee meeting was stalled because a member belonging to the Aka community raised objections to the term 'Mon' as excluding non-Monpa members. Non-Monpa members also object to the insignia of a yak on the MARDC emblem, for the yak, a traditional mainstay of Tibetan Buddhist economies, is held to be a symbol of Monpa-ness. Both Monpas and non-Monpas recognize that the yak on the MARDC badge is not simply the symbol of an economic way of life, but also a cultural symbol. The use of the yak in the trans-Himalayas maps not only altitude but also the spread of civilization and the linking of trade routes. Among the tribes in the higher-altitude districts of Arunachal Pradesh, only the Monpas have traditionally practiced yak-husbandry for the obvious reason that they were part of the Tibetan Buddhist trade network and profited from the use of yaks as pack animals (Dhar 2000:242). Leki Norbu, a lecturer of geography in Bomdila college who has written his doctoral dissertation on the yak economy, told me that yak-dances are part of the performative repertoire of yak-based Tibetan Buddhist economies, and pointed out that to trace where yaks are found, one has to trace where the yak-dance exists. Yak-husbandry is thus a crucial marker of the Monpas' Tibetan Buddhist identity. In refusing the insignia of the yak on the MARDC badges, non-Monpa supporters of the demand for autonomy actually reject the Tibetan Buddhist affiliations of the Monpa proponents.

The idea of autonomy is contested not only by such forces that place limits on it from outside, but also by those from within the Monpa community who are uneasy with the idea of a Buddhist place that emerges through the

Figure 8 MARDC badge with yak logo

narrative of cultural preservation. In my ethnographic inquiries, I found that those Monpas who have Hindu or Christian spouses – though few in number – whose personal ties undercut their allegiance to a Buddhist community, tended to reject the premises of the autonomy demand.

A break-away group among the Monpas who identify themselves as 'Sartang' challenge the notion of a Buddhist community by claiming a separate indigenous identity. These are the Monpa groups living in certain villages of West Kameng district (e.g., Selari, Rahung, Khoina, Jirigaon, and Nine Mile) on the borders of Monpa and non-Monpa territories who practiced a form of animism worshipping trees, hills, and inanimate objects; a few among them have now become Buddhists, while some others have converted to Christianity. Traditionally held in low esteem by other Monpas because they did not follow Buddhism, Sartang Monpas have historically been assigned an inferior rank in the social hierarchy. Other Monpas remarked to me: 'they have turned their clan identity into religion', implying that the Sartangpas' low status in the hierarchy of Monpa clans has led them to assert a different identity. Sartangpas themselves claim that their assertion of a separate identity is not based on religious differences. However, the politics inherent in their assertion is evident. At present, the Sartangpas often have to compete on unfair terms with other Monpas to receive state benefits earmarked for Scheduled Tribes. However, if they were to succeed in getting registered as a separate group from Monpas in the list of Scheduled Tribes, they would be able to compete as a distinct collectivity with the Monpa groups to receive affirmative action benefits.

The discourse of autonomy is therefore a compromised discourse, where both internal fissures and external forces limit the extent to which the autonomous council model can sum up the ethnographic realities of the demand. In its current constitutional definition, the model of autonomous councils does not pose a significant challenge to the already mapped political lines between states: it is a constitutionally valid manner of redistributing administrative privileges without redrawing existing state boundaries. I submit that the Mon demand for autonomy is a pact with the constitutional mandate, whereby autonomous councils may cover areas that have multi-ethnic/multi-religious demographics but may not overstep already delimited political boundaries between two or more states. This pact involves compromise, covering up earlier antagonisms and putting forth an inclusive ideology in an attempt to conform to the territorial solution that is already provided as legitimate and viable. In spite of it, the alternative spatial imaginings of trans-local community find expression and outlet in the cultural politics of Tibetan Buddhist preservation.

In 2011-2012, Tawang society saw an outbreak of protests by monks against hydro-electric projects, which seek to tap into the vast river resources of the region to generate power. The main champion of the anti-dam movement is Lama Lobsang Gyatso, a monk from Tawang monastery, who had studied in Sera Monastery in Mysore and was one of the proteges of T.G. Rinpoche. An organization started by Lama Lobsang called the Save Mon Region Federation has been spearheading the protests (Gohain 2017c). The main concern of the anti-dam protestors was primarily the environmental threat of big dams, but they are also concerned that the dams might submerge Buddhist sacred sites. After police shootings killed two protesting monks, the conflict between monks and the administration, which was in favour of the hydro-electric projects, became polarized. According to the latest news, the monks are waiting until a final decision is taken on the dam issue, which is currently pending resolution in the country's highest court. In the tensions following the anti-dam protests, the autonomy demand has taken a backseat. With the main architect of the autonomy demand now no more, it has become the charge of a few political representatives, while the monks have momentarily stepped back. It is, however, important to note that the anti-dam protests and the autonomy demand, as conceived by T.G. Rinpoche, are part of the same vision – of marking Mon as a Tibetan Buddhist geography.

3 Connections

> [C]laims of descent from a common ancestor are among the most effective and commonplace means by which human groups forge bonds of community. What gives kinship its special potency as a basis of community is that it can draw upon the past not simply to posit a common origin but also to claim substantial identity in the present. (Brow 1996: 21)

One balmy autumn noon, I was waiting for an audience with T.G. Rinpoche at the GRL monastery. Usually willing to accommodate me in his schedule at short notice and often inviting me to stay on for lunch or dinner, T.G. Rinpoche was particularly busy that day. I waited in the green monastery lawns, soaking in the tepid midday sun. A big monk with a broad, smiling face dragged a plastic chair beside me, and we began chatting. This was my first introduction to Lama Tashi, whom I have already referred to in the previous chapter. Lama Tashi is the popular address for Geshe Nawang Tashi Bapu, Principal of the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies, Dahung – a person of eminent stature in Monyul. We drifted to the topic of the origins of the Monpas, which seemed to evoke keen interest in everybody I had met so far, and I casually asked him, 'Where did Monpas migrate from?' Twinkling his merry eyes at me, Lama Tashi answered, 'Will you be able to face it, if I tell you?' and after a pause, 'The Monpas are originally from Tibet.' His question of whether I could 'face' this fact suggests both his awareness of the complexities around the question of Monpa origins, and his assumption that I, as an outsider and non-Monpa Indian, would rather hear stories of an Indian origin of the Monpas.

Origins and marriage are politically charged issues in Monyul today, entangled with the India-China boundary dispute. Far from being innocuous quests for roots or trifling matters relegated to the status of old wives' (or grandpa's) tales, narratives of origins and migration are deeply embedded in the politics of culture. Stories about origins have a powerful impact on social and political relations: in the history of modern nationalisms, the question of origins has surfaced when groups sought to assert their dominance over others by claiming original or prior settlement, often citing ancient texts and rewriting history to support their claims (Tambiah 1992).

The converse is also true. While origins can be the basis for diaspora populations to articulate 'long-distance nationalism' (Glick Schiller 2005), they can also become negatively marked for the same reasons. Those left out from or attributed a later migration in origin stories can be subject

to discrimination and forced to adopt a subordinate rank in society. If 'blood', origins, or migration from a common ancestral homeland can become the basis for a collective national identity, then hybrid origins and miscegenation across borders can also be seen as potential threats to the idea of the homogenous nation. It is in this light that contemporary stories of trans-border origins and kinship among Monpas should be understood.

The imagined place created through oral narratives of migration from and kinship with Tibet, and at times Bhutan, has a different shape than the 'Mon' articulated through the programs for Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa related to the demand for autonomy. Although both cases create spaces of belonging for Tibetan Buddhists of the Himalayan region, the latter constructs community through programs for action while the former does so through the criteria of descent and kinship. More importantly, while the practical cultural agenda constructs a community of Indian Buddhists by accommodating both the border and Tibet's controversial position in India-China foreign relations, the community articulated through origin and kinship, invoking mythical time or times past, carries more transgressive potential regarding the current national borders.

I must clarify here that while Monpa oral narratives of transnationality do hark back to the past in nostalgic reminiscences, I do not see them as reconstitutive of an authentic space. At the same time, that does not mean that they can be dismissed as being of little consequence. Spaces of resistance subvert dominant spaces by articulating, momentarily, both a metaphor and a 'speaking position' (Keith and Pile 1993: 23).[54] While stories of trans-border origins and migration cannot wipe out dominant spatial representations, they can provide limits to the dominant, normative national geographies by articulating transnational belonging.

In Northeast India, migration stories are still fresh in the popular memory of many groups due to their relatively late migrations, and many of these groups continue to maintain transnational ties today. The Northeast region, connected to the rest of the nation through a slim corridor aptly titled the 'chicken's neck', is as much the north-eastern border of India as it is the

54 Keith and Pile give the example of a few Labour authorities in London who declared the local units under their jurisdiction 'nuclear free zones' in the 1980s to vocalize a political statement about the possible, undesirable infiltration of nuclear proliferation into intimate residential zones. They argue that whether or not this designation could be taken seriously is beside the point: it 'created, however, briefly, a *space of resistance* that tried to weld place, politics and identity' (1993: 10). In 2011-2012, similar spaces of resistance in urban spheres of America and Europe were formed through the Occupy Movement, when thousands of people gathered in high-profile urban zones to protest economic structures of inequality.

north-western border of Southeast Asia (Baruah 1999). Relatively recent stories of trans-border migration are the norm rather than the exception here. In the case of the Monpas, stories of trans-border – and particularly Tibetan – origins have become a contentious issue given the border conflict, which is occasionally rekindled. Each nation-state tried to determine that the disputed tracts, which include Monyul, were part of their national territory. To do so, first the Chinese and then the Indian state invented an ethnic relatedness between themselves and the border populations as support for gaining control of the McMahon Line boundary (Huber 2010: 301). For both sides, this meant citing sources that would prove that these tracts and their inhabitants had traditionally been part of their national territories.

As inhabitants of a disputed border, Monpas have to tread carefully on questions of origin and national belonging. A straightforward admission of cross-border lineage might be seen as shouting out loud their transnational affiliations, thereby jeopardizing the Monpas' position as national subjects. These anxieties of belonging (Middleton 2015) give variable expressions to origin stories. Some individuals seek to overstep the nation-state's borders through narratives of transnational connections, while others accommodate the border by claiming indigenous belonging (Van Schendel 2005). In this way, qualifications and caveats make their appearance in narrations of transnational connections.

I do not think it possible to find a conclusive answer regarding origins, or to capture an elusive pure essence (Foucault 1994a: 360) of a clan or lineage by tracking down blood ancestry. Indeed, the routes to roots frequently lose continuity in the mists of hoary time and the jumble of multiple retellings. Fresh migrations and inter-marriage of populations lead to 'impurities', making pure-blood narratives impossible. My intention is not to try and pin down the convoluted story of Monpa origins to a particular point in time and space, but rather to see where the act or process of narration itself leads and what political positioning it signifies.

Most scholars working on oral traditions agree that origin stories are metaphorical 'pseudo-histories' containing renditions of cultural circumstances rather than history (Deloria 2002: 16). There are differences of definition in different categories of oral traditions; for example, Nobakov lists three distinct categories within Native American oral traditions: myths, legends, and folktales. Myths are sacred stories that take place in an earlier world, are held as absolute truths, and are based on cyclical time, for they are invoked to give explanatory meaning to the present; legends maintain their link to Western 'historical' time, containing human characters and factual content; and folktales are 'just-so stories', entertaining but often

containing implicit moral or educational lessons (Nabokov 1996 cited in Deloria 2002: 16). However, the lines dividing these categories are blurred. Stuart Blackburn (2004: 17) distinguishes migration legends from other forms of oral narratives in two important ways: first, unlike most oral narratives, migration legends claim to be more specific in chronological, geographical, and historical terms, especially through their emphasis on named events, places, and people or groups; and second, migration legends are not recited or performed in ritual contexts and lack certain conventions, such as an opening formula ('once upon a time'), but are instead usually told in fragments, as anecdotes.

While Monpa narratives of origin and migration have these two signal characteristics highlighted by Blackburn, that is, named specificity and non-ritual performance, I have used 'oral narratives' as a common term for the narrative genres that include both Nabokov's 'myths' and 'legends'. My main motive for examining these narratives is to understand the politics and positioning inherent in the narration. With that aim, I focus on oral narratives to see how people 'read' oral narratives. Reading is both the discursive act and reproduction, where reproduction is not same as duplication (De Certeau 1984). Just as the reader of a linguistic or cultural text inhabits, transports themself into, and transforms the text they read, the listener, and later narrator, of a tale also invents or reinvents that tale. That is, the reader 're-tells' the narrative, and in this respect the act of narrating becomes central. I examine how Monpas re-invent narratives of Tibetan origin, migration, and marriage through re-telling by analysing the ambiguities and tensions that surface at the moments of articulation and the peculiar inflexions given to narratives by individual narrators.

In the beginning was the war

During the period of intense boundary disputes of the immediate pre-war period in the 1960s, the Indian Prime Minister and the Chinese Premier met to discuss their differences and designate government officials to study historical records, accounts, maps, and documents relevant to the boundary question and prepare a joint report. The *Report of the Officials of the Governments of India and the People's Republic of China on the Boundary Question,* published in 1961, is divided into two sections containing the official viewpoints of the Indian and Chinese governments on the border dispute, in which both sides seek to marshal evidence drawing on law, geography, and custom to substantiate their claims. The section providing

the Indian perspective includes a claim that the Monpa areas traditionally belonged to the Indian subcontinent, citing several textual sources. Drawing on ancient Indian texts such as the *Mahabharata* and *Kalika Purana*, it shows that the areas claimed by China have traditionally been part of India's sacred and political geography (*Report* 1961: 104-107). On the Chinese side, the writings of some Chinese Tibetan authors, such as Chab-dga-rta-mgrin' in his book *Bod-ljongs-zhib'jug*, reveal similar political attempts to co-opt Monpas into the Tibetan kin universe (Pommaret 1999: 63).

Taking recourse to mythological treatises to prove that Mon areas have been part of the national geography since the hoary past is an exercise in making 'spatial memory' (Alonso 1994: 387) – that is, temporalizing and memory-making to stabilize the identity of place and people by showing how what is within (the people-nation) *was* before. A common strain in nationalist narratives is conflating the nation's territory with common blood or origins and demonizing those constructed as non-indigenous and interlopers (Tambiah 1992) – despite the fact that the idea of indigenous origin is frequently incongruous with the reality of cross-border kinship ties. In other words, in nationalist narratives geographical and ethnic boundaries coincide.

The Indian section in the *Report* alludes to relatively recent texts such as eighteenth-century travel accounts by Italian missionaries Ippolito Desideri and Horace Della Penna to support the thesis that Tibet historically excluded the Mon areas (*Report* 1961: 105). The underlying assumption is that if Tibet did not include Mon, then Tibetans also are not related to Monpas. Similar ideas have continued in the post-war period: in an article published by India's Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis, the author, a former political officer to Tawang, argues that the Monpas are descended from an Indian prince, Rupati, who spread Hinduism in Monyul before the advent of Buddhism in the eighth century (Murty 1971a: 528). A fairly recent article (Dutta 2008: 564) published by the same institute repeats the argument that Monpas were influenced by Tibet but were of a different ethnicity, even though experts (e.g., Aris 1979b) reject the thesis of an Indian origin of the Monpas.

Other groups who live in Arunachal Pradesh such as the Adis and Sherdukpens also have origin legends that trace Tibetan descent (Bose 1979a: 16; Fürer-Haimendorf 1982: 172; Nyori 1993 quoted in Blackburn 2004: 23).[55] Yet,

55 Huber observes that the Mra, non-Tibetan populations of Upper Subansiri district of central Arunachal Pradesh on the Indo-Tibetan border, also claim ethnic relatedness with Tibetans (Huber 2010; Huber 2012). But this is a post-1950s phenomenon and clearly shows cultural identity

the Monpas' claim of Tibetan origins is quite different from the origin claims of the Adis, who only had trading ties with the Tibetans in recorded history, or the Sherdukpens, who despite being Buddhists and residents of West Kameng were independent of Tibetan rule. In contrast to these other groups, Monpas owed allegiance to the Tibetan state until the early twentieth century, which lends their stories of cross-border origins a more transgressive character. In other words, origins and as I will discuss in a later section, cross-border marriage, have been dragged into debates about the current political boundary.

Monpa monks and intellectuals are now inserting their own stories into this war-affected discourse, positioning themselves as part of a 'Tibetan' or 'Bhutanese' and, at times, 'indigenous' Indian space. Narratives of trans-border Tibetan origins provide a counter to a national geography that marks off Monyul as a peripheral border between India/Indian and Tibet/Tibetan; they subvert the trope of remoteness that is often attributed to Monyul by narratively introducing a component of movement. However, the same people who claim trans-border ancestry from Tibet are also aware that such claims are fraught with wider political implications involving the disputed border. The claim to Tibetan origins is therefore frequently accompanied by disclaimers and qualifying statements, such as the refrain that it happened 'in the old days', or various other narrative strategies. I trace these narrative and geographical shifts in the following sections.

The thesis of Tibetan origins

Many individuals, young and old, identify Tibet as the original homeland of the Monpas, drawing on both oral lore as well as old and contemporary texts. There is a common notion that Tawang Monpas are *asli* (authentic) Monpa, compared to the Dirang Monpas who live nearer to the plains. While older people are quick to brush off such distinctions as people's ignorance, the term '*asli* Monpa' definitely circulates, especially among the younger generation. It is possible that Tawang is considered authentic because it has

construction. The Mra (postcolonial name: Tagin) not only conducted cross-border trade with Tibet but also enjoyed certain customary rights during the Tibetan era, especially since cross-country traders to Tibet had to pass through their territory. Because of their economic privileges, the Mra considered themselves superior to neighbouring groups. Following the 1960s border dispute, they were co-opted as a tribal group by the Indian state, lost their former privileges, and became at par with the other Arunachali tribal groups. Huber argues that in the context of their present marginalization, Mra representation of their Tibetan ties must be understood as an effort to highlight both their past economic standing and their connections with a ruling class.

a Monpa population that is relatively un-hybridized by intermarriage with other Arunachali groups or Indian migrant communities. Population-wise, Tawang also has fewer non-Monpas than Dirang or Bomdila – especially the latter, which has many migrant settlers. But un-hybridized populations alone do not make for authenticity. Another possible reason Tawang may be considered more authentic is that it was the seat of the Tawang monastery, which was directly in contact with the Tibetan government. In Lhou village in Tawang, an octogenarian ex- headman, Pema Gombu, now departed, defined Mon as that region which stood south when seen from Lhasa as centre.

The migration stories of Monpas give another clue, which is that the Tawang Monpas are considered to be of truer ethnic stock because Tibet is closer to Tawang. Dirangpas, or people of Dirang, say that Tawangpas are the real thing. When asked why, they reply: 'everything started from there'; according to oral narratives, Tawang was the first to be inhabited by people from Tibet, followed by other Monpa areas. In popular opinion, Tawang is the land of the authentic Monpa because the original migrants from Tibet settled there first.[56]

Monpa communities follow the Tibetan kinship system, in which the primary organizing principle of descent is *rü* or 'bone'. In Tibetan Buddhist belief, 'bone' is the bodily substance found in human beings and animals, passed down from father to offspring through the male sperm (which, in its whiteness, is identified as bone) during the act of sexual intercourse, leading to conception. In this sense, *rü* describes categories of people who share a common agnatic descent from common ancestors, and more particularly patrilineal descent categories or simply patrilineal clans (Levine 1981: 55, 60). Nancy Levine shows how the Nyinba, a Tibetan Buddhist group of Nepal, use *jat/jati* – a Sanskritic Hindu term primarily used to refer to caste categories – as a loanword to express the concept of *rü*. This indicates how group identities are shaped by the national framework where they live, for the Nyinba live in a predominantly Nepali caste Hindu society (Shneiderman 2006: 21). Monpas also use the term *jat* to refer to patrilineage.

In the last few years, a couple of books on Monpa society that include genealogical accounts of different Monpa patrilineal clans have been published in Monyul: *Sba yul skyid-mo ljong kyi chos 'byung* [*The Religious History of the Hidden Place of Happy Valley*] (2002), a publication of the

56 J.P. Mills, a British ethnologist-administrator who visited Dirang in the 1940s, wrote, 'Dirang Dzong is the most important of a small group of 9 or 10 villages inhabited by people who call themselves Grangmarangpa, but are usually included under the general term of Monba. They claim a Tibet origin and their culture is largely Tibetan' (1946: 8).

Buddhist Culture Preservation Society (BCPS), translated into Hindi for me by Lama Lhobsang Phuntsok of Jang and Gelong Sangey Leda of Tawang; and Gyalsey Tulku (Rinpoche)'s *rTawang dgonpa'ilorgyus Monyulgsa ba'imelong* [*The Clear Mirror of Monyul: The History of Tawang Monastery*] (Gyalsey Tulku [1991]2009), translated for me by Gelong Sangey Leda. Written in the Tibetan language, these books trace the origin of Monpa clans to, and subsequent migration from, Tibet, and even to specific villages within Tibet.

While the BCPS publication *The Religious History* does not specify a single author, apparently being a work of collective authorship, *The Clear Mirror of Monyul* is authored by the ex-abbot of Tawang monastery, Gyalsey Tulku, who was born in Kham province of Tibet in 1939, and received his Geshe Lharampa degree from Drepung monastery in Tibet before coming to India in 1959. His story is that when he became abbot of Tawang monastery in 1978, visitors from abroad would often ask him to write something to introduce Tawang to outsiders. Being new to the area at that time and not having much information, he searched for books in vain. So he thought that he should consult some senior monks and knowledgeable village elders about the genealogies of particular lineages and write a book on this subject. He claims to be the first to write a book in the Tibetan script on Tawang monastery and the Monpas.

Both books trace the roots of many current Monpa lineages to a common progenitor – Lhasey Tsangma, a prince who was exiled from Tibet to the land of Mon sometime in the eighth century. According to the *The Clear Mirror of Monyul*, Monpas migrated from Tibet in seven waves, and Lhasey Tsangma came with the seventh wave. Lhasey Tsangma was the brother of Langdarma, the Tibetan king who is infamous in Tibetan history for his attacks on Buddhism, destruction of monasteries and scriptures, and persecution of Buddhist monks. Although Lhasey Tsangma, as the eldest son, was the rightful heir to the throne, he chose to become a monk. Since the middle son Langdarma abhorred religion, the youngest, Thiralpa, was made king. Langdarma, however, desperately wanted to be king, and conspired with his evil minister to kill Thiralpa and end his reign. But first they had to get rid of Lhasey Tsangma, who would be made king if Thiralpa died. Langdarma bribed all the prophets and fortune-tellers of Tibet and instructed them to say that if Lhasey Tsangma were to remain in Tibet, the whole country would plunge into misfortune and Thiralpa would fall gravely ill. The evil minister duly reported the false prophesies to Thiralpa, who believed them and decided to expel Lhasey Tsangma to eastern Bhutan, sending with him rations and a retinue. After his expulsion from Tibet, Lhasey Tsangma roamed over many areas of present-day Bhutan, and his progeny eventually migrated and populated various areas of Monyul.

Figure 9 Gyalsey Tulku Rinpoche, author of *The Clear Mirror of Monyul* with Sangey Leda

All versions of the Lhasey Tsangma story match the narrative in the *rGyal rigs*, a seventeenth-century Tibetan text by the monk and scholar Lama Wanginder about the royal dynasties of east Bhutan based in Trashigang, of which one English translation exists (Aris 2009). Gyalsey Rinpoche admits that he drew heavily on the genealogies written by Lama Wanginder, which in his view provides the best possible account of Monpa origins.

Lama Tashi, whom we met at the beginning of this chapter, claims to have found confirmation of his roots in Lama Wanginder's text. Hailing from Thembang village in Dirang and belonging to the lineage of the Thembang Bapus, Lama Tashi uses the prefix Bapu before his name. In the common parlance of central and southern Monyul, 'Bapu' is a generic term for all ruling or higher clans going by different names, while 'Gila' is the collective term for low-ranking groups, who are supposedly descendants of the servants, horse grooms, water-carriers, and porters who formed part of Lhasey Tsangma's retinue that came from Tibet.[57] Lama Tashi gave the following account:

> Bapu *jat* came in ninth century to Mon areas. [...] The original Bapu in Kalaktang was descended from a local king in the Tawang

57 In Dirang, Namshu, Thembang, and other areas of central Monyul, as well as in Kalaktang in southern Monyul, the Melongkharpa, Faichilpa, and Sherthipa are said to be Bapu clans. In common parlance, 'Bapu' stands for ruling clans.

> area – Prangpodar. Wangma Peladar and Prangpodar were cousins and all Bapus are descended from these two cousin brothers. These cousins were great great grandson of the king of Tibet. [...] *When Lhasey Tsangma was on his way to Tawang from Lhasa, he came via Bhutan and had a son with a local girl and that is how his descendents fill that part of east Bhutan, i.e., Trashigang.* (emphasis added)

Old men and women in rural areas draw on oral traditions to trace the origins of their clans to either the various branches of Lhasey Tsangma's bloodline or people migrating from Tibet in earlier waves. According to myth, some of these earlier migrants were either expelled from Tibet as a consequence of war or due to the belief that an ill person can get rid of their disease by dispatching a human substitute to a faraway land, i.e., Mon. For example, *The Religious History* (2002) recounts a story about a festival called Lhasa Monlam, during which, one man would be exiled to Monyul each year in a symbolic gesture of evacuating evil. The man probably functioned as a kind of human *torma*, an offering cake whose ritual consignment to flames during Tibetan festivals symbolises the banishment of evil. Each year, a man from a different village would be exiled, and the clans that he gave rise to in Monyul took on the names of the villages in Tibet from which the progenitor of the lineage had migrated. For example, if Kong-po was the village, the lineage came to be called Kong-mo. Ser-mo, Nyar-mo, Ngur-mo, Khu-mo, Kyi-mo, Khar-mo, Drag-mo, Nye-mo, Zhu-mo, Rong-mo, Tsang-mo, Dag-mo, Kar-mo, Nam-sa, Wang-mo, are some Monpa clans said to have been originally named after the corresponding villages in Tibet. A few Monpas now use their clan titles, such as Da[g]mo, as surnames.

People of Tawang readily narrate clan histories that retrace original migrations from Tibet. For example, those belonging to the Khyi lineage trace descent from the illegitimate son of King Srongtsan Gampo, drawing on a well-recognized oral narrative. This particular origin tale straddles the real and the fantastic, for it begins with the illicit activities of one unfaithful queen of Srongtsan Gampo, who had sexual intercourse simultaneously with a dog and a goat. The resulting offspring was a boy who had the face of a dog and horns of a goat, and who was given then name Khyigharathoe (*Khyi* is 'dog', *gha* is 'face', and *rathoe* means 'forehead like a goat'). Although the king did not know the truth and considered the boy to be his own, he was ashamed to show his son to the public, and so sent him to the Monpa country along with some servants. The Monpa people thought he was of royal blood and made him king. The present Khyi lineage is formed of the descendants of King Khyigharathoe. Khyigharathoe is a mythological hero in other areas as well, including Bumthang, Bhutan, and Nepal, though the tale is not as widely

popular there (Aris 1979a: 60). However, Monpas of the Khyi lineage in Monyul were proud to recount their blue-blooded ancestry, despite its illicit beginnings and despite the rather unflattering categorization of Mon in this legend.

All the stories about the clans claiming royal lineage have one common element. The settlement or village in quest of a ruler/chief would send out a search party which would, in the course of its wanderings, chance upon a group of children playing. The party would then lay out an array of meat and the child who refused all meat (e.g., chicken, pig, cow, and goat) except the leg of the yak or sheep (the two animals most important in Monpa animal husbandry and said to form the diet of the higher-ranking clans) would be immediately recognized as the future prince.

A few oral narratives also trace the descent of some Monpa clans from Tibetan commoners.[58] A popular story recounts how Merak Sakten on the Bhutan-Monyul border and Senge, Nyukmadung, Lubrang in Monyul were populated by working people from Tsona in Tibet who then formed the Merakpa lineage. Yeshi Tsering, the village headman of Senge village, Dirang, narrated the following story:

> There was an autocratic king [a *dzongpon* or officer in some versions] in Tsona [Tibet]. One day he said that a mountain was blocking the sun and casting a shadow over his house, and so he set all people to work to cut down the mountain. A mother nursing her child was crooning a lullaby, and she sang that it is easier to cut off the neck of the tyrant than to cut down the mountain. The workers took the hint and beheaded the king. Following this, they fled to Merak Sakten, via the Sela pass [some must have settled in Senge, Lubrang, and Nyukmadung on the way]. When they reached Merak they thought that it was a good place to rear yaks and cleared the forest by setting it on fire. Merak means 'set on fire'. The nursing mother was deified as Aum Jomo, and even today is worshipped by the people of Merak. *Merakpa* is one branch of the original immigrants from Tsona. When the group was fleeing from Tsona to Merak, some of them came to Thembang [in Dirang] and became Merakpas. Even today, Aum Jomo is worshipped in Thembang every six years.[59]

58 Like many oral narratives of Tibetan origins that actually stem from textual sources, this legend is also a written narrative circulating in manuscripts in the area; one version dates to the eighteenth century. All oral versions come from retellings of this text, as with the Lhasey Tsangma story (Toni Huber, Personal communication, January 2013).

59 Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk, the current Bhutanese queen mother also gives a version of this tale in her description of the Brokpas (yak-herder communities) of Merak-Sakten in her book on Bhutan (Wangchuk 2006: 165, 166).

This story describes migration routes that originate in Tibet, move through Bhutan, and end in Monyul. In the story of Lhasey Tsangma as given in the book *Clear Mirror*, there is also a back and forth movement of marriage alliance and descent between clans that had settled in areas that are now divided among Tibet, Bhutan, and Monyul. Kinship provided a basis for the alliance between ruling clans of Bhutan and Monyul, and descriptions of how particular areas of Bhutan and Tawang came to be settled construct a Tibet-Bhutan-Mon kinship circuit. For example, cross-migration between Bhutan and Mon of members of the 'Jowo' lineage – referring apparently to a clan in Lhau and Dirang belonging to the lineage of Lhasey Tsangma (Bodt 2012) – is shown to have given rise to new clans. Thus, the genealogical narrative in *The Clear Mirror* does not simply sketch a migration route, but through the exchange of chiefly personnel it also connects different lineages of Mon and Bhutan together.

Despite the presence of Bhutan in these narratives as a mediating link between Tibet and Monyul, a section of scholars in India sometimes puts forward a thesis of independent Bhutanese origin or ethnicity, presumably to offset the Tibetan origin thesis. To say that the Monpas are of Bhutanese ethnicity lessens Tibet's (and therefore, China's) claim on the Monpa areas, and hence, in some accounts, Bhutan is positioned in opposition to Tibet as the land of origin of various Monpa clans. For instance, D.P. Choudhury (1978) denies any connection between Tibetans and the tribes of the North East Frontier, including the Monpas, in his historical account of India's North East Frontier. Although his work is primarily an analysis of British colonial policy in the North East Frontier of India, especially Tawang and West Kameng from the early colonial period beginning in 1865 until the demarcation of the McMahon Line boundary in 1914, Choudhury states that in the context of the India-China border dispute it becomes necessary to find out how far 'this area ethnically relates to Tibet' (1978: 17). Choudhury concludes on the basis of observations of the language, dress, architecture, and crafts of Monpas, Tibetans, and Bhutanese that were made by other scholars that it is 'highly likely that Monpas were originally non-Tibetan in stock but were exposed to Tibetan influence from the north' (Ibid: 19). He surmises that the Monpas have Bhutanese blood, and possibly even 'tribal' blood through their connections with the tribesmen living south, i.e., on the Assam foothills. Attributing a Bhutanese affinity with Monpas counteracts suggestions that Monpas have Tibetan origins.

Mediating the Tibet connection: Bhutan in Monpa origin stories

Domkho-Morshing, twin villages in the Kalaktang administrative division of West Kameng bordering Bhutan, are the stronghold of the Melongkharpa clan, which claims clan membership with the current queen mother of Bhutan, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. Pema, my host in Bomdila, put me in touch with Karma Wangcho, who drove me to Domkho-Morshing in his taxi. Karma is from Shyo basti ('village') in Tawang, which is reputed to be a Tibetan settlement, and he always looked furtive when giving his village name. Shyo basti has ambiguous standing in Tawang, but that is another story that I will take up in Chapter Five.

Domkho-Morshing and Sanglem, another village where the former Tibetan tax post Talung Dzong is located, share only one Inspection Bungalow with two guestrooms between them, and this is where Karma and I stayed after our three-hour drive from Bomdila. Searching for a lead who could tell me about the Melongkharpa clan, I stumbled across young Gombu Thrinley, barely into his twenties but already the local *Anchal Samiti* (regional council) leader, who offered to introduce me to village elders who were known to be good sources and raconteurs of oral histories. One of the first houses we visited was that of Netan Dorjee Bapu, a former headman then in his late 70s. After we were served the usual fare of tea, biscuits, and homemade corn nuts, Netan Dorjee asked me what I wanted to know. I dug out my notebook and recorder and started asking him questions about Domkho-Morshing, the origins of Monpa clans, Buddhism in the region, and Tibetan rule. He patiently answered my questions for an hour or so, and then suddenly said, 'why don't you come for dinner tonight?' The others in the room chipped in, 'yes, yes, we can have a bonfire'. I was momentarily taken aback. Domkho-Morshing was a new area and my friends, whose company would have given me confidence to accept a stranger's dinner invitation, were not around. My natural inhibitions took over, and I politely refused, saying that I had another engagement that evening. Later, as we were leaving the house, Gombu told me I had made a mistake in saying no. People relaxed and became more garrulous after a drink or two, and I would have got a lot of information that way, he said. I realized that in my self-consciousness of being in a strange location I had missed out on a chance to establish rapport and earn the trust of informants in a new setting. Thankfully, Gombu relieved my disappointment by offering to share with me the stories his mother used to tell him.

Gombu claims to be the last of the Melongkharpas, and the last in a direct line of twelve generations, the heads of each of which he could name. The

tenth in this line was Gombu Hridar. The current Bhutanese queen mother is the offspring of one of the descendants of Gombu Hridar, who was also a reincarnation of Zhabdrung Rinpoche, the founder of the Bhutanese state. According to village lore, the queen had visited Domkho after hearing stories from her grandmother Dorjee Wangmo about her kinsmen and of the fabulous jewellery and property supposedly in the possession of the Melongkharpas of Domkho. As dusk closed in, we crouched around a flickering lantern in the electricity-less Inspection Bungalow, as Gombu narrated the following tale about how Domkho, the former seat of power of the Melongkharpas, came to be settled:

> Domkho [Domkhar village] was founded by Srongtsan Gampo's son Trangshidhar, who saw many places and finally settled in Domkho. When the Tibetan king heard of Trangshidar's growing power, he wanted to challenge him, and an army was called from Tibet. It took one year, carrying loads, clearing roads, and so on, and it camped in Buringbam for one month from whence it sent a message to Trangshidhar. Ultimately negotiations took place and the Tibetan army went back after constructing a *mane* [Buddhist stone wall] near Domkho.

Gombu's narrative traces recent descent from a Bhutanese lineage but original descent from Trangshidhar, who also figures in the narrative of Lhasey Tsangma. The spatial spread of his narrative links Tibet, Bhutan, and Mon, where Bhutan appears as the intermediary location between the places of origin (Tibet) and of eventual settlement (Mon).

Some historians and Tibetologists trace the origin of Monpas to east Bhutan and differentiate the Sharchokpa (easterners) from the Nyubchokpa (west Bhutanese), applying the former term to both the east Bhutanese and the southern and central Monpas, although not to the Monpas of Tawang. The British historian Michael Aris (1979a, 1979b), who produced the first systematic history of Bhutan using classical Tibetan sources, argues that Monpas may have been Bhutanese aboriginals who settled in Monyul after fleeing excessive taxation in eastern Bhutan. Aris (1979b) claims to have based his work on the writings of Lama Wanginder and refers to the Bapus of Domkho and Morshing in West Kameng as the original kings of Mon, who settled there as a result of being sandwiched between the advancing Tibetan army from the north and the Ahom rulers from the south.

Aris (2009) was deeply interested in the origin of not the Monpas but rather a lost dynasty of East Bhutan, which, he believed, were aboriginal to Bhutan. Francoise Pommaret (1994, 1999) also traces the origin of Monpas

to Bhutan and suggests that the Monpas of Arunachal Pradesh might have been the aboriginals of Bhutan who later migrated eastward. She makes several interesting suggestions regarding Monpa-Bhutanese ties: first, she implies that the Monpas do not constitute a self-contained, monolithic ethnicity but may have trans-border ethnic affiliations with certain groups of Bhutan, citing the example of the Merak-Sakten people in Bhutan who are called *brokpa* ('yak-herders') as well as 'Brah-mi', a term also applied to the Tawang Monpas; and second, she maintains that a group also known as Monpas in south central Bhutan do not have any obvious links with the Arunachali Monpas, for the former are recent converts to Buddhism.

A third Bhutan scholar, John Ardussi (2004), refutes the theory of the Bhutanese origins of Monpas and instead traces the original homeland of both the east Bhutanese and Monpas to Tibet, calling them descendants of the gDung lineage. Based on the similarity of the languages between the populations of East Bhutan and Monyul (collectively, termed the gDung lineage), Ardussi argues that the gDung lineage might not have been aboriginal to these areas but might have been driven there from their original seat in Yarlung in Tibet by the powerful Sakya rulers in the fourteenth century, following which they settled in eastern Bhutan and Mon. That is, the gDung in current Monyul and Bumthang in East Bhutan might have had origins in Yarlung, Tibet. Ardussi also argues against the temptation to view the core population of Bhutan as more or less fixed since antiquity, for the evidence points towards ongoing immigration and population movement during all periods (2004: 68).

A clarification offered by Lama Thupten Phuntsok of Tawang is interesting in this regard. He points out that a distinction between a Bhutanese and Tibetan ethnicity is a technical one, if we consider the crisscrossing migration routes and common instances of inter-marriage. According to him, 'the majority of Monpas have Tibetan origins. Earlier, Mon covered a vast region. Today, if you see the Mon areas, you could say that some of its people came from Bhutan. But earlier, there was no Bhutan.' By saying 'there was no Bhutan', the lama meant that Bhutan was not yet an independent political entity, since it was actually known as Lho Mon [southern Mon] in earlier times. Lama Phuntsok raises an interesting point: how can we say that Monpas have a Bhutanese origin when both Monpas and east Bhutanese originated in Tibet?

I do not suggest that Tibetan or Bhutanese connections can sum up the ancestry tale of the Monpas, who come from a hybrid stock with different sections migrating from different areas including, but not restricted to, Bhutan and Tibet. Migration seldom took place in a series of major waves,

instead occurring in several 'micro-migrations' (Huber 2012) or smaller processes of movement and resettlement in which trade also played a large role. According to oral traditions, many from the Bodo-Kachari groups living in Udalguri in the adjoining plains of Assam migrated to villages in central Monyul for purposes of trade. Sangja Gombu, a former Panchayat leader belonging to a high-ranking clan in Namshu village in Dirang, offered a tale about the Monpas' mixed heredity and commented that the Tsarmo clans of Namshu are of Kachari stock; they apparently came from Majbat in Assam. It is very likely that such trade and hosting relations resulted in marriage over the course of time.

Despite the multiple routes to the Monpas' roots, for the average person in Monyul, the original homeland of the Monpas is usually Tibet. Many Monpas in settlements near the Bhutan border, who claim common ancestry with east Bhutanese royal clans, also eventually trace their lineages to Tibet.

'Born here': Claiming indigenous space

> Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Taylor 1994: 28)

> [D]enial of recognition [...] does not represent an injustice solely because it constrains the subjects in their freedom for action or does them harm. Rather, such behavior is injurious because it impairs these persons in their positive understanding of self – an understanding acquired by inter-subjective means (Honneth 1992: 189).

If there are many in Monyul who speak of Tibetan origins, there are also those who, aware of the Chinese territorial claim, introduce boundaries, both physical and ethnic, between Tibet/Tibetan and Mon/Monpa. In the last decade, there has been an attempt to memorialise and institutionalise a king, Kala Wangpo, an epic figure in Monpa oral lore said to have ruled over Tawang in the olden days. Making a local history and claiming kinship with a local figure has become, for some, a way to carve out a space that is indigenous and thereby, to counter the thesis of transnational origins.

In this section, I show how some Monpas employ the legend of Kala Wangpo to strategically narrate indigenous origins. Kala Wangpo is projected as Monyul's own, a local historical figure indigenous to Monyul, from whose offspring the people of Monyul are descended. There has been a resurgence of

the popularity of this legend, with the story now included in local textbooks and the local staging of theatrical performances. Kala Wangpo's story is derived from a Tibetan *namthar* ('sacred biography') dating to the seventh century CE. It mentions Tana Mandralgang as the place from where King Kala Wangpo ruled. People believe that this is the same place where the present monastery of Gaden Namgyal Lhatse, popularly known as Tawang monastery, is situated. Many people in their 60s to 80s heard this story narrated by lamas at public gatherings, or from their parents or relatives.

Looking for an English translation of the Tibetan *namthar*, I found a copy of Cynthia Josayma's translation titled *Khandroma Bumo Drowa Sangmo Namthar* (Josayma and Tsonawa 2001: ix) in the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala. I also got the text of the play as performed in Monyul theatres in the Hindi script from Pema, my host in Bomdila. Both the Hindi script and Josayma's text are based on the opera script used by the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) in Dharamsala. The following is an abridged version of the folktale as given in Josayma's text.

> It is one thousand five hundred years after the Buddha had passed into Nirvana. Buddha's teachings are flourishing all over but there is a place called Mandralgang,[60] which has no religion, and which is rocked by fighting among the people who lived there. The goddess of wisdom, Yeshi Khandroma, decides to show them the way of Dharma [religion] by taking human form. She is born on earth as the daughter of a pious old couple and is called Drowa Sangmo. She grows up to be a beautiful young woman. Once when the king of Mandralgang Gyalpo Kala Wangpo is out hunting, his dog goes missing, and while searching for his dog, he comes across Drowa Sangmo, is smitten by her beauty and marries her. Drowa Sangmo introduces the people of the land to the Dharma, but soon after giving birth to a daughter Lhachik Kuntu Sangmo and a son Lhase Gyalpo Kuntu Legpa, she flies away to the heavens. The king has another wife, Hashang, a demoness in human form, who, wishing to usurp the kingdom, conspires to get the king's two children from his other marriage killed. She pretends to have a rare disease that can only be cured by eating the hearts of the children, and hires two executioners. The executioners take the children to the top of a high hill with the intent of throwing them down. They decide to spare the girl child but not the

60 In Monpa narrations, Mandralgang/Mandal Gang is identified as Tawang, although in some versions of this tale the king is said to have ruled from Mukto, the Monpa area south of Tawang (Nath 2005: 57).

> boy, who is, however, rescued by his mother, who is watching from the skies, and is carried away to Padmachen. The boy becomes the king of Padmachen and is eventually reunited with his sister. The evil demoness has, in the meantime, imprisoned the king, Kala Wangpo, and become queen of Mandralgang. The boy challenges her to battle, where he defeats and kills her. He releases his father from captivity, and thereafter, father and son return to Padmachen [and live happily ever after].

This is a folktale replete with religious symbolism that celebrates the triumph of good over evil. However, when we compare everyday Monpa renditions of the legend and the text of the Tibetan opera *Drowa Sangmo* as followed and performed by Tibetan opera troupes and Monpa theatre groups, noticeable shifts appear. The shift of some Monpa narrations leads to an additional element attaching to the religious character of the tale. These narrations project Kala Wangpo as a king whose line of descent affirms the Monpas' indigenous status. Here, I wish to focus on the disjunction between the public performance of the text and the individual retellings of the tale by Monpa narrators.

In March 2010, when I visited the office of the Deputy Director of School Education in Tawang, I found three monks huddled around a table inside one of the rooms, making notes and drawing sketches. Drugyal Lama, Yeshi Khawa, and Lhamo Tsering were Tibetan language teachers who were in town to design the Bhoti syllabus and illustrate textbooks for primary schools, and had instructions to design the syllabus keeping in mind local traditions. Apart from the usual content of the Bhoti textbooks used in Ladakh, the textbooks would include local folktales such as the story of Kala Wangpo. Yeshi Khawa began his narration of the legend by highlighting the glory and spread of the kingdom of Kala Wangpo:

> Gyalpo Kala Wangpo was a king who ruled over Tawang. His wife was Khandro Drowa Sangmo. He had two wives, the other was Dunmo Hashang. Two children were born to him: a girl and a boy. The boy was called Kuntu Lagpa, the other was called Lyachi Kuntu Sangmo. The king thought of the welfare of his people and his reign was peaceful. One of his wives, Dunmo Hashang, was a demon, who was against religion. She wanted to destroy the king and his family.

Here, it is not clear whether Gyalpo Kala Wangpo's kingdom stretched over Tawang alone or over all Mon, including the southern lowlands. Yeshi Khawa told me that whereas Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, and Monyul had been

collectively called Mon in the seventh century, 'today, Mon has become the personal name of West Kameng and Tawang'. In this narrator's version, Kala Wangpo is made into the central protagonist, while the Tibetan version gives Drowa Sangmo the central place. Drowa Sangmo enters at a later stage in this narrative. In contrast, note the prelude to the story of Drowa Sangmo from the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) website:

> There once was a place called Mandal Gang, which had no religion and which was rocked by fighting among the proud people who lived there. The wisdom Dakini, Yeshi Khadroma, observed this region and saw the suffering of its inhabitants. She decided to show them the path of Dharma. She was born on earth to the daughter of a pious old woman and was called Drowa Sangmo. (http://www.tibetanarts.org/lhamo_drowa.html accessed 11 March 2011).

In this prelude it is the religious significance of the story that is flagged, indicating that it is a tale about how religion came to a pagan place, Mandal Gang or Tana Mandralgang, where Kala Wangpo ruled. Kala Wangpo himself makes an unostentatious entry in the prelude thus: 'her husband, King Kala Wangpo is totally under her [the evil queen's] control.' Similarly, in Josayma's English translation of the Tibetan text (2001), the first two chapters are devoted to describing how the wisdom fairy Yeshi Khandroma chose to take birth in human form to save the world from degeneration. The king is introduced only in the third chapter, which describes his first encounter with Drowa Sangmo.

The advantage of the narrative shift in the Monpa version becomes evident when we note that Kala Wangpo is portrayed as a typical patriarchal figure, or the probable father of a Monpa lineage. Yeshi Khawa focused on the goodness of the king himself, while in the Tibetan text Kala Wangpo is depicted as a somewhat arrogant king who indulges in 'sinful' activities such as hunting animals. The Tibetan version attaches more significance to the theme of religious symbolism – the defeat of evil forces after severe trials and tribulations – represented by the celestial being Drowa Sangmo, the harbinger of Dharma, than to the patriarchal and patrilineal king figure.

In different Monpa narrations of the legend, local place names are frequently highlighted to add to the truth claim of the story. The mythic scope of the stories notwithstanding, they collapse temporal distance by marking present locations with the imprint of a past that appears to be within grasp. The evil queen is assigned a birthplace in Zemithang (in north Tawang), while the celestial queen is said to have hailed from Morshing (in

Kalaktang circle of West Kameng district). The battle between the king of Padmachen (Kala Wangpo's son) and the demoness is said to have taken place in Merak on the Monyul-Bhutan border. In some versions, people identify Thembang village in Dirang as Padmachen, and the fortifications around the village as remnants of the king's fortress (according to more recent history, these fortifications were erected to repel raids by outsiders on Thembang). The hill from which the children are hurled by the assassins is identified as Mukto hill, which falls in the Mukto circle in Tawang district, although some local people name Kitpi as the hill in question. All areas are unquestionably within Monyul.

In the Tibetan version by TIPA and Josayma (Josayma and Tsonawa 2001), on the other hand, Monpa place-names are almost wiped out: one section of the book simply notes that after escaping the clutches of the assassins for the first time the children spent some time wandering about in the jungles of East India.

In 2013, Lama Don, whom I mentioned earlier, had made it his mission to write a local version of the Kala Wangpo story by actually visiting all of the places mentioned above. By referring to places that are within Monyul, Monpa narrations of the legend construct Kala Wangpo as native to Monyul, and in doing so, reinstates the king figure from his dependent position as Drowa Zangmo's spouse to the central role as the father of the Monpa race. This kind of appropriation becomes necessary for the spatial appropriation of the legend. Thus, the narration of this particular legend is intended, first, to show that Kala Wangpo was indigenous to Monyul, and second, that Monpas are indigenous to Monyul. The story shifts from a religious tale to one about a local king.

On 21 November 2008, the ex-chief minister Dorjee Khandu inaugurated the Kala Wangpo Convention Center in Tawang, and in July 2010, a theatrical performance of the play was staged in Tawang in the newly constructed Convention Center. On 21-22 October 2014, a two-day seminar on Drowa Sangmo and Kala Wangpo was organized by the Department of Karmic and Adhyatmik Affairs (DoKAA) in Bomdila, West Kameng. The Khando Drowa Zangmo Nursing School and District Hospital was opened in Tawang in October 2016 (*The Dawnlit Post* 2016). There is clearly a conscious endeavour at the official and popular levels to appropriate Kala Wangpo as a heroic figure local to Monyul.

Still, Kala Wangpo is not a figure that can be territorially contained as Monpa local lore, for his story unfolds across a geographical stretch that crosses over into Bhutan. Performance of this legend is not confined to Monyul alone, but has also been popularised by the culture industry in

Bhutan. A feature film on Gyalpo Kala Wangpo has been made in Bhutan. Schools organise theatrical performances of the story and it is included in school textbooks written in Dzongkha, Bhutan's national language. In Tibet, too, traditional performances of Kala Wangpo's legend are common, and in Dharamsala the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts set up by the Tibetan community-in-exile regularly stages performances of the story of Drowa Sangmo. The legend of Kala Wangpo has merit and popularity for its emotive quotient in all Tibetan-influenced areas.

The memorialization of Kala Wangpo in Monyul can possibly be read as the natural quest of a marginalised people for a historical hero who is absorbed neither in the 'great tradition' of either Sanskritic Hinduism or Tibetan Buddhism but is independent of both. While Kala Wangpo is a figure in Tibetan oral traditions, he is far from being a central figure there. I argue that in contemporary Monpa discourse, Kala Wangpo has been chosen to mark a Monpa indigeneity. Even though Kala Wangpo ruled over contiguous stretches of the Indo-Tibetan borderlands, in contemporary local texts his primary identity has to be Monpa.

This is not the same as tribal groups from India claiming the indigenous slot in international conventions on indigeneity to gain global recognition for their demands for political sovereignty (Karlsson 2003). In my analysis, Monpas' claim of indigenous descent has less to do with international recognition or securing state-given material benefits: as Scheduled Tribes, they are already beneficiaries of affirmative action. Rather, it is a reaction to the regimes of recognition (Gordillo 2011) instituted by the modern nation-state, in which national cultures are territorially bound and one has to subscribe to such singular notions of culture to be recognised as a full national. The institutionalisation of Kala Wangpo as a local legend exposes this problem. It highlights the predicament of a border people who have to come up with local histories that suppress, rather than glorify, the multiple routes and tendencies which shaped their past and continue to do so in the present. Ambiguity is thus built into the act of institutionalising memory. This ambiguity is not simply the ambiguity of form that accrues from the multiple telling and interpretations of oral texts (Trawick 1988) or through semiotic excess – the plurality of meanings generated by any sign that resists interpretive closure (Mankekar 1999). It is also an ambiguity deriving from the liminal position of the narrators as denizens of a disputed border. Popular constructions of Kala Wangpo as an indigenous king bring to the fore the political negotiations that Monpas make to combat questions of transnational (non-national) origins.

The following remarks by an elderly lama serving in Tawang monastery are revealing: 'Kala Wangpo and Khandro Drowa Sangmo must have been progenitors of a *jati* [lineage, in this case]. There is no proof of this because in this king's time, there was no language, no Hindi, English, or even Monpa. People simply used to chant Om Mane Padme Hung, and fly prayer flags. There were no schools then'. Significantly, this lama was reluctant to name Tibet as the origin of the Monpa clans since he was aware of the Chinese claim. He refused to corroborate Gyalsey Tulku's account of migration in *The Clear Mirror of Monyul*, fearing that China might put pressure on India if it found out that somebody in India had written a book saying Monpas migrated from Tibet. He suggested that I should write that Monpas are neither from Tibet nor India, but are of indigenous origin – 'born here' – and that they were descended from the offspring of Kala Wangpo and Khando Drowa Sangmo, and have been living here since then.

This kind of genealogical assertion of indigeneity can be validated only if Kala Wangpo's kingdom is in Indian territory. Kala Wangpo is believed to have ruled at a time when Monyul was not part of Tibet (Aris 1979b; Nath 2005: 57): in his time, Kala Wangpo was neither Tibetan nor Indian but a native of Tawang. This makes the treatment of indigenous origins a more flexible issue, for if Kala Wangpo was native to Tawang, and Tawang is now part of India, it means that Monpas – his descendants who live in Tawang (and by extension in West Kameng) are native to India. By putting forward Kala Wangpo's kingdom as an indigenous space, this lama negotiates the contested arena of origins to offer a thesis of indigenous origins for the Monpas.

I encountered several other ways, besides tracing descent from Kala Wangpo, by which Monpas deflect the thesis of cross-border (implying foreign) origins. After recounting how the Tsangmo and Shukmo/Shu-mo clans of Seru were descended from Tibetan lineages, a former headman of Seru village added that even before the Tibetan migration there used to be Monpas in Mon areas. He traced the first wave of migration to the Pandava and Kaurava war in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, in which the defeated Kauravas fled to the northern side of India – which, he concluded, would have been the Mon areas. When prodded, he did not or could not cite any source for this story, saying that it was just hearsay.

The reference to the *Mahabharata* is not entirely hearsay, however: it has its source in some classical Sanskrit texts that mention that the Pandava princes Arjuna and Bhima tackled the armies on the north and the east respectively during the great war of conquest, and these enemies included the Kirāta, a term used to describe the mountain-dwelling people of the

Himalayas, believed to be of Sino-Tibetan origin. While some historians regard the Kirātas as one of ten tribes of the Bhota race who were allied with the Tibetans, who had their headquarters in Eastern Nepal (e.g., Barpujari 1990: 82), others refuse to identify the Kirātas with any present-day inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh on the basis of vague references (Blackburn 2004: 44). It is telling that the Indian section in the *Report* published jointly by the governments of China and India on the boundary question refers to epics to substantiate Indian claims over Monyul, and that a well-read Monpa man would also chose to bring this reference up while discussing origins.

In Nepal, activists of the Thangmi community claim indigenous belonging in India by dissociating themselves from Nepal through assertions that the Thangmi had in fact originally lived in India, but had then migrated to Nepal, from where they eventually returned to their point of origin in India (Shneiderman 2015). When the lama of Tawang makes a case for the indigenous descent of the Monpas from Kala Wangpo, or when the headman from Seru suggests indigenous origins for the Monpas, they manifest a similarly defensive attitude.

We may understand such invocations of indigeneity as a moral claim articulated in the idiom of descent by a marginal community to move beyond a present sense of weakness. Monpas are constitutionally recognised as Scheduled Tribes and are entitled to legal benefits. However, these entitlements are not sufficient in themselves for granting moral recognition; as inhabitants of a disputed border, Monpas are regarded as not wholly national – 'citizens, but not quite'. When applying for Scheduled Tribe certificates, which I discuss in a later chapter, Monpas signal toward the constitutional definition of indigeneity, defined by the Indian state as a legal category. In their strategic narration of a legend in which they position themselves as 'natives' of India, on the other hand, they supplement this legal category with the moral category of indigenous origins.

Nancy Fraser analytically distinguishes between demands for redistribution and demands for recognition: while the first stems from economic (class-based) disparities, the second stems from cultural alienation; while the first invites solutions in the political and economic sphere, the other requires transformations in the cultural valuation structure (2007). In the real world, however, political economic injustice and cultural injustice are frequently intertwined. For Fraser, redressing misrecognition means replacing institutionalised value patterns that impede attaining a parity of participation; that is, demands for positive recognition should also be seen as demands for procedural changes whereby recognition by the majority translates into legal safeguards.

While it is true that redistribution and recognition ought to mutually supplement one another, the second does not always follow from the first. Monpas are already recognised *de jure* as a Scheduled Tribe, but in a national-cultural schema they are misrecognised, denied moral recognition as full national subjects due to their inhabiting of a suspect territory. Therefore, when Monpas take recourse to a figure in legend to claim indigeneity, they seek, first, to supplement their legal citizenship with a moral citizenship deriving from a narrated indigeneity, and second, to reinvent themselves from a suspect population into a loyal subject population. Just as identity claims can be fashioned to secure favour according to an international concept of indigeneity, they can also be constructed to secure positive social recognition in a border-normative nationalist ideology. When a section of Monpas call themselves the offspring of a ruler who was indigenous to Mon, they seek sanction from the mythical past to claim national belonging in the present, invoking idioms of both blood (descent) and birth (native-born) in the process.

Tibet is not us: Marriage and denial

In 2009, coinciding with the period of my fieldwork, a section of the media went into overdrive in reporting China's renewed interest in Arunachal Pradesh, particularly the Mon areas. Many Monpas, including those claiming Tibetan origins, cautiously distanced themselves from the political question of Tibet. While narrating the Tibetan origins of his Bapu clan, Lama Tashi took care to mention an ancient boundary that existed between Tibet and Monyul even before the British delineated the current one: 'Lhasey Tsangma put a border between Mon and Tibet. He took a tree and planted in Tawang in a place called *Nye – Monyul Nye*, people there are called *Nye-pa. This is never found in books but heard about a lot'* (emphasis added). Accounts of such a boundary existing between Tibet and Monyul kept cropping up in other conversations, suggesting that many Monpas are not only conscious of, but also continually resist, allegations of being more Tibetan, and hence, by implication, somehow less Indian.

People repeatedly distanced their present from their past associations with Tibet. If at all there was kinship with Tibetans and connections of trade and rule, it belonged to a past that is now over. In this context the phrase '*pahle zamaane mein'* ('in the old days') takes on a heightened meaning. I argue that 'in the old days' acts as a caveat to stress the discontinuity between the past and present. 'In the old days' is not to be thought of in the same way as one would use the phrase 'once upon a time' in fairy tales, or even

'dream time' in Australian Aboriginal mythology. In my understanding, this phrase is a rhetorical device born of political contingency. It does not telescope time or bridge yesterday and today. Rather, it carves up time by erecting a temporal division between now and before in a way that makes the past distant and more inaccessible, for the past is suspect. This tension is especially noticeable in the defensive attitude of some Monpas discussing Monpa-Tibetan marriages.

Lumpo village in Zemithang administrative division is very close to the China border. Nawang Chotta, the headman of Lumpo, agrees that cross-border marriage probably occurred in the past. In Zemithang, on the Indian side, there are families who married members of the same clan from areas that are now in Tibet. When asked whether there had been marriage relations between his village and the adjacent Shou village (now in Tibet), he said, 'There was a woman from Shou who married and settled in Kyalengteng [a neighboring village] [...] in the old days. This happened long ago', he added for additional emphasis. Kesang, now in his 80s, also from Lumpo village, reminisced, 'There is somebody from Hyou [which falls on the Tibet side, now] who married and settled in Kyalengteng [on the Indian side]. All this happened *in the old days*' (emphasis added). When asked about marriage relations between people in the border villages in Tibet and Monyul, the headman of Seru village whom we earlier saw defending the thesis of the indigenous origins of the Monpas, replied that there had been instances but that they took place 'in the old days'.

These scraps of conversation carry force if one acquires a sense of the militarised landscape of the region and the 24-hour surveillance that its inhabitants are subjected to. In Tawang, Tibetan kinship is hard to deny. If distance determined marriage partners, then it was easier for people from Tawang to marry within their own area or with the cross-border Tibetan and Bhutanese populace than with people from the plains. While love often led to such marriages, clan endogamy also played a role. Clan endogamy combined with village exogamy to create a kind of cross-border marriage circuit, especially in Tawang. Marriage rules thus respected clan boundaries and not the modern boundaries of nations. The chances that migration and marriage between Monpas and Tibetans occurred are therefore much greater than the chances that they did not.

For a large number of Monpas, marrying Tibetans was and is actually quite a routine matter. Many Monpas have a Tibetan grandfather or grandmother living with them, or some uncle or granduncle who had migrated to Tibet and married there. Yeshe from Senge Dzong village told me the story of his father, who came down from Tibet at the age of fifteen as the orderly of

the lama deputed to look after Nye Gonpa in Senge, which was under the jurisdiction of the Tawang monastery. Since the lama was very popular, the people of Senge requested him to stay on after his three-year tenure was over. The lama and his orderly, Yeshe's father, settled down in Senge, and the latter married a local girl, who was Yeshe's mother.

Written records (Fürer-Haimendorf 1982) corroborate the oral history accounts of marriages between Monpas and Tibetans. Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, an anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in Arunachal Pradesh in 1980, observes that although there were social sanctions that restricted Monpas from marrying outside their community or social rank, high-ranking Monpas could marry Bhutanese and Tibetans of good standing. 'In recent years, some Monpa girls have married Nepalis but no Monpa man has so far married any complete outsider. Bhutanese and Tibetans do not fall in this category as they are Buddhists with similar customs' (Fürer-Haimendorf 1982: 160). People could marry fellow Buddhists, and it was common for people to marry between clan divisions within their own village or neighbouring village.

In the present period, Monyul offers a demographically mixed landscape, for the number of Monpas married to non-Monpas is high. Many Monpa men and women have found partners in Assamese, Bengalis, Punjabis, Oriyas, other Arunachalis, and especially Nepalis, who migrated for trade, military service, or other work. Despite the shift in marriage patterns, it does not mean that the earlier form of marriages no longer take place, only that they are not readily visible to the outsider. Since Monpas, Tibetans, and Bhutanese share common Buddhist names unmarked by ethnicity or nationality, marriages among these three groups often form a pattern that is not readily visible, and which are just not advertised to the outsider.

What is interesting is not that such marriages take place, but that sections of the public tend to shroud such marriages with the veil of secrecy and look uncomfortable talking about marriages with Tibetans, not least because Tibetans are marked as having the distinct political status as refugees. Where marriages between Monpas and other Indians do not threaten boundaries, for these occur between Indian citizens, marriage between Monpas and Tibetans disturb the political boundaries between citizen and refugee. From the perspective of the Indian nation-state, in light of China's rival claims over Monyul, it becomes more important to highlight the social boundaries and history of antagonistic relations between Monpas and Tibetans rather than the kinship ties between the two. The simple fact of association by marriage therefore becomes a matter of fear and contention in the light of Chinese territorial claims.

The matter of Tibetan refugees acquiring false identity documents meant for Monpas, which I discuss more fully in Chapter Five, has added another edge to the issue. Allegations abound of Tibetans who have used their influence and kinship connections with local Monpas to acquire identity documents and acquire benefits reserved for the latter category. Such allegations have added to the public discomfort to admitting close social ties between Monpas and Tibetans. Many Monpas do not readily volunteer the information that their family includes a Tibetan member, while some outright deny the fact that such marriages used to take place even in the past.

Although marriages between Tibetans and Monpas continue even today, by using the phrase 'in the old days', they can appear to be events of long ago: this phrasing introduces a break between the past, when Monpas may have married Tibetans, and the present, when they do not. This is in contrast to traditional narratives or myths where past and present temporalities are cyclically linked and the past and present mutually realize each other. In other words, when origins become contested, the carving up of time – which is the opposite of rhetorical cyclical time – becomes a rhetorical strategy. So, on the one hand, the narrative of Tibetan Buddhist preservation conjoins dispersed spaces in the Himalayas but on the other, the phrase 'in the old days' carves up time through a chronology of before and after. Temporal carving is a rhetorical device that succeeds in highlighting the pathos of present boundaries that divide spaces that were previously joined.

Denial of the past and narrations of indigeneity are border effects (Van Schendel 2005) that are not subversive in that they do not seek to circumvent or defy the border, but instead to accommodate it. They enable a spatial conception of Monyul as a region that can be as neatly separated from Tibetans in kinship aspects in the same way that the physical boundary separates the contiguous territories of Monyul and Tibet.

Mixed origins, hybrid spaces

> Tradition is about 'pastness.' And not just about the past. It is not a positive discourse but a reflective and reflexive one [...] It is a metadiscourse which allows the past to cease to be a 'scarce resource' and allows it to become [...] a renewable resource (Appadurai, Korom and Mills: 1991: 22).

Using origin myths to navigate the contested terrain of belonging and assert a particular identity is not peculiar to present-day Monyul. In colonial India, influenced by colonial racial constructs, many upper-caste Hindu groups

claimed Aryan ancestry in order to find greater affinity with the British rulers, and to create distance with forest or hill dwelling aboriginals at the bottom or outside the pale of the caste order (Guha 1998). In late nineteenth-century Assam, high-caste Hindu Assamese drew on colonial notions of race to trace their original migration from the Indo-Gangetic plains and thereby claim Aryan origins, while upper-class Muslims traced genealogies from the Persianized Gaurs of Bengal (Sharma 2011). Plenty of examples from Indian history show how, from ancient to modern times, marginalized peoples sought an illustrious lineage to either combat marginality or make their political status at par with an equivalent spiritual or social rank. Thus, after coming to power an individual belonging to a tribal group would claim descent from either a princely clan or a relatively higher caste. During the middle ages, it was common for many Hinduized ruling families to claim descent from a respectable ancestry.[61]

One way to interpret the Monpa narratives tracing their origins to Tibet is to see these as attempts to resist minority status by drawing connections to royalty. B.N. Jha, a professor of history in the Bomdila Government College, West Kameng who has lived and researched in Monyul for several decades now, considers Monpa attempts to trace Tibetan lineage as a result of Tibetan monastic rule. The spread of monastic education among the Monpas led to their familiarity with Tibetan genealogical traditions, and their need to associate with the ruling power led to genealogical legends and stories that claimed descent from royalty. Professor Jha also sees the tendency to trace Tibetan royal lineage as arising from the Monpas' interactions with princely clans, such as the Kachari Rajas, among neighbouring plainsmen, with whom they shared trading ties.[62]

I do not want to reduce the Monpa discourse of origins to a summary statement about a marginalized population's quest to acquire status and

61 For example, the Gurjara Pratiharas, believed to have come from Central Asia, represented themselves as the descendants of Lakshmana, the brother of king Ram in the epic *Ramayana*, and members of the Suryavamshi (solar) dynasty. In Assam, the kings of the Mlechchha dynasty, who ruled between the seventh and tenth century and are considered to be of aboriginal (implying tribal) origin, similarly claimed descent from Naraka, the legendary son of mother Earth and the god Vishnu and founder of an Aryan kingdom in Assam (Barpujari 1990: 96, 124). M.N. Srinivas's (1960) thesis of Sanskritization is about attempts by lower caste groups to move up in the caste hierarchy by emulating an upper caste or taking the latter as reference group. He provided examples of tribes that self-converted to the warrior Kshatriya caste when they acquired economic and political power. For example, the Noniyas, a Shudra caste, tried to raise their status to that of the higher ranked Cauhan Rajputs by emulating the latter's lifestyle.

62 According to Professor B.N. Jha, this must be especially the case with Monpas living south of Tawang such as those from the Thembang settlement and of Dirang and Kalaktang in central Monyul, who had closer interactions with the plainsmen (Personal communication, October 2009).

respectability. In invoking Tibetan connections, individual narrators are not merely telling the story of their origins, but are also retelling it with a specific aim in mind. Each teller of a narrative surely embellishes the basic story in order to better serve his or her interests in the given social context (Huber 2010: 323), but upwardly mobile aspirations form only one possible explanation for origin narratives. Further, the processes of identity production does not take place exclusively within the boundaries of single nation-states, or in a flat and undifferentiated world of global discourse or flow. Identity is produced within the frames of multiple nation-states, as well as in the movement between them (Shneiderman 2015).

I have used this chapter to show how narratives of trans-border origins, when consciously retold, can be read as an expression of transnational identification among a border community. Yet, Monpa discourse of origins is not a monolithic space, but instead a highly fractured one, veering away from Tibet toward Bhutan at times and folding back into an indigenous Indian space at others. Fragmented origins, in turn, are the tangible effects of the border dispute, which casts its constant shadow on Monpas' iterations, and Monpa origin stories reflect the tensions between the idea of a culturally homogenous nation and the empirical realities of transnational subjectivities.

Among the Monpas, memories and oral narratives of migration from Tibet sustain cross-border ties with Tibet, albeit in a discursive, fragmentary form rather than as actual physical movement – and at that too, accompanied by multiple acts of negotiation and compromise. In contemporary politics, narratives of Tibetan origins emphasize Monyul's transnational connections and form a complementary angle to the narrative of Tibetan Buddhist cultural preservation that draws, albeit selectively, on the region's Tibetan and Tibetan Buddhist past. The vanguard role of monks such as Gyalsey Tulku and Lama Tashi, and that of the BCPS led by T.G. Rinpoche, in crafting and disseminating written accounts of Monpa migration from Tibet, demonstrates that such endeavours are not random projects of different individuals but instead conform to a pattern. I argue that oral narratives of cross-border, and specifically Tibetan, origins are akin to 'structures of feeling', which are affective elements of consciousness and relationships (Williams 1977). Neither do these structures of feeling exist in solely allegorical fashion nor have they coagulated into a solid or readily visible form, but they do closely intersect with the narrative of Tibetan Buddhist cultural preservation. From this point of view, oral narratives of cross-border origin and migration give further shape to the emergent circuits of belonging that I call the Himalayan imagined geography.

4 Periphery

On the way to the India-China border post around 42 km from Tawang town, there is a lake called Tsho Nga Tser. According to popular memory, this lake was formed after an earthquake created a crater in land that was traditionally used as grazing pastures. *Tser* means 'grazing land', and since villagers used to pay *nga* ('five') coins to the owner of the land in exchange for the customary right to graze their cattle, the *tsho* ('lake') came to be known as Tsho Nga Tser. In 1996, Bollywood director Rakesh Roshan shot a Hindi film, *Koyla,* at this location, and since then the lake has become famous as Madhuri Lake after the popular actress Madhuri Dixit who acted in the film. As local army men, taxi drivers, and others serving the tourist business started referring to the lake as Madhuri Lake, the new name gradually upstaged the older; and a signboard with the name Madhuri Lake also appeared by the roadside (*The Telegraph*, 8 July 2009).

Many places in Monyul have similarly acquired Hindi names, or a Hindified pronunciation of local names, due to the settlement of mostly Hindi-speaking military populations from other parts of India. As army camps spring up, places get new names through arbitrary assignment. People say, for example, 'In Muna camp, there [allegedly] used to be a general called Muna and so they started calling it Muna.' The name sticks, and gradually the areas surrounding the army camp come to be called by the same name.

Places also get new names through the displacement of *bastis* ('hamlets') to newly-formed urban settlements. Entire hamlets are gradually evacuated as the population resettles in the encampments that develop by the side of the main road. For example, Rahung, a village in West Kameng originally located atop a hillock, was resettled alongside the road from Dirang to Bomdila when many of the villagers began to work as construction workers or suppliers for the army. A second army settlement, Jyoti Nagar ('the town of light'), adjoining Dirang town was previously called Nangrobchap ('behind the hill') and was part of Yewang village; when Yewang sold the land to the army, its name became Jyoti Nagar. In quite a few cases, the new names have also replaced the older place names in postal communication.

Namge Tsering, a former headman of Jang village who acted as guide to Indian army soldiers on several occasions, claims to have seen place names misspelled and misrepresented in army maps. He declares, 'Places are given Hindi pronunciations, altering the very names of the places'. Since Indian soldiers cannot easily pronounce Monpa place names with their Tibetan

spellings and phonetics, they tend to Hindify the pronunciation, leading to the distortion of the Tibetan names.

I identify the replacement of local Monpa toponyms or place names with Hindi toponyms by the Indian army as a postcolonial 'spatial strategy' (Deshpande 1995) meant to integrate peripheral and disputed state spaces into mainstream national spaces.[63] Renaming seeks to facilitate a seamless transition of the cultural landscape as one crosses from the Indian mainland into the hilly hinterland of Monyul. From the perspective of the Hindi-speaking soldiers stationed in Monyul, Hindi names may be particularly heart-warming as they symbolically create a 'home away from home'. A (North) Indian *jawan* ('foot-soldier') deployed to this peripheral corner of the country with no prospects of immediate transfer, who possibly arrives resigned to a bleak tenure away from the heartland, is not immediately assaulted by a sense of the foreign but instead assuaged by the ring of familiarity when he encounters Hindi place names such as *Jyoti Nagar* instead of the strange sounding (from the point of view of Hindi-speakers) Tibeto-Burman *Nagrobchap*. For such a soldier, a Hindi place name invokes associations that place it within a more familiar cultural topography.

While this view – of the soldier's homesickness being comforted by Hindi place-names – is not completely untrue, it depoliticizes the context. In my interpretation, Hindi renaming is not simply a sentimental act of recalling home through familiar markers created by soldiers in a strange land – not to mention that the strangeness or otherness of Monyul itself stems from a construct of the Indian self as North Indian. The imposition of Hindi names inscribes places considered to be sub-national with the seal of the nation,[64] marking them as a postcolonial hinterland open for nationalist appropriation. Unlike development, which is a more straightforward strategy of rule, renaming constitutes a covert approach to integration.

63 I use 'integration' instead of 'assimilation' to speak of nationalist co-option, because unlike 'assimilation', which borders on the denial of distinct cultural identities, 'integration' accepts differences among the 'parts' which are subsumed into the national 'whole' (Watson 2000). While integration, with a multicultural spirit, views India as a 'composite culture' where diversity is not annihilated but unified through fusion, it is impaired by the clause of allegiance to a national concept, which is primarily defined by the majority culture. 'Integration', although more nuanced than 'assimilation', also eventually makes demands for minority cultures to take on a subordinate existence, and assumes that these cultures should place their commitment to the national goal over and above their ethnic and religious allegiances.

64 Here I use the term 'sub-national' to express both potentially secessionist tendencies within the Indian nation (Baruah 1999) as well as the spaces that are not recognized as fully national, or that are marginal to the nation.

In 2009, T.G. Rinpoche publicly registered his grievance against renaming practices, saying to the press: 'How can we allow people from outside to change the name according to their whims just because some popular cine star shot a film in that location?' (*The Assam Tribune*, 14 July 2009). The Rinpoche was most critical of renaming practices, making it a point to raise this issue in all his public speeches. If renaming by the Indian army is a claim of possession made by the state on a peripheral border, then popular responses in favour of restoring old names are a counterclaim to space – together they constitute a politics of toponymy.

The politics around toponyms may be compared with the politics of repatriation. The repatriation of material culture among the Native American communities involves justifying rights over material heritage by tracing both membership in and lineage from the original, ancestral community – although, as the United States federal law NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection Act) shows, proving ownership is fraught with tensions and raises the impossible question of how far to trace origins to determine a rightful claim over a cultural property (Stutz 2009). The tracing, wresting, or granting of rightful ownership in the NAGPRA discourse is intertwined with the politics and history of Native American disprivilege in North America, moving back and forth between past denial and present justice, rather than with the objective establishment of true ownership; NAGPRA itself is the culmination of this process of political struggle. Just as repatriation is more than about actual ownership, but is also a political contest, so too are toponymic claims. Monpa assertions over place-names may be considered claims for the repatriation of non-material culture or intangible heritage.

Both during the Rinpoche's lifetime and after his death, several individuals and organizations have attempted to restore older place-names, unofficially as well as through official proposals. In 2017, when I revisited my field sites after a gap of four years, quite a few of the places that had been renamed seemed to have gotten their old names back, at least according to newly added road signs. The contest over place-names is a contest between different normative imaginations of what Monyul should be, which I illustrate in the following sections.

When legends die

On 14 April 2017, in a clear reaction to the Indian government's decision to allow the Dalai Lama to visit Tawang, which it considers disputed territory, China's Ministry of Civil Affairs issued a notice transcribing the names

of six places in Arunachal Pradesh in Chinese characters. It added that China's territorial claim over Arunachal Pradesh – which China calls South Tibet – is supported by clear historical evidence. Significantly, five of the places China renamed are located in Tawang district ('Concept note' 2017). Much before the Chinese took to changing the names of places in Arunachal Pradesh, however, the Indian army had already begun the process, not as official policy, but through the far more widespread act of renaming many local sites.

Names fix the character of places by narrating how a place came to be called that name, thereby naturalizing the connection between the signified (topography) and the signifier (name). They invest a place with a distinct character and identity through discursive effect (naming, iteration) and the power of representation. Renaming, therefore, co-opts the periphery by changing its textual signifiers. It is telling that the Sanskritic name of the state Arunachal Pradesh ('land of the rising sun'), which draws it into a pan-Indian cultural geography, was introduced only after the region became the subject of a border dispute.

Renaming also effaces stories, for each place-name has a narrative embedded in it. Places figure in Monpa tales of religious revelation and spiritual presence, as well as in 'secular' stories speaking of Tibetan rule, trade, or genealogical connections. Almost all the origin tales that I heard were very place-specific, never simply about *X* clan but about *X* clan of *Y* village. I came across myths about spiritual personages or magically endowed men who came from either Tibet or Bhutan and left their mark, and a name, on a particular place through their extraordinary deeds. Many village *gonpas* and *chortens* in Monyul encapsulate a story, and many caves and forests are identified through hand or footprints cast in stone, indicating the blessing they have received from the passage of a holy person.

I call stories that express a relation with particular places 'toponymic tales'. They do not exist in a decontextualized discursive space, but instead facilitate 'place-worlds' (Basso 1996) – worlds made by connecting the present and past through the medium of places or landscape. A named landscape, charged with historical significance through toponymic tales, encodes both a morality and a history. Place-names function as benevolent keepers of tradition by mnemonically recalling people to their customary ways and cautioning against transgressing traditional boundaries. They remind a people of who they are and where they come from.

One tale popular in all areas of Mon, from the settlements of Domkho in southern Monyul to Senge and Jang in northern Monyul, tells the story of the great mystic and tantric master Ngon Chin Yula, whom local people

referred to as Sangey ('god'). It is said that he once travelled from Jang in northern Monyul to Domkho in the southeast and was accompanied by a magical bison on his return journey. The magical creature performed different actions in each place it passed, causing those places to be named accordingly. In the different versions of the story that I heard, there were slight variations in details: for example, in some, the protagonist Ngon Chin is a healer while in others he is a yak-herder. But in each version, the particular events resulting in the place-names remain unvaried.

I heard this legend for the first time from the mother of Chomu, at whose house I stayed during a visit to Jang, one of the administrative sub-divisions of Tawang district. At that time, Chomu was pursuing a doctoral degree in history at Gauhati University in Assam, and was visiting home when I happened to meet her. *Ama* (the term by which I addressed Chomu's mother, referring to both mother and mother's sister) narrated the legend to me one evening when we were discussing the origins of the different lineages of Jang. As Ama listed the clans one by one, she mentioned that people of the Ngon Chin clan are known to be very proud because they were descended from a great man, Ngon Chin, and so began her tale (translated by Chomu):

> In Domkho Melongkhar, a rich boy dies. He was the only son of the house. The family heard that there was a man in Jang, Ngon Chin, who could revive the dead, and so they go to meet him there. Ngon Chin asks them how many days it was since the boy had died and they reply two days. So the next day at sunrise, Ngon Chin comes to Domkho [since he had powers, he could cover distances in a flash] and revives the boy. The family is very happy and wishes to reward him, but he asks only for the *zhop* [rock vessel in which *mand* ('wild bison') are given food]. Ngon Chin goes to the riverbed and using his magical powers makes a rope out of sand. He ties the *zhop* with the sand rope and tugs it thrice, saying 'get up'. In the place which is now called Mandlangphudung, the *zhop* turns into a *mand*, gets up and follows him [*Mand* is 'bison', *lang* is 'get up']. Wherever Ngon Chin passed with the bison, names became attached to places. For example, the place where the bison bellowed, came to be called *bir mang* [*Mand* is 'bison', *bir* is 'heavy sound']. When he reached what is today called Lish, the bison's weight suddenly became very heavy [*Lyu* means 'very heavy'], and hence was named *Lish*. In Melongkang, the bison wept, and hence it became Melongkang [*melong* is 'mirror']. At Nyumadung, the bison was sick [*nyu lok* means 'unwell'] and so the place name became Nyumadung. At Senge dzong, the bison felt better [*seng*

> means 'better'] and thus the place acquired its name. At Mandtsithong, he drank water [*tsi* is 'water', *thong* is 'drank'].
> At Sela pass, there are three *tsho* ['lakes']. One is called Myaktsikang/ Mandthungsa. It is believed that at the spot where the lakes stand, the bison wept, and a lake formed [*Myak tsi* means 'tear drops', *kang* is 'the place where tear drops fell']. At the Sela pass, the guardian of one of the lakes did not allow the bison to pass. Ngon Chin had two foolish sisters. He sent a message to them asking them to bring peace offerings for the guardian of the lake, but the persons carrying his message were envious of him, and so they distorted the message and told the sisters that their brother wanted them to bring radish, onion, and garlic, considered impure.
> When their brother saw them bringing these items, he resigned himself to going inside the lake and battling with the guardian of the lake. He told them that if the water of the lake boiled white like milk, it meant that he had won, but if it boiled red like blood, it meant that he had lost. After cautioning them not to act in haste, he dived in. After prolonged fighting, the lake's water started boiling like milk, and the sisters foolishly assuming that their brother had won, started clapping. But immediately afterwards, the lake water turned to boiling blood, indicating that their brother had lost the battle and died. At last, the right hand of their slain brother came out of the lake. [The story of Ngon Chin ends here but there still exists in Jang a clan called Ngon Chin which claims descent from him].

For *Ama*, this tale establishes the fact that there had once existed a man called Ngon Chin, and by referencing place-names that correspond to actual places today, *Ama* supported her genealogical thesis that there are descendants of Ngon Chin still living in Jang.

At Domkho village near the Monyul-Bhutan border, young Gombu, the college-educated village council chairman, whom I mentioned in Chapter Three, narrated a slightly different version of the same tale. His version both names and describes a landscape (Domkho) and a clan (Melongkhar) that has lost its earlier glory. Gombu, who claims to be the last of the Melongkhar clan, framed his account to highlight his kinship connections with the present Bhutanese queen mother, who also belongs to this clan. Since the legend speaks of the wealth of the Melongkhar family, it supports Gombu's claims of aristocratic privileges, although nothing material remains of the ancestral property except for the ruins of the Melongkhar house. By pointing out to me the exact spots where, for example, the vessel turned into the

bison or the bison had been tethered, Gombu attempted to authenticate the associations between the places in the story and the places before us.

The different versions of the Ngon Chin tale show that narratives and memory are not outside the individual or subjective, but are instead fashioned and reinvented through the narrator to send out specific messages. The narrative not only reflects but also helps create the subjectivities and political positioning of the narrator – recycling the past to suit the contingent circumstances of the present. The use of place-names in narratives creates a hyper-link between the present and the past so that individuals, while narrating stories, are able to make a temporal claim of continuity by attributing to present places something that transpired in the past.

Keith Basso describes how, in Apache territory, landscape is invested with subjective quality by the people: 'We *are*, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine' (1996: 7). He gives the example of a young girl who wore hair curlers to an Apache puberty ceremony where all women are supposed to come with their hair loose. While the girl was an object of disapproval, nobody said a word to her until a different gathering, when her grandmother narrated the tale of a forgetful Apache policeman who was punished for behaving too much like a white man to impress upon the girl the consequences of forgetting traditional ways. As the girl told Basso, every time she passed the place which had been indicated as the place where the policeman was born, she was forcefully reminded of, and revisited by the shame of, her transgression. Thus, Apache names of places are metaphors for entire morality tales that prescribe correct conduct. Long after the morality tale is narrated and over, its force continues to be disseminated by the physical markers of the landscape, such as trees, streams, or mountains, that are named in the tale and serve as reminders, through a metonymic tie to the tale, of what can befall a transgressor of the social and moral code. Basso puts it wonderfully: 'Mountains and *arroyos* step in symbolically for grandmothers and uncles' (1996: 60).

Ultimately, therefore, a named landscape gives a people an anchor for living or reliving group identity. They are 'chronotopes' (Bakhtin 1937, cited in Basso 1996: 62), or points in the geography of a community where time-space intersect – where time takes on flesh and space becomes charged with the enduring character of a people. Chronotopes exist as symbols of the community itself, as forces acting to shape members' images of themselves; as long as they persevere, they become agents for the transmission of collective memory. This does not mean that places, individuals, or communities have stable identities, but that these can be actively constructed by the act of remembering. For Gombu, the legend of Ngon Chin serves as an entry

point for broaching his aristocratic lineage, and the place-names in the narrative give legitimacy to his claim by grounding the memory in real places. The place-names in the legend thus function as chronotopes, which, in this particular example, Gombu uses as a means to assert his heritage by summoning the cultural repertoire embodied in them as a renewable resource for the construction of self.

In contrast, renaming effaces toponymic myths, and disconnects time and space to the extent that chronotopes lose their holistic quality. When Yeshi, the headman of Senge village, narrated the myth of Ngon Chin to me, he intended his narration to be a critique of the military's tendency to rename places. Yeshi described how most of the places originally named after the various deeds performed by Ngon Chin's bison in the myth have now been given new names by the Indian army. For example, *Melongkang* is now called *Sapper Camp* (the etymology of this word is not clear, although *sapper* in Assamese means 'low-lying'), and is an Indian army outpost. Similarly, *Mandthungsa* is called *Harighat* ('abode of the lord Krishna'). The identity of places given by the myth of Ngon Chin Yula is therefore obliterated through army instances of renaming.

How and why the army renames places varies according to location and context. In April 2019, I visited Ladakh and the Pathar Sahib Gurudwara, a popular Sikh place of worship. On our way back from the confluence of the Indus and Zanskar rivers, my partner and I decided to stop at the gurudwara for the delicious *langar* or free community meal it offers every day. The gurudwara hospitality services were completely managed by the members of the Indian army. There was a list with slots for different chores such as cleaning toilets and serving food. The food was simple and tasty, and we were moved by the untiring, selfless work done by members of the Sikh regiment to serve the daily stream of visitors who visited the gurudwara and partook of the *langar*. The story goes that this gurudwara was built to consecrate a marvellous feat by Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. Our local Ladakhi host and friends apprised us of a different story, however. Before the gurudwara was built, local stories spoke of another guru, Guru Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche, who propagated Buddhism in Tibet. He had apparently come to this region and was accosted by a demon whom he defeated. The story is remarkably similar to the one about Guru Nanak endorsed by the Indian army. Locals allege that when the Sikh regiment came to Leh and encountered the story of the Guru who vanquished a demon and saw the stone that bore the body imprint, they immediately assumed it was Guru Nanak and built a gurudwara in his name. A few years ago, this gurudwara shot into focus when its interiors

were vandalised, and Sikh relics were replaced with Buddhist ones. Kerstin Grothmann (Gohain and Grothmann 2015) recounts a similar contest between the tales of two gurus in Mechuka valley of Arunachal Pradesh, inhabited by the Membas, a branch of the Monpas who migrated there. Grothmann describes the Sikh cultural appropriation of Pema Shelphug cave – long known as a Buddhist pilgrimage spot in Mechuka because it was visited by Guru Rinpoche – and the site's gradual reinvention as a Sikh retreat at the instance of an army colonel, Dalvinder Singh Grewal. Evidently, the hand of the Indian army in renaming places is visible in several border areas across the Himalayas.

Several places in Monyul are now identified by Hindi names, many referring to figures from Hindu mythology or traditions popular in northern India. Locals give a ready list of places that have acquired Hindi names through the agency of the army. *Zhangmona*, a place below the Sela Pass between Tawang and Dirang, is now called *Arohan* ('ascent') by the army. A place called *Phugten* (local meaning is 'cave inside a rock') is now an army camp which goes by the name of *Baisakhi* ('spring' or 'spring festival'). A hill locally known as *Donglhai Gyapo* (*dong* means 'conch') after the resident deity, is now named as *Jinda Pahaar* (translates as 'living hill', but it could also be named after an army general called Jinda). *Wang-thok foh tser* is a place where there used to be a lot of tea trees and a cave by the side of the grazing ground. *Wangthok* in Tibetan means 'abundant *wang* ('tea trees')', and *foh*/*pho* means 'cave' and *tser* means 'grazing grounds'. This place is now called *Bhawani* (the name of a Hindu goddess). *Ngangma* is the original name of Rama camp, possibly named after the Hindu god Rama; *Dzong Tse* became Mohan Camp; and so on. One of the first Indian army outposts to be set up on the border, and also one of the first to have fallen to the Chinese military attack in 1962, is Dohola or Dhola Post (*dhola*/*dhaula* means 'pristine white' in Sanskrit, and could be derived from the name *Dhaulagiri*, one of the highest Himalayan peaks in Nepal); it was earlier known as *Tshih Doong* (*tsha* means 'water' or 'marshy land' and *doong* means 'ridge': therefore, 'marshy land over a ridge'). These new place names narrate a postcolonial military history or summon a Hindu mythological universe.

When older place-names in Monyul are replaced by new Hindi names, narratives are unmoored from their topographic anchor and places are a-historicized. Once old place names are changed or distorted or almost forgotten, the metonymic chain to the place is broken. Hindification overwrites a nationalist narrative onto the older toponymic narratives and aids in the nationalist transformation of Monyul.

In the name of the nation

> The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them (Said 1993).

In colonial India, places, roads, and institutions of learning were named after British monarchs or administrators. In postcolonial India, especially in the last couple of decades, many state governments have sought to change the colonial names of streets, monuments, institutions, public spots, natural landmarks, and even entire cities. In this case, renaming reverses the colonial story of humiliating rule by foreigners with the nationalist myth of a glorious past or triumphalist modernity. Such instances of renaming create a historical narrative for the nation; just as the length of one's genealogy confers prestige on an individual, the length of its history confers prestige on the nation by tracing its existence into the past (Tuan 1980). Renaming, then, is part of the project of constructing a nationalist memory – the (invented) oral lore of the national community.

In 1995, during the Narasimha Rao-led Congress government (1991-1996), the outer and inner circles of the circular Connaught Place, the famous central shopping plaza of Delhi, were renamed Indira Chowk and Rajiv Chowk, respectively, after Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, the daughter and grandson of India's first premier Jawaharlal Nehru, both of whom also held the post of prime minister at different times. The substitution of colonial names with names that indicate an Indian heritage or, as in the case of Rajiv Chowk, an Indian modernity, marks an attempt to write out or over colonial labels that mar the respectability of nationalist memory.[65] The fact that renaming places seldom arises from a collective desire but is generally done by the initiative of a handful of politicians who have the political and legal clout to decide such matters (Sen 2010) does not detract from its objective of nationalist memorialization.

Nativists or regionalists in various parts of India, similarly charged with a decolonizing aim, have successfully lobbied for the renaming of entire cities and states. Take, for instance, the attempt to rename the state of West Bengal with its Bengali equivalent, Bongo, or the renaming of Madras to

65 While national memory proposes an origin myth for the nation, commemorations, monuments, and memorial spaces that celebrate selected events and heroes of the past naturalize the memory by associating it with everyday life events (Azaryahu and Kellerman 1999) and are instrumental in how national memory is carried forth.

Chennai, or renaming Bombay to Mumbai after Mumba Devi, the patron goddess of the Koli fishermen, the earliest inhabitants of the city (Hansen 2001). In 2018, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, renamed several cities whose names had an Islamic connotation, giving them Hindi- or Sanskrit-based names. In both the nativist and the nationalist reasoning, renaming is the symbolic reinstating of the vernacular over the colonially given character of cities or urban sites.

However, in Monyul renaming is not an attempt to rewrite a colonial history, for colonialism followed a different trajectory here than in metropolitan areas. The British never named the places or roads of Monyul after colonial figures. In fact, the British were quite reluctant to make aggressive claims on Monyul during their rule for fear of offending the Tibetan authorities who had not yet entirely relinquished their *de facto* claims. Thus, the only names that were present at the time of decolonization were the local names. It is only since the 1950s, and especially after the 1962 Sino-Indian border war, that local places have rapidly been renamed with the arrival of a huge military population. Again, unlike in the metropolitan areas of India, where renaming is done through official legal procedures, in Monyul renaming has mostly been unofficial. However, many of the army-given names have now become the *de facto* postal addresses, not only marking them as fresh settlements but also making the stories and histories associated with the old names obsolete.

Colonial states tended to erase people and places in already-inhabited border regions so that the frontier could be reconstructed as a potential site for adventure and discovery (Tsing 2005). For example, nineteenth-century English colonialism in Ireland consisted of translating Gaelic-sounding names into their English equivalents, thereby transforming the Irish landscape into an Anglicised one (Friel 1980 *cited in* Reinares 2007). Although the policies of the British colonial government constructed Monyul as a buffer and dispensable frontier (Gohain 2020) and postcolonial renaming practices treat Monyul as a suspect frontier that has to be integrated, albeit as a peripheral national space, both approach the area with a similar frontier attitude. By adopting a frontier attitude toward Monyul, the postcolonial state is able to see the border zone as 'terra nullius' (Povinelli 2002): virgin territory that is amenable to intervention, and which may be explored, discovered, and settled.

The renaming of places, whether by politicians in the metropolis or by the military in the periphery, is undergirded by a *common nationalist spatial code,* which prescribes that place-names should be compatible with a nationalist memory. In the metropolis, renaming overwrites colonial

historiography to fix an indigenous Indian character to places. In Monyul, the Hindified toponyms, while not driven by the desire to symbolically rid a place of its colonial character, still have integrationist aims: Hindi names bring the region into the ambit of an Indian cultural nation through their iterative effect.

Settling the periphery

While renaming is a symbolic means of national integration through a resignification process, it is supported by collaborative material practices. Physical settlement of the Indian army in grazing lands, village community land, and public places in Monyul, as well as the construction of war memorials and temples, are the overtly physical or material methods of national integration. The two processes of renaming and resettling are simultaneously implicated in the nation-building moment. Together, they inscribe Monyul as a frontier to be settled.

The physical settlement of non-native populations in ambiguous state-spaces has been a common strategy for incorporating ambiguous areas into a state. Chinese frontier policies in the Yunnan region during the Qing dynastic period, for example, comprised of efforts to secure the allegiance of border populations, including through intermarriage with local women (Giersch 2006). In the pre-nation-state period, the emphasis was on ensuring loyalty of border peoples rather than enforcing a strict territoriality of the borders. In modern China, on the other hand, the emphasis is on the territorialization of marginal spaces. Since the 1950s, the Chinese state has sought to transform the landscape of Tibet through wasteland reclamation, terrace and irrigation canal construction, and agricultural cultivation. Since the 1990s, increased marketisation and the opening of private enterprises by Han Chinese migrants have changed the Tibetan landscape in a yet different way (Yeh 2013).

Additionally, modern states have become excessively concerned with physically mapping the borders, a phenomenon that Sankaran Krishna (1994) calls 'cartographic anxiety.' He cites an incident from 1992, when the Hindu nationalist party of India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), contemplated a plan of a nation-wide march, beginning at the southern extremity of India and ending in a flag-hoisting ceremony in Srinagar, the capital of disputed Kashmir, in the north. When bad weather prevented the march from taking place, the BJP leaders exhorted every Indian to draw a map of India on the soil nearest to them and plant a flag at the point representing Kashmir, the

subject of bitter disputes between India and Pakistan (Krishna 1994: 510). Driven by this sort of cartographic anxiety, states harness both physical acts of conquest and symbolic means of representation to assert control over frontier or sub-national spaces.[66]

Monyul is an area of intense surveillance with high priority on the security radar of the Indian government. In the wake of border hostilities with China, the Indian state deployed massive numbers of troops to the region. The first troops to be stationed at Tawang were the Assam Rifles, a paramilitary unit under the governor of Assam, functioning under the External Affairs ministry of India. In the months leading to the border war in 1961-1962, the Assam Rifles were supplemented by the armed forces, and a number of military outposts were set up with a headquarters in Tawang (Bhargava 1964: 69). Since then, there has been a gradual build-up of military settlements all over Arunachal Pradesh. Monyul especially is a highly militarised landscape. From Dirang onwards, driving up the main road to Tawang, one passes through several army camps: Rama Camp, Sapper Camp, Senge Camp, Mohan camp, Baisakhi Garrison, and after crossing Sela, the Nura Tuskers, and finally Bomber camp just before reaching Tawang. Baisakhi is by far the most sprawling, stretching for 15 km alongside the main road NH13, and with a helipad of its own.

Many Monpas objected when the first army settlements arose, disturbed by the army occupying vast stretches of their cultivated or cultivable land as well as pastureland. While the army needed flat surfaces to set up camps, there was frequently a discrepancy between the areas notified and those actually occupied and, further, the compensation given for the land that was taken was quite meagre (Chanda 1969). Disputes between local people and the army over land use continue today, as villagers often feel insufficiently compensated for the prime land that is taken over to serve as a military firing range. There are documented cases of land acquisition-related conflicts. I have one such document in my possession, which contains a complaint submitted by villagers of Seru Tso in 2012 alleging a lack of transparency in land dealings and collusion between the offices of the Deputy Commissioner and District Forest Officer, village headmen who signed away the land, and

66 An extreme comparison would be the inscription of a Zionist imaginative geography over Palestine's spaces, which consists of 'construct[ing] Palestine as a space empty of its native Arab population. A series of campaigns – at once political and military, economic and cultural – was waged to establish this imaginary as brute "facts on the ground"' (Gregory 2004: 78). To realize the dream of Eretz Israel (the 'Holy Land of Israel'), Zionists had to de-realize (or reduce in presence) Palestine, and they did this by actively resettling Jewish settlers in Arab landholdings, while legally dispossessing the Arab landowners.

Figure 10 Army camp at Bap Teng Kang on road to Zemithang, Tawang

army authorities. In their letter to the Deputy Commissioners, the villagers demand redressal for inadequate compensation, illegal constructions, and the unsanctioned use of village community land as residences or firing ranges by army regiments.

It must be noted, however, that the relations between the army and local people in Monyul have not taken the polarized form they have in some other parts of Northeast India. Imphal in Manipur, for example, was classified 'disturbed' by the Indian Government from 1980-2004 (this designation is still in place in other districts of the state). When any territory within the boundaries of India is declared 'disturbed' by either the Ministry of Home Affairs or the Governor of that state, extraordinary laws are allowed to be enacted in that territory (McDui-Ra 2016: 15, 18). Specifically, it enables the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 (AFSPA) to operate. The AFSPA permits any member of the Indian Armed Forces and Paramilitary ('armed forces' hereafter) to fire 'even to the causing of death' upon individuals acting in contravention of any law or order, carrying weapons (or anything capable of being used as a weapon), or assembling in a group of five or more people. Under the AFSPA, suspected persons can be detained for 24 hours with unlimited extensions/renewals, and members of the armed forces are permitted to enter any premises without a warrant (McDui-Ra 2016: 18). Residents of Imphal have had to suffer both armed extortions from underground militant groups as well as obstructions of mobility, everyday surveillance and harassment, chronic fear, and violence at the hands of the military, a predicament captured by Pankaj Butalia's documentary *Manipur Song* (2009).

In Monyul, despite the relative lack of conflict between the army and local people, the army's aggressive presence is visible everywhere. Army settlements located in former yak pastures have affected the local economy and ecology. Former lands marked as grazing pastures for yaks and sheep are now wholly occupied by the Indian army troops, who have bounded off these areas from the public. Lamenting the gradual shrinking of grazing lands, and the yak population, Lama Don remarked to me, 'Yaks provide a temperature meter; when the temperature falls, they come down, and when it rises, they go to upper lands. They do it on their own; there is no need to drive them. Nowadays, they can no longer go to the upper reaches, since the army *jawans* (soldiers) chase them off. Some even beat them. A few have also been lost. They are almost all gone.'

Yak-rearing used to be a good source of livelihood for the local people, because they are the traditional beasts of burden in the trans-Himalayan Buddhist economies as well as a wholesome food source.[67] Yak has a special kind of hoof that helps in mountain-climbing, and has been used as a pack animal in long-distance trade. Yak hair is used for making carpets, blankets, and special type of fans. Local people consume yak cheese as part of their diet, and also use it (fermented) as a seasoning in curries. Yak meat is also an important part of the protein intake for Monpas. Yak pastures are important, for yaks can never be fully domesticated and thrive only in the wild – and that too, in higher altitude areas, at heights of 9000 feet and above. In other words, the traditional landholdings at high altitudes for grazing these semi-domesticated creatures are necessary for the continuance of yak-husbandry practices. Depletion of land reserves for grazing yaks because of army occupation of traditional grazing pastures has affected the livelihood of the *brogpas*, as yak-herders are known. Now, not many people feel motivated to breed yak.[68]

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research has set up a national research centre on yak (NRCY) with an experimental yak farm at Nyukmadung, around 31 km from Dirang. Its headquarters are a few hundred feet from the main market, and whenever I went to Dirang, Phunchu Namje, who

67 According to people I spoke to at the National Research Center on Yak at Dirang, the stretch from Mongolia, China, Tibet, West Kameng and Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Ladakh, to Uttaranchal comprises the yak-belt. In fact, the yak might be a common thread in the former Buddhist civilizations linked by trade.

68 Arora (2010) has written about the coexistence of yaks and mines – leftovers of the India-China war – in the grazing fields of Sikkim, and the crisis in yak husbandry in a region floored by new commerce. She touches upon but does not fully analyze how this crisis is propelled by the clash between popular and state interests.

works as a technical officer at the NRCY, always arranged for me to stay in the institute's old guesthouse. The institute has an able staff of agricultural scientists, research scholars, and local employees, and organizes regular workshops and national as well as international conferences. It runs, among other projects, a milk processing unit to manufacture yak milk products; a wool processing unit to weave yak wool caps, mats, carpets, ropes, and belts; a veterinary polytechnic; and scientific cells to study transgenic animal production, genome mapping, and so on. While NCRY has contributed to yak conservation and research in the yak farm, it has not been able to salvage the local economy of the yak-herders.

Besides the physical settlement of personnel, the army has also transformed the local landscape through various war memorials. Following the India-China war of 1962, several war monuments were constructed on the Tezpur-Tawang main road. The most prominent one is the Tawang War Memorial, dedicated to the 2420 Indian servicemen who lost their lives in the 1962 India-China War. Built in the form of a large white *chorten* complete with prayer wheels, and housing Buddhist scriptures and idols, this monument makes concessions to Buddhist architectural styles and seeks to gain local sympathy for members of the national army through the appropriation of local cultural symbols. A stone inscription at the site of the monument also announces that this stupa has been blessed by the monks and local citizens of Tawang.

A second war memorial is Jaswant Garh in Nuranang, a shrine to the rifleman Jaswant Singh Rawat who gallantly battled Chinese troops until he fell to a bullet in the battle of 1962. In army lore, this memorial has been elevated to the ranks of a temple, and both junior and senior army men as well as civilians passing through this route stop to pay their respects at the shrine (Anand 2012: 230). While driving on the highway to Tawang, one frequently comes across stone pillars carrying eulogic inscriptions, such as, 'when you go home, tell them of us and say: for your tomorrow, we gave our today'.

War memorials aid the nationalization of space by injecting a new element of local history. If landscape is a text, war memorials, through their visible, visual impact and eulogies, establish the dominant narrative and edge out the other, older narratives, which then become muted, unspoken, or even invisible. War memorials further declare Monyul as a place where Indian soldiers battled to keep the nation's borders sacrosanct. Edicts and epitaphs praising fallen soldiers impress on both visitors and locals that this was a territory gained through bloodshed and martyrdom. They are therefore an endorsement of the state's ownership rights on a territory hard won.

In the context of Imphal in Manipur, Duncan McDui-Ra (2016: 66) observes how memorials point to a continued contestation over place between the Indian army and local people. Memorials built by the Indian army to commemorate the presence and contribution of the armed forces in the region compete for space with memorials constructed in memory of the heroes of the Manipuri resistance. These memorials, built by different groups, demonstrate the desire of different actors to produce and control memory in the city of Imphal.

Apart from war memorials, General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) has also built several Hindu temples on the main road connecting Tawang to the plains below, which now superimpose on the cultural geography of Monyul. The aura of these temples, dedicated to various gods and goddesses in the Hindu pantheon, is embellished with new legends. At a place called Dedza, on the road to Bomdila, there is a Nag Mandir or temple for the worship of the snake god. The story goes that the army engineer charged with building the road encountered various problems until finally the snake god appeared in a dream and instructed him to build the temple. Once the temple was built, the road construction went smoothly. T.G. Rinpoche once irately complained to me that Monpa children are more likely to know the name of the Hindu goddess Durga than the Buddhist deity Tara because of the numerous Hindu temples all over Monyul.

The erection of army settlements near or over old villages, the transplantation of entire hamlets to spots near the main road and their metamorphosis into roadside shanties, and the physical occupation of yak pastures by the army troops, especially in areas close to the border, are all processes that materially supplement the project of renaming. Many Monpas recognize that army occupation and renaming are connected practices, saying, 'wherever the army people have moved, they altered the place-names'.

Directing the tourist gaze

Sela Pass separates Tawang from Dirang. As per Tibetan phonetics, the name should be spelled 'Dzela'. Although the British had begun the name distortion by referring to it as Sela Pass (seemingly unable to pronounce *dz*), the name Sela has now acquired a reinvigorated popularity through a new legend, circulated by the Indian army. Even many younger Monpas do not know that the story of Sela replaced an old Monpa legend about *Dzela Khuchi*, a mountain god who resides on the pass. Earlier, whenever the god heard noise, he would cause rainfall. 'So one had to tread softly', said Yeshi

Tsering, the headman of Senge, a village that provides a direct view of the pass. 'All that has stopped now', he added.

The new legend that soldiers are fond of telling has origins in the 1962 India-China war. In 2008, en route to Tawang from Bomdila, I had stopped for tea at a small shed where one or two lonely, friendly sentries wait. They served us sweet, watery tea and enthusiastically showed us the memorial built in the name of Jaswant Singh Rawat, the Indian soldier who had died after his singlehanded combat with Chinese soldiers. The legend of the brave soldier has been embellished: in the soldiers' account, corroborated by our cab driver, Jaswant was assisted in his valiant battle by two local Monpa girls called Sela and Nura. Thus, in the army version of the story, Sela Pass is known after Sela, while Nuranang, where the Jaswant Garh war memorial is located, is named after Nura.

This is a popular story, and no one knows how it originated. Yeshi, the headman of Senge village, states that such stories are pure fabrications. I am not sure whether army records would validate the new version, and yet it circulates among tourists, taxi-drivers, and lonely soldiers stationed in misty outposts who further help to circulate the story among fresh tourists. Every new tourist who comes to the area takes back this legend as part of his/her travel memories and aids its further circulation. The new legend finds frequent mention in media reports as well as travelogues and travel journals published by visitors to this area. For example, one tourist writes:

> Jaswant Singh's saga of valour and sacrifice continues to serve as an inspiration to all army personnel posted in this sector. It is a fact that he alone killed more than 300 Chinese soldiers in the war. He was assisted by two girls of the local village named Nura and Sella, and they were also given due credit, and the pass was named after Sella, and the highway named after Nura. It is believed that the soul of this martyr still protects the whole of West Kameng from Chinese attacks (Dutta 2010).[69]

Like the renaming of Tsho Nga Tser as Madhuri Lake, the new legend of Sela Pass caters to a growing tourist industry. Tourism is not confined only to the official or circulated brochures, but also is composed of a complex of actors, including those who benefit from the 'ripple effects' of tourism, such as service providers of lodgings, food and beverages, handicrafts, local transportation, guides, shopping, entertainment, photography, etc.

69 See also Simmons (2007).

(Bezbaruah 2005). It is these latter groups that are responsible for the spread of new legends that have a pan-Indian appeal.

Ethnic tourism, less commercialized and insufficiently packaged in Arunachal Pradesh, is not the main attraction for domestic tourists. Ethnic tourism, which markets ethnic culture as the unique selling proposition (USP) of many marginal communities, frequently rests on the idea that these communities only have ethnicity, the Other of civilization, to sell: and ethnicity, in turn, presumes, some kind of isolated development, pristine wholeness, unspoiled nature, etc. While Arunachal Pradesh is also advertised for ethnic tourism, it is more commonly branded as an 'unexplored paradise' of scenic wonders, natural waterfalls, caves, lakes, and mountaintops. Eco-tourism – encouraging tourists to spend time in 'the lap of nature' – is fast gaining momentum in Arunachal Pradesh, also in keeping with this region's prevalent image as *terra incognita* (https://www.tripoto.com/trip/find-solace-in-the-lap-of-nature-at-this-bird-sanctuary-in-arunachal-pradesh-5a312cbcf271c; accessed 11 June 2019).[70]

Like the rest of Arunachal Pradesh, Monyul is seen as virgin territory, and as a place without culture, despite the syncretic mixing of Tibetan Buddhist traditions and pre-Buddhist Bon rituals that speaks of a long history of outside contact rather than an insulated evolutionary trajectory.[71] If the people of Arunachal Pradesh are at all seen to have 'history' (Wolf 1982), it is one that can be approached through pan-Indian legends – and indeed, tourist brochures of Arunachal Pradesh often promote only those historic ruins or sites that have mythological associations with the Indic culture, such as Malinithan or Parasuramkund in eastern Arunachal Pradesh (http://www.vedictoursindia.net/arunachal-pradesh.php; accessed 19 August 2016).

The domestic tourist is therefore tutored into developing a tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen 2011) that is already pre-formed in its expectations, and thwarted if these expectations are not met – much like that of the tourist in an African Safari tour who fails to spot a lion. In this context, the domestic tourist visiting Monyul is rather unimpressed by stories about a mountain god named Dzela or Tibetan grazing lands, which only resonate with local sensibilities. The same tourist, especially if hailing from sections influenced by the Hindi popular culture industry, would be more impressed by the

70 See also https://www.terra-incognita.travel/listing/india-all-india-birding-tours-himalaya-20-days; accessed 11 June 2019.

71 Tawang is an exception, for it is the site of the Tawang monastery, which attracts many domestic and international tourists. Many other monuments in Monyul, such as the Dirang Dzong fort in Dirang, lie neglected. It is only quite recently that the government has begun paying attention to renovating or restoring such historic sites.

implicit romance between an Indian army soldier and a local Monpa girl in the Jaswant Singh story than by the legend of a (g)rumbling mountain god.

Not surprisingly, the story of the soldier Jaswant and the local girl Sela greatly resembles the plot of a popular Bollywood film of the 1960s, *Haqeeqat* ('The Reality'). It is a war film set in Leh (Ladakh), on the northern frontier of India, during the India-China war of 1962, with a sub-plot of the romance between Bahadur Singh, an Indian soldier stationed there, and Angmo, a local Kashmiri girl who dies with him after a heroic battle. In her analysis of the film, anthropologist and China scholar Patricia Uberoi writes,

> As the Chinese and Indian armies confront each other in Ladakh, what is the role of the local population of Ladakhis? *Haqeeqat* presents Ladakh as a 'barren' frontier land where not a blade of grass can grow. In skeptical moments, the soldiers even doubt that it is worth fighting for. Insofar as this marginal zone is seen as peopled at all, its population is narratively *feminized* [...] The femininity of the border area is represented by Angmo (the daughter of a Kashmiri mother and Ladakhi father) [...] Captain Bahadur Singh, representing mainstream masculinity, promises Angmo redemption from liminality: he will take her with him to the glittering city of Delhi, and give her lovely clothes and jewels. The fantasy of her incorporation into the national society is not to be, however, for she perishes with Bahadur Singh on the front (Uberoi 2011: 333).

Uberoi's summary of the film's plot, presented in wonderfully vibrant language, brings out the structural similarities between Ladakh and Monyul, including the marginality of the two frontier areas and the impossibility of full nationalist incorporation because the nation needs its marginal Other for self-construction.

The film's plot is recycled in the legend of Sela and Jaswant Singh, narrating the Monyul frontier as a space that both desires incorporation into the national space and is given protection by the agents of nationalism, i.e., the Indian army. In fact, a Hindi film titled *72 hours: The martyr who never died*, which is based on the story of Jaswant Singh was released in 2019 (Sharma 2018). Romance is very much a contributing factor in the perpetuation of new legends. Similarly, the quality of romance is surely amplified in renaming a lake Madhuri, after the reigning Bollywood actress of the 1990s instead of sticking to the former, obscure Tibetan name Tsho Nga Tser. The romantic supplements do not feed a local thirst for the ingredients of external romances, but rather aid a tourism complex that brings in elements from mainstream Indian popular culture to lure domestic tourists to a far-flung

frontier. It is the latter to whom is sold the imaginative representation of Monyul as a marginal frontier with which the nation interacts as a protector. Tourists from other areas of India buy these images, acquiring the conviction that the frontier is not foreign but something they can *know* (identify) as being part of themselves via the story of the doomed Indian soldier who was aided by a frontier woman. The marriage of Hindi, Bollywood popular culture, and tourism thus serves the purpose of nationalism by mapping these spaces as marginal, to be sure, but also appropriable as *us* and *ours*.

It is a common state strategy to convert peripheral state spaces into zones of loyalty through the circulation of the national language. The Hindification of Monyul's places, however, is also a consequence of the spread, and use, of Hindi in Monyul's public spaces. The power of reification, whereby places appear to *be* what they are designated, does not simply stem from the personal authority of the person naming it – in this case, the Indian soldiers as agents of the Indian state (Bourdieu 1991), but also from the *recognition* granted to it by the members of the local community. In Monyul, the Hindification of the general landscape is one in which Monpas participate through the recognition they grant to Hindi.

In the national media, the prevalence of Hindi in Arunachal Pradesh is cited as the mark of the state's integration. In February 2008, during a period of renewed media hype about Chinese advances in Tawang, a national newspaper reported,

> Tawang, a bustling town of almost 10,000 people, looks more well-integrated into the Indian mainstream than most other eastern Himalayan towns like Darjeeling, Gangtok and Shillong. Hindi, which faces resistance in most of the eastern hills, has become the lingua franca of this frontier region. 'We have adopted Hindi because it is our national language and because the tribal groups here do not have a common language,' explains Tashi Wangchu. As the melodious tune of Ya Ali from Hindi movie Gangster wafts across Old Market Street, Dicky Dolma, a teenaged shopkeeper comments, 'We find ourselves close to India, the birthplace of Buddhism. We get everything, from food to education, from there [...] Here, the word Chinese is only associated with a particular cuisine' (Pradhan 2008).

Hindi has, however, become popular not simply because it fills a lacuna, but also through the systematic dissemination of Hindi serials and films aired on television and by the thriving market for Hindi audio and video discs. Several writers (Mankekar 1999; Nayar 2006) have discussed how the national

television and a film industry centred in Bollywood often becomes the media for disseminating official nationalist narratives.[72] Similarly, a television and Bollywood-centric Hindi popular culture have been instrumental in conditioning acceptance of Hindi in Monyul's public sphere.

Toponymic politics

Lumpo is one of the few villages in the Zemithang administrative block that is linked by motorable road. On days of heavy rain, driving there is risky, as car tires get stuck in the mud. Young Urgyen Drema guided me up to the house of Nawang Chotta, headman of Lumpo village. A storehouse of local knowledge, Nawang Chotta comes from a family of lamas and has two brothers living in monasteries. Belonging to a line of village priests who do not take the robe but perform rituals and ceremonies in villages – for which literacy in literary Tibetan is needed – he is fluent in reading and writing the language.

He informed me that Zemithang is actually a distortion of Zemathang – the region has traditionally been known as Pangchen-Zemathang. Zemathang means 'sand plain' (*Zema* means 'sand/desert', *thang* is 'plain'). Then he showed me a document containing a list of places with their old names and the legends associated with each place, which he had painstakingly drafted with the help of assistants in English. He generously offered to share a copy with me. Many places have had their names changed through army settlement, and Nawang Chotta decided to compile the legends to preserve them before they were permanently lost.

One narrative describes how the place Gyapa in Zemithang, considered to be the most remote corner of Tawang district, got its name: 'The word Gyapa in Monpa means the travelers who travel from one place to another for business. In ancient time, the travelers from Bhutan used to travel through this place to Tibet on business purpose and they take rest at this place for taking meals'. This narrative offers an image of Gyapa (and Zemithang) as the corridor for trans-Himalayan commerce, and constructs the illegitimacy of the army-given names by putting forth an alternative claim with regard to how the places

72 Nayar (2006), for example, shows how the 1960s, a period of nation-building and Nehruvian developmentalism and socialism in the political sphere, has its essence captured in films like *Hum Hindustani*, and in songs like '*chodo kal ki baatein, kal ki baat purani; naye daur mein likhenge, milkar nayi kahani, hum Hindustani*' ('Forget the yesterdays, lets script a new story together today, we are Indians').

really got their names. Note also the story of how *Wang-thok Foh Tsher* came to be called so: 'This is a place having a lot of *cheel* trees around with a cave by the side of grazing ground. The word, *Wang-thok* means abundant *wang* trees, *Foh* means cave and *tsher* means grazing place. Therefore, the place is called *Wang-thok Foh Tsher* and not as *Bhawani* [the army given name]'.

The fact that Nawang Chotta choose to compose this document in English clearly shows that his target is a wider audience beyond Monyul. It is a self-conscious act of place-making (Tuan 1980). Yi-Fu Tuan distinguishes between 'rooted-ness' and a 'sense of place', where the former is an unselfconscious, taken-for-granted attitude towards place, while a 'sense of place' is a self-conscious reflection on places. Tuan explains the difference between the two as the difference between 'knowing' and 'knowing about'. According to him, there is a knowing that is the result of familiarity through long residence, and a knowing that results from conscious effort; the latter 'knowing about' is conscious awareness, where the past is mined for support in the present (Tuan 1980: 6-8). Thus, to have a sense of place is to consciously articulate a particular place-identity. When individuals step back from the flow of their everyday lives and self-consciously attend to, or *dwell*, on place, they acquire a sense of their relationship to space. In doing so, they also dwell on themselves and their identities.

This kind of sense of place can be seen in the demand for ethnic or ancestral homelands, where the homeland is seen as mapping onto contemporary physical spaces that have existed since time immemorial. Philosopher Malpas gives the example of the discovery of one's aboriginal background as not only a return to home, but also acquiring a sense of place. This is not to reduce self-identity to place or memories of a place, but that 'having a sense of the past and the narratives that go with it, are tied to a sense of place and to identifiable localities' (Malpas 2004: 179). A sense of place or 'knowing about' does not consist only of restoring old buildings or sites, but also of the deliberate acts of creating and maintaining place through the medium of speech, gesture, rituals, and words (Tuan 1980: 8). A self-conscious sense of place is marked by a people's reflections on where they came from, and their networks or associations with the world (Basso 1996: 107; Tuan 1980).

To have a sense of past is to have a grasp of one's present and future in relation to the story of one's embodied activity within particular spaces. There is a close interconnection between subjectivity, narrativity, memory, and embodied spatialized activity. Memory is connected to place; since memory is articulated through narrativity, so the connection between memory and place is indicative of a parallel connection between place and narrative. In my understanding, the Monpa drive to restore place should

be read as an ideologically motivated act meant to construct places of difference. It is in line with Yi-Fu Tuans' notion of a sense of place: not a natural, spontaneous feeling but rather a self-conscious grasp of place as something to be claimed.

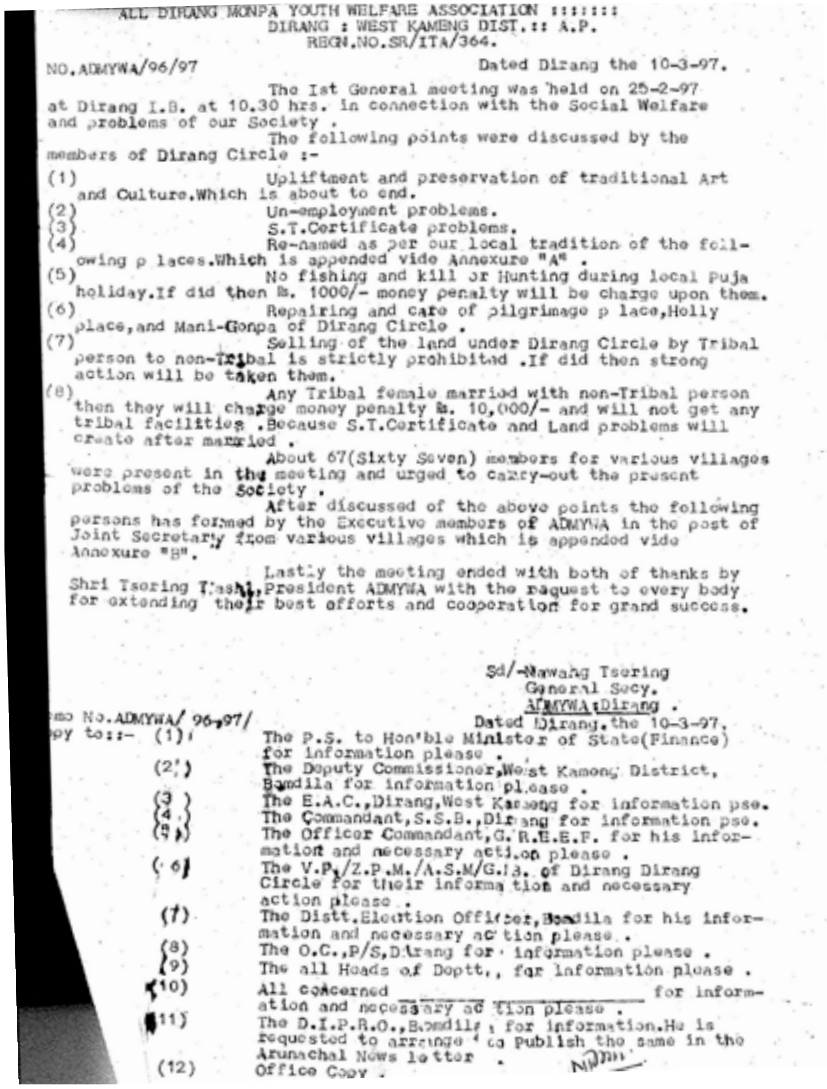
The All Dirang Monpa Youth Welfare Association (ADMYWA), a cultural organization based in Dirang town, had undertaken the task of documenting place names some years ago. In 1997, the organization produced a manifesto with a list of sixteen places from Bomdila to Tawang whose names have been changed. Now almost defunct, the ADMYWA was founded by contemporaries of T.G. Rinpoche. Phunchu Namje, the Vice President of the organization, my friend and guide in Dirang, introduced me to Nawang Tsering, the General Secretary of the organization.

The ADMYWA proposed, among other things, the restoration of the traditional names of these places. The following list, reproduced from their 1997 manifesto, presents on the left-hand side the names given by the army, and on the right-hand side the older names, but it inaccurately classifies the latter as 'new names' and the army names as 'old names'. (This shows the extent to which army-given names have become entrenched in public consciousness).

	Old name	*New name*
1	Salari	Namku
2	3 mile	Chanden
3	9 mile	Warjong/Tinkhai
4	14 mile	Darbu
5	Munna camp	Balung/Chonma
6	Panchavati	Tangchenmu
7	Lonihat	Larzab
8	Dirang village	Dirang dzong
9	Jyoti nagar	Nagrobjab
10	Kalachakra camp area	Karkha
11	Rama camp	Khamkhar
12	Kala pahar	Lungrom
13	Sapper camp	Melongkang
14	Mohan camp	Saktenkang
15	Baisakhi	Mantsathongmen
16	Hot water, Dirang	Khochi

The ADMYWA document is clearly a self-conscious act to preserve the characteristics of a Monyul that the members only knew through legend.

Figure 11 Manifesto of All Dirang Monpa Youth Welfare Association



ALL DIRANG MONPA YOUTH WELFARE ASSOCIATION :::::::
DIRANG : WEST KAMENG DIST.:: A.P.
REGN.NO.SR/ITA/364.

NO.ADMYWA/96/97 Dated Dirang the 10-3-97.

The Ist General meeting was held on 25-2-97 at Dirang I.B. at 10.30 hrs. in connection with the Social Welfare and problems of our Society .

The following points were discussed by the members of Dirang Circle :-

(1) Upliftment and preservation of traditional Art and Culture.Which is about to end.
(2) Un-employment problems.
(3) S.T.Certificate problems.
(4) Re-named as per our local tradition of the following p laces.Which is appended vide Annexure "A" .
(5) No fishing and kill or Hunting during local Puja holiday.If did then Rs. 1000/- money penalty will be charge upon them.
(6) Repairing and care of pilgrimage p lace,Holly place,and Mani-Gonpa of Dirang Circle .
(7) Selling of the land under Dirang Circle by Tribal person to non-Tribal is strictly prohibited .If did then strong action will be taken them.
(8) Any Tribal female married with non-Tribal person then they will charge money penalty Rs. 10,000/- and will not get any tribal facilities .Because S.T.Certificate and Land problems will create after married .

About 67(Sixty Seven) members for various villages were present in the meeting and urged to carry-out the present problems of the Society .

After discussed of the above points the following persons has formed by the Executive members of ADMYWA in the post of Joint Secretary from various villages which is appended vide Annexure "B".

Lastly the meeting ended with both of thanks by Shri Tsering Tashi,President ADMYWA with the request to every body for extending their best efforts and cooperation for grand success.

Sd/-Nawang Tsering
General Secy.
ADMYWA:Dirang .

mo No.ADMYWA/ 96-97/ Dated Dirang.the 10-3-97.
py to:- (1) The P.S. to Hon'ble Minister of State(Finance) for information please .
(2) The Deputy Commissioner,West Kameng District, Bomdila for information please .
(3) The E.A.C.,Dirang,West Kameng for information pse.
(4) The Commandant,S.S.B.,Dirang for information pse.
(5) The Officer Commandant,G.R.E.F. for his information and necessary action please .
(6) The V.P./Z.P.M./A.S.M/G.B. of Dirang Dirang Circle for their information and necessary action please .
(7) The Distt.Election Officer,Bomdila for his information and necessary action please .
(8) The O.C.,P/S,Dirang for information please .
(9) The all Heads of Deptt., for information please .
(10) All concerned _____ for information and necessary action please .
(11) The D.I.P.R.O.,Bomdila for information.He is requested to arrange to publish the same in the Arunachal News letter .
(12) Office Copy .

The ADMYWA members were people in their twenties in the 1990s; they are the generation currently in their late 40s or early 50s who were born in the aftermath of the 1962 boundary war and faced the brunt of the re-orientation from Tibet. They were the ones cut off from older memories and experiences and exposed to new networks through a Assamese/Hindi/Indian-based education and popular culture. This generation had no knowledge of the older place names, which by the 1990s had already been replaced by the

army-given names. To compile the list of Monpa/Tibetan names, the members of the ADMYWA had to consult with older Monpas who had first-hand experience of Tibetan rule and still retained those memories.

The ADMYWA members later increasingly got busy in their personal and professional lives, and could no longer be active in the organisation's activities. In 2009-2010, Phunchu Namje and Nawang Tsering, former office-bearers of the organization, seemed to have become reconciled to the entrenched nature of the Hindi names, but suggested a middle way out of the dilemma between preserving older names and retaining the post-colonial names by arguing that both should be simultaneously retained and used in postal communications.

A book on Tawang written by a Monpa bureaucrat (Norbu 2008) contains a list of 64 places whose names have been changed by the Indian army. A few of the new names have a military touch, such as Assam Rifle Colony (previously known as Pelri), named after the Assam Rifles. Although, the author of the book does not comment on the name changes besides listing the old and new names, the fact that he thinks it necessary to include the list in the appendix of his book, once again an English publication, also suggests a self-conscious act of place-making.

Most of those who are outspoken against Hindi renaming have been influenced by the ideas of T.G. Rinpoche. The Rinpoche had declared in a press interview: 'It makes no sense why the state government is allowing outsiders to name historical places, steeped in ancient religious Buddhist tradition [...] does not augur well for more than four lakh Buddhists living in the state' (*The Telegraph,* 8 July 2009).

On 6 June 2016, Jambey Wangdi, the present secretary of DoKAA (Department of Karmic and Adhyatmik Affairs), launched a pilot project to rechristen places with their original names, declaring, 'my predecessor T.G. Rinpoche had toiled restlessly for it and I am extremely pleased to be a part in materialising the project with vigorous assistance from the state government'. In a gathering that included Lama Thupten Phuntsok among others, Mr Wangdi helped raise hoardings on the Tawang Deputy Commissioner's office which carried the original name Zhitrotse, instead of the later Sanskritic name Tapovan Colony. He announced that similar projects of renaming were in the pipeline for West Kameng and Tawang districts (https://www.facebook.com/tawangvigilances/; accessed 2 June 2016). Indeed, during my trip in December 2017 I saw how this had been achieved to a large extent, with places regaining their Tibetan names. The old (or should I say re-renamed) names are written in Bhoti and English letters on green signboards alongside the road. But old habits die hard and people

Figure 12 Restoring old place names

still refer to the places by their military-given names. Shops and other establishments such as banks by the road still have signboards that carry the Hindi names in the address.

The protests against Hindi renaming, framed in the discourse of cultural preservation, make the cultural identity of the Monpas synonymous with their Tibetan Buddhist religious identity. While Hindi names fix Monyul in the essentialized image of a periphery to be integrated, it is contested by the alternative image of Monyul as a Tibtan Buddhist place, which also is essentialised in character.

Sacralising space

One morning Phurpa Lhamo, at whose house in Tawang I was staying as a paying guest, knocked on my door. Get ready, she said, the Tenma is giving blessings today, and after that we will have a picnic! I did not know much about the Tenma, but the prospect of a family picnic in the sunny outdoors, a typical recreation activity in the area after any group or public function, sent me hopping out of my warm bedclothes. After a quick cup of tea, Phurpa, her parents, two young daughters, and I bundled into a Maruti Van and made our way to a site near the Manjushree Orphanage just below the Tawang town. It was 3 April 2010.

The Tenma, I found out on our way, is an oracle from Dharamsala who is consulted by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. She had been flown in from Delhi

for a ceremony held to consecrate the Jigkyob Thondrol *stupa* to be built at a site located downhill from Tawang town. This site is revered as a sacred place, for it is believed to bear many physical marks of the Sixth Dalai Lama's presence. People report that the current Dalai Lama instructed the Monpa leaders to build a *stupa* at the site when he visited in November 2009. He felt that the history of the region should take into account the fact that it was the birthplace of the Sixth Dalai Lama. Neglected for a long time, the site became one of several places earmarked for restoration by the Arunachali government, then headed by the late Monpa chief minister Dorjee Khandu.

Throughout the entire speech-filled ceremony, the Tenma sat with lowered head on a dais amidst a scattering of ministers (Tsewang Dhondup), public personalities (one of whom is the current chief minister, Pema Khandu), monks (Guru Rinpoche, Lama Thupten Phuntsok), and army officers. After the ceremony was over and the Tenma had left, just as quietly with her gaze still lowered, we followed a lama who was narrating the myths and legends surrounding the site. The sixth Dalai Lama had been a precocious child in his childhood and had often been physically reprimanded by his parents and older siblings for being disobedient and wilful. We were shown a rock which bears the imprint of the young Dalai Lama's body where he had fallen after being struck by his sister.

The event was a public presentation of Monyul as a Tibetan Buddhist *gnas* ('sacred place'), consciously asserting a claim to Monyul's Tibetan Buddhist past and mapping Monyul as a Tibetan Buddhist sacred geography. The presence of the Tenma oracle, as a representative of the Tibetan government in Dharamsala, served to vindicate this claim. Phurpa Lhamo's father told me that the place would have great attraction for tourists after the *stupa* was built; according to rumour, around a thousand statues of Avalokiteshwara would be kept inside the stupa, as well as the scriptures and possessions of the sixth Dalai Lama. 'Later the roads would also improve', he told me, pointing to the sloping mud road that leads to the site.

Just as Hindi renaming is accompanied by the physical settlement of the army, imaginations of Monyul as a Buddhist place go beyond the discursive level to find expression in material practices. The struggle to restore place-names is therefore also accompanied by attempts to materially transform the spaces of Monyul. While the densely spread army settlements define Monyul as a military region and contested border, the visibly growing efforts to build and renovate monasteries, restore and reclaim sacred sites, and build institutes for Buddhist studies are revising the former image of Monyul as a militarised borderland. The symbolic and material go together in the production and contestation of place.

Figure 13 Plan of *stupa* to be built in memory of Sixth Dalai Lama, Tawang

There are growing trends to show that funds are now being invested in reinvigorating the Buddhist traditions in this region. This is reflected in the increasing drive to build monasteries, often with the aid of foreign (Japanese, Taiwanese, American) donations, to renovate ancient Buddhist monuments (e.g., Gorsam Chorten in Zemithang) and build new ones (e.g., the statue of Tara Devi in Lumla), to establish institutes for Buddhist learning or organizations for Buddhist culture preservation, and to revive the Bhoti script in educational and administrative circles. In 2017, when the Dalai Lama visited Monyul, he inaugurated two new constructions – the Dolma Lhakhang dedicated to Tara Devi in Lumla and the Thupsung Dhargyeling monastery in Dirang. These material constructions aid in further propagating the image of Monyul as a Buddhist cultural place – a Himalayan imagined geography with specifically Buddhist characteristics.

However, just as Hindi toponyms seek to fix Monyul in an essentialized image, the same is true of the Buddhist counter-image. The first essentialist view propagated by the Indian army is potentially being replaced by yet another essentialist view of Monyul as Tibetan Buddhist geography. The Indian social psychologist Ashis Nandy (2006) writes with regard to the name change of the south Indian city of Bangalore to a more decolonized Bengaluru, that the latter 'corrects and compensates for the sanitised, "de-vernacularised" image that Bangalore has always projected – first as a city of retired bureaucrats and army officers, then as the capital of Indian science, and now as a citadel of information technology.' However, Nandy cautions against the fixing of the spatial character that naming achieves. If the colonial Bangalore had superseded the vernacular character of Bengaluru by projecting it as only a technocratic city, then Bengaluru threatens to supersede all the images associated with Bangalore. Neither factor is desirable, for cities, like all spaces, are plural (Ibid.).

Identities and communities are not stable and fixed in practice; rather, they are characterized by multiple narratives and inherent instabilities (Hansen 2001). As described in the previous chapter, non-Monpas, non-Buddhists, and even some Buddhist Monpas profess discomfort with the idea of Mon as an exclusively Tibetan Buddhist place. Imaginations of Monyul not only emerge in fragmentary fashion, but are also internally fractured. Co-existing spaces of everyday practices prevent us from defining an authentic Buddhist space, even as the Buddhist imaginative geography allows us to denaturalize the dominant conception of Monyul as periphery.

5 Region

In the early days of my fieldwork in July 2007, I was taking a stroll through the Bomdila town market when I found the narrow road blocked by a procession of people shouting slogans and holding banners that said, 'Go Back, Refugees'. The next day, all the shops in the market remained closed. I probed, but drew blank responses from the shopkeepers and small traders, many of whom were Tibetans.[73] The moment I broached the refugee issue, a shadow would cross their faces. Later, well into my fieldwork, when I raised questions about a Tibetan refugee problem in front of MARDC supporters, they brushed aside my concerns, saying it was a politicized affair, a 'created' issue by politicians in Itanagar, which had been popular between 1994 and 2003.

Tibetan refugees are a contentious subject in the regional politics of Arunachal Pradesh. In this chapter, I show how the Tibetan refugee issue crystallises the tension between the Monpas' regional identity and their transnational affiliations, and introduces complications into the Himalayan imagined geography. The Monpas' Tibetan connections also highlight how region and religion exercise competing influences in Monyul, which, in turn, manifest in the complex relationship between local Monpa communities and their Tibetan neighbours. In this discussion of Tibetan refugees, I am not pointing to Dharamsala where the Tibetan government-in-exile in India is based, or any of the other locations where sizeable chunks of the Tibetan exile community are resettled; rather, I specifically look at Monpa-Tibetan relations in Monyul.

Since the 1990s, a strident Arunachali regional identity movement, led by students and based on an opposition between indigenous tribal groups and non-tribal outsiders, has led to refugees becoming a contentious subject in the regional politics of the state. Arunachal is a tribal majority state, with a 68 percent tribal population; out of 60 total seats in the state assembly, 59 are reserved for tribal representatives. Along with the other groups of Arunachal Pradesh, Monpas are constitutionally classified as a Scheduled Tribe (ST). In principle, ST status does not denote that they are original inhabitants of India, but is instead associated with a constitutionally enumerated category (Béteille 1998; Xaxa 1999) that is supposedly 'backward' in relation

73 In Tawang, many of the Tibetan refugees have stores in the market. This is true of many other places in Northeast India, where migrants, both old and new, concentrate in the commercial areas of cities. Usually, during agitations against immigrants, these areas become flashpoints of violence (McDui-Ra 2016: 51).

to other Indian communities, and therefore entitled to affirmative action benefits (http://tribal.nic.in/Content/DefinitionpRrofiles.aspx; accessed 3 October 2011).[74] Unlike other so-called 'backward' groups of central and western India, such as the Bhil, Gond, Santhal, or Munda, who self-represent as *Adivasi* – which translates as 'aborigine' – ST groups in Northeast India do not use the term *adivasi* for themselves.[75] Still, most of the time Scheduled Tribes in Northeast India have asserted an indigenous identity to claim priority of settlement *vis a vis* new settlers.

In postcolonial India, Monpas and Tibetans have two distinct political statuses, which are defined in mutual opposition to one another. Unlike the Monpas, who are Indian citizens, Tibetans are refugees – stateless people. After the Dalai Lama entered India in exile and was granted asylum on 31 March 1959, hundreds and thousands of Tibetans followed in his wake. While estimates of the number of Tibetan refugees settled in India vary according to different sources, a 2009 census carried out by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) estimated that 94,203 Tibetans live in exile in India (*Tibet's stateless nationals III*, 2016: 30). Although India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issues resident certificates to the descendants of Tibetans who arrived in India before 1979 through the office of the district superintendent of police in the locality where the individual resides.[76] Tibetans

74 According to Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, the President of India, in consultation with the particular state government, may identify tribal groups within the state who meet the criteria to be listed as a Scheduled Tribe. Criteria for identifying a tribe include features such as geographical isolation, simple technology and condition of living, general backwardness, the practice of animism, tribal language, physical features, etc. However, as these were neither properly formulated nor systematically applied, the list of Scheduled Tribes includes widely diverse populations across different regions (Xaxa 1999: 3589).
http://tribal.nic.in/Content/DefinitionpRrofiles.aspx (accessed 3 October 2011).

75 It must be noted that in the Indian context even the term *adivasi* does not approximate the international category of indigenous peoples, given that everybody migrated from somewhere at some point of time. The term *adivasi* appears to be a middle ground solution between colonial and global terms such as 'tribe' and 'indigenous' and more parochial terms of postcolonial India, such as *janajati* (translated as 'tribe' for lack of a better word) or *vanavasi* ('forest-dweller'). Further, it is confined to the Fifth Schedule areas and not to the Sixth Schedule areas of India (Chandra 2015: 122; see also Baviskar 2005). In Assam, tea tribes, the descendants of former indentured labourers from central India who were brought in to work on the tea gardens of Assam, call themselves *adivasi* but are not listed as Scheduled Tribes of Northeast India.

76 While the Dalai Lama himself entered India via Tawang, most Tibetans takes the easier route through Nepal during the winter months, when the extreme cold results in lax surveillance on the border posts. Once in Nepal, Tibetan refugees receive a card from the local UNCHR office after which they may depart to India, a procedure that takes anything between a week to several months. When they reach India after a three-day bus journey, they are registered by

are free to work and own property in India, but they do not enjoy the same rights as Indian citizens, such as formally participating in Indian electoral politics or holding an Indian passport. According to certain provisions of the Citizenship Act of 1955 in India, a section of Tibetans in India can apply for citizenship depending on the year of their birth, the Indian citizenship of one parent, or through naturalisation; in reality, though, these Tibetans find it very difficult to acquire documents to prove their status as citizens, and thus they remain foreigners in India ((*Tibet's stateless nationals III*, 2016: 58).

Given this, it is easy to assume that Monpas would have an opposed, even conflictual relation with Tibetans, as nationals to foreigners. Indeed, conventional migration theory, which constructs an opposition between immigrants and natives, commonly identifies the structural differences between citizens and refugees as the cause of friction between the two – for refugees, like migrants, are thought to always have allegiances to the home they left behind (Brettel and Hollifield 2000: 98, 99). However, many anthropologists (e.g., Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1994; Glick Schiller and Faist 2010) have begun to rethink this binary division between migrants and natives. Instead of taking the nation-state as the frame of analysis, Nancy Glick Schiller focuses on localities, where both migrants and native residents are situated at the confluence of regional, national, and global networks and flows. In my introductory chapter, I referred to this as a non-localist mode of analysis.

In the same mode, although not directly concerned with flows of capital, I pay attention to the regional, national, and transnational networks that structure 'local' inter-ethnic relations between Monpas and Tibetans in Monyul. The basic idea here is that the local is not a nested, neatly circumscribed unit, but instead interacts with historical and trans-regional, transnational forces. Within Monyul, Monpa-Tibetan relations cannot be fitted into stereotypical distinctions between indigenes and refugees because of the specific historical shifts, regional politics, and cross-border connections of this border region. Their present relations have been shaped by continuous bonds of religion and memories of harsh rule, as well as a *role inversion* in the present: Tibetans, the erstwhile powerful rulers of the Monpas, have become negatively marked in the citizen/non-citizen binary as the disempowered Other in an exclusivist regional ideology. Thus, while memories of a harsh Tibetan regime may encourage Monpas' participation in an anti-immigrant regional discourse, these negative memories are tempered in the present

Indian authorities at the border and then sent to the Tibetan Reception Center at McLeodganj, Dharamsala (Routray 2007).

context, where Monpas have rights to affirmative action benefits while their former rulers live in a condition of disenfranchisement amidst them. Besides, in relation to other communities of mainland India Monpas are themselves marginalized. Their acceptance of Tibetan refugees is further augmented by the fact that both groups recognize the Dalai Lama as their common spiritual leader. In 2019, when a state government led by a Monpa, Pema Khandu, was formed in Arunachal Pradesh, the Dalai Lama's office sent the new Chief Minister a congratulatory message. Both the religious and political leaders in Monyul maintain good relations with the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala; and this influences how the Monpas chose to view the Tibetan populations within Monyul today.

Prior to the administrative integration of Arunachal Pradesh, Monpas had less occasion to interact with groups in the eastern part of the state, compared to their interactions with neighbouring Tibetans or even their Assamese trade partners in the plains below. The different Monpa communities who distinguished amongst themselves in terms of territorial settlement nevertheless had a common term, 'Gidu'/'Lopa' to mark out non-Buddhist groups. In the older dominant Tibetan Buddhist civilizational scheme, before the rise of nation-states, and modern national identities, Tibetans could be Bodpa and the Bhutanese, Drukpa, and split by sectarian loyalties, and yet, the Monpas shared common ground with these groups as followers of the Buddhist religion. Plainsmen from adjoining territories were called *Nyera* or *Ki* (in southern Monyul), but they fell outside the circle divided between Buddhists and the Gidu/Lopa. The Tibetans may have been oppressive masters, but they were still more familiar than the groups that dominate the administrative circles in postcolonial Arunachal Pradesh. In everyday practice, non-Monpa Arunachali groups frequently club Monpas and Tibetans together because of the physiological and cultural similarities between the two groups.

In the postcolonial context, older divisions have been thrown askew, with Monpas and Gidus sharing a common Arunachali regional identity and Tibetans, as non-citizens, placed on the other side. However, ambiguities surround the Monpas' reception of a regional ideology premised on an indigenous-foreigner distinction. Historical and cultural differences with other Arunachali tribes and current marginalization within Arunachal Pradesh hinder their sense of regional belonging. The demand for a Mon Autonomous Region, led by the pro-Tibetan monastic section and petite bourgeoisie class in Monyul, is an outcome of this gap. Thus, past and present cross-border relations articulate with contemporary identities of region and state to give a peculiar cast to Monpa subjectivities, preventing a clear

delineation between the categories of Monpa-indigenous and Tibetan-foreigner. In this chapter, I explore the dynamics of region – Arunachal Pradesh – and religion – Tibetan Buddhism – in shaping the contours of the imagined geography.

Immigration and Arunachali regionalism

In 1994, an elected Member of Parliament (MP) from Arunachal Pradesh, Mr Nyodek Yonggam, who came from one of the dominant tribes in the state, raised the issue of refugees in the national parliament, urging the central government to arrange for their repatriation. I reproduce a part of his speech below:

> As the nation is aware, a large number of refugees, particularly Chakma and Hazong refugees from erstwhile east Pakistan were permitted to settle in Arunachal Pradesh under a temporary arrangement by the NEFA administration (now Arunachal Pradesh) and the Central Govt. on different occasions commencing from 1964-65. Likewise, a large number of Tibetan refugees have also been permitted to settle in Arunachal Pradesh [since] 1950. All these arrangements were made when there were no elected Governments in the State and the people of Arunachal Pradesh were quite ignorant on all these developments. As per the census conducted in 1990 the strength of refugees in Arunachal Pradesh is as under.
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | Chakma-Hazong | – | 30000 |
> | Tibetan | – | 6500 |
> | Yobin | – | 1500 |
>
> Now the number of refugees has increased to more than one lakh. The presence of such a large number of refugees in Arunachal Pradesh is causing social, economic and political tensions. They have outnumbered the indigenous population and have occupied all the fertile lands. Such developments have been disturbing the minds of youth and leaders of A.P. (Yonggam 1994).

Mr. Yonggam here expresses what Myron Weiner (1978) famously terms the 'sons of the soil' sentiment, referring to conflict between indigenous people and migrants over economic and natural resources, such as land, jobs, educational and employment quotas, and other politically bestowed benefits in a context where opportunities are perceived to be scarce.

In Northeast India, protests against 'infiltration' by immigrants has constituted a prime mover of the region's politics, even before India's independence (Van Schendel 2005: 195). During the anti-colonial struggle, when avowing national, rather than regional, identity was paramount, political leaders in the undivided state of Assam – which later splintered into five of the seven Northeastern states – expressed concerns about indigenous populations being outnumbered by migrants from other parts of India.

The Assam Movement (1979-1985) was the first movement in Northeast India built on an anti-foreigner discourse. Spearheaded by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), the movement called for the deportation of Bangladeshi nationals. The students, who perceived a threat to employment opportunities from immigrants, were firmly supported both by a peasantry upset by demographic pressures on land and an urban middle class fired up with sentiments of linguistic nationalism.

In Arunachal Pradesh, a similar student-led movement against the influx of refugees has steadily been on the rise since the 1970s (Prasad 2007). The first students' union was set up by students of the Adi and Mishing tribes, who were beneficiaries of Christian missionary education. During this early phase, the students' union was an elite body mainly operating through petitions. It was later renamed the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU). Developing in parallel with, and drawing inspiration from, the Assam Movement, from 1979 the AAPSU also began demanding the detection of foreign nationals and their deportation from the state. In a meeting held on 26 August 1981, the AAPSU took a resolution that refugees including Chakmas, Hajongs, and Tibetans should be immediately removed from Arunachal Pradesh, as their presence posed both security and demographic challenges. From 1994, the AAPSU intensified their agitation, with a delegation of around 400 students marching to Delhi to demand the deportation of illegal foreigners. The 'Refugee go Back' movement launched by the AAPSU gained traction after a 'people's referendum rally' held in the capital Itanagar on 20 September 1995, in which leaders of all political parties of the state were also present. Throughout these developments, the government of Arunachal Pradesh has supported the students' stance against refugees.

In the neighbouring state of Assam, large-scale labour migrations were started by the colonial state, with workers being brought in from central and east India to work on the newly growing tea, oil, and coal industries in the nineteenth century, as well as to cultivate jute for Calcutta's jute mills. In Arunachal Pradesh, however, the colonial inner line policy which continues till today, restricts entry even to domestic migrants, and refugee settlement here has been sponsored by the postcolonial state.

With the mass exodus of people from Tibet following the flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959, in the 1960s the government of India requested various state governments to donate lands to the refugees (Routray 2007: 81). Karnataka was the first to respond, giving land in Bylakuppe for the first Tibetan settlement, and later other states also complied. The Indian government resettled a small number of Tibetan refugees in the Lohit and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The settlements were designed in a 'non-assimilative' way to enable the Tibetans to preserve their cultural ways and religious institutions (Norbu 2003).

A few years later, in 1964, a large number of Buddhist Chakma and Hajong tribes displaced from Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) were relocated to Arunachal Pradesh (Verghese 2004: 225-226).[77] The government of India decided on Arunachal Pradesh as one of the primary refugee rehabilitation sites due to the low population density of the state as well as the proximity of other Tibetan Buddhist and Theravada Buddhist groups in the region.

A main cause of discontent among Arunachali regionalists is that the central government manoeuvred the resettlements at a time when Arunachal was a Union Territory, without consulting either the local people or the representatives of the region, who resented these intrusions from the start. Forced by public pressure, on 29 September 1980 the Arunachali government issued a circular directing all deputy commissioners to terminate the employment of Chakmas, Hajongs, and Tibetans until further decisions could be taken in this regard (Routray 2007: 86). The general perception among Arunachalis is that, while Tibetan refugees are inoffensive, they are

77 The Chakmas and Hajongs are ethnic minorities who formerly lived in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of undivided Bengal, which became part of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) during Partition. In the years following India's partition, the Buddhist Chakmas and Hindu Hajongs faced religious discrimination in East Pakistan. Many Chakmas were also displaced by the building of the Kaptai dam in the Chittagong Hills Tracts district of Bangladesh. Although all the Chakma and Hajong populations who settled in other parts of Northeast India were given citizenship, those in Arunachal Pradesh are considered refugees (Prasad 2007). On 17 September 2015, the Supreme Court directed the Arunachal Pradesh government to give citizenship to around 7000 Chakma-Hajongs who had settled in India between 1964 and 1969. The Union Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju said that the court order would dilute the constitutional safeguards of the people of the state. The AAPSU has opposed the Supreme Court order and resumed agitations against refugees in Itanagar. The AAPSU general secretary Biru Nasi says, 'We are not opposed to the SC granting them citizenship. What we have been opposing is the decision to allow them to settle down in our land as it indirectly makes them Arunachalis [...] outsiders should not be allowed to buy our land.' (Pisharoty 2015)

very industrious and have a good business sense, which helps them prosper more than the locals (Verghese 2004: 228). In other regions of India where Tibetan refugees were resettled, reports of inter-ethnic conflict between Tibetans and local Indians have similarly been linked to issues relating to competition for resources (Routray 2007).

In Himachal Pradesh, for instance, local resentment against Tibetan settlers is fanned by land alienation cases, in which refugees are thought to illegally acquire land owned by the indigenous inhabitants, violating the Himachal Pradesh Tenancy Act, which stipulates that only Himachalis can buy land in the state (Routray 2007: 85). Because they are perceived to have prospered by usurping rights that are legitimately meant only for the indigenous populations, Tibetans have become targets of mob violence. In the early 1960s and 70s, there was plenty of room for refugees to work in the agricultural and handicraft settlements allotted by the Indian government. However, as more and more refugees make their way from Tibet to India without the government of India allotting new lands for their resettlement, many of the fresh refugees are crowding the marketplaces of Dharamsala, leading to increasing tensions between local people and the refugees. My own observations in Dharamsala during a visit in June 2009 impressed upon me the extent of overcrowding in this small hill town, which has resulted in problems of water and electricity supply.

In Arunachal Pradesh, friction between Tibetan refugees and local communities has erupted into violence on a few occasions, and some activists of the AAPSU were allegedly beaten up by Tibetan refugees in a Tawang village in September 1994 (Verghese 2004: 228). In 1994, when the anti-refugee agitation in Arunachal Pradesh was at its heights, the AAPSU president issued strong demands to eject Tibetan and Chakma refugees and threatened to disrupt the forthcoming state assembly elections if photo identity cards were not issued to citizen voters. The anti-immigrant sentiment among Arunachali youth has led several student organizations to demand that the state impose anti-refugee measures. Anti-refugee sentiment is also frequently expressed in public and media spaces, and by state representatives from Arunachal Pradesh like Mr. Nyodek Yonggam, who speak in the same language as the student body with respect to immigrants. Here, as in other anti-foreigner movements in Northeast India, priority of settlement constitutes the terms on which people self-identifying as indigenes assert their difference from later settlers; each time battle lines are drawn between locals and immigrants, older residents take on the indigenous slot *vis a vis* the new migrants.

However, who is and is not indigenous is a fraught issue, involving a selective invention and inventory of tradition through which constructions of indigenous and foreign in the present are traced back to the past. Many writers (Devalle 1992; Tambiah 1992) have noted how traditions of hostility toward outsiders frequently metamorphose into exclusivist ethnicity/nationality discourses in the postcolonial context. In the context of Northeast India, 'sons of the soil' movements have also rested on tracing indigenous-foreigner distinctions to the past through a variety of discursive and constitutional procedures (Weiner 1978).

The anti-refugee discourse in Arunachal Pradesh, articulated in the statement of the parliamentary representative from Arunachal Pradesh, Mr Yonggam, posits an indigenous-foreigner dichotomy in similar terms. It implies that pre-1959 (in the case of Tibetan refugees) and pre-1964 (in the case of Chakma and Hajong refugees) Arunachal Pradesh had been an exclusively indigenous territory; it is on these grounds that the AAPSU demands the repatriation of refugees from Arunachal Pradesh to their pre-migration homelands. By casting Arunachal Pradesh as a homogeneous whole that has been ruptured by the presence of non-indigenous elements, such statements erect a temporal division between an indigenous past and an immigrant present.

However, even a slight shifting of scale disturbs the narrative of this statement. The postcolonial identity of Arunachal Pradesh is amorphous, comprised of frontier areas. This plural identity was recognized in its initial designation as the North East Frontier *Tracts*. Although it was subsequently renamed the North East Frontier Agency after independence, and later Arunachal Pradesh, its regional unity is a political unity in which a singular narrative of an indigenous 'us' versus an outsider 'them' cannot be sustained. This is particularly the case if we shift scale from the regional unit of Arunachal Pradesh to border areas such as Monyul. In the latter, the indigenous-foreign distinction is not so easy to maintain, considering that traditionally there was a continuous, uninhibited flow of Tibetans to this region – some even choosing to settle there – until as late as 1951.

I do not suggest that previously there were no boundaries between Monpas and Tibetans, but rather that rule, religion, and kinship created certain ties between the two which cut across ethnic boundaries. In the postcolonial context, where divisions are based on territory and political boundaries with their accompanying rights and obligations, those who were earlier 'outside' are now 'inside'. In the following sections, I show how historical connections between the Monpas and Tibetans as well as present contingencies inform the former's attitude towards Tibetans.

Remembrance and reconciliation: Coming to terms with Tibetan rule

As I described previously, the various areas of Monyul in western Arunachal Pradesh became part of the Tibetan state in 1681, following which the people of the region started paying taxes to the Tibetan government (Aris 1979b: 51). Many older people in Monyul testify that Tibetan rule was highly unpopular. Elderly people throughout the region remember that the lamas were quick to inflict corporal punishment on any errant villager. What kind of lamas were they if they were so cruel, one old man from Yewang village in Dirang questioned. He was quick to praise the Indian government and said that life was much better now.

On the other hand, Tashi Khandu, the former headman of Kitpi, a village in Tawang district about 23 km from Tawang town, whom I first met in 2008 and later a couple more times, did not think that life during the Tibetan period was that bad: 'Everybody had their share of food'. But he agreed that Tibetans were present in large numbers then. According to him, 'Tibet seems a bit less now. Earlier, Tibetan officers used to reside here for three months at a stretch. Then all the villagers had to work at grinding wheat, making *chang* [local fermented beer]. They did give us some hardships, made us work, did not pay us. There was an official at Gyanghar Dzong, who was like our DC [Deputy Commissioner] today'.

Netan Dorjee of Morshing village, West Kameng was more critical. 'Tibetan people would inform two-three days beforehand, and nine people would come for taxes. […] They had documents stating which village had to carry how much *threi* [tax in food grains]. Local people had to carry loads, cook food for these nine people. Punishment consisted of beatings. If roads were not constructed in time, there would be fines, sticks and confiscation of cows. There was a lot of harassment. Locals had to produce fodder for the cows and horses. If the bells did not tinkle (indicating that the animals were fed and content) punishments would be given out.

Both these statements are by men who were in their 70s and 80s during the time of the interviews. At Kitpi village, I also visited Yangchin Chomu, a Monpa woman who was 70 at the time. She can barely see, but still preserves her raven-black hair and tight, fair skin. She was a child when Tibetan rule ended, but she had heard many stories about Tibetan officers. When Tibetan *dzongpons* ('officers') visited, Monpas would be summoned to fetch food and water and prepare *chang* ('local beer') for the officers, clean and sweep the rest areas. They would be forced to supply fodder for the 20-30 horses brought by the tax officials. People would be punished for trifling

crimes; they would be stripped naked and beaten, or thrown into prison. Lesser crimes such as being late for work or in delivering supplies would earn beatings or starvation. Yangchin Chomu says, I 'feel like crying at the memories of Tibetan rule'. In her knowledge, Monpas had to pay a lot of money in monastery taxes earlier and often had to give up their household rations. At times, they even had to forage for food in the forests, for their last grains would be seized by Tibetans. 'I don't remember if anybody apart from *dzongpons* came', she says, but people 'dared not lift their eyes to look at the Tibetan officials' and would run to hide when Tibetan officials came. In her view, Tibetans 'definitely must have looked down on the Monpas, or else they would not have tortured us so much', and so, 'with Tibetan rule gone, Monpas are now more prosperous'.

Both oral memory and written documents preserve the record of Tibetan high-handedness toward the Monpa peasantry. Popular memory resurrects a past in which the Tibetan overlords ruled Monyul with an iron hand. Although some among the monk leadership in Monyul attempt to downplay the hierarchies that once characterized interactions between Tibetans and Monpas, stories of the harsh Tibetan regime have percolated through the generations to become etched in public memory.

An oppressive taxation system harshly enforced by tax officials deputed from Tsona or Lhasa contributed to the stereotype of the Tibetan as a merciless master, although not all Tibetans were tax-collectors or belonged to the ruling class. Stories of the injustices meted out to poor Monpa peasants by Tibetan tax-collectors have built a negative image of Tibetan rule among the Monpas. The elderly people, especially those living during the cusp period of the Tibetan and Indian political eras, have a memory conditioned by their personal childhood experiences with Tibetans mixed with the stories handed down by the generations before them. For this generation, Tibetan rule compares poorly with that of the democratic government of India from the 1950s onwards.

Colonial writers from the early twentieth century have also remarked on the extent to which the Tibetan tax regime was responsible for the impoverishment of many Monpa households. There are several such reports, especially regarding the Dirang region where quite a few colonial expeditions and surveys were sanctioned. In his account of the tax regime in Dirang, British officer Captain Nevill writes, 'South of the Sela is the valley of Dirangchu, a fine, open valley and well-populated. [...] the inhabitants did not strike me as being nearly so prosperous as their neighbours north of the Sela [...] *The people are ground down by excessive taxation and they are only left barely enough to live upon*, also they are generally harassed by

the Lobas who levy blackmail in the most oppressive manner' (Nevill 1914, cited in Reid 1983[1942]: 287, emphasis added)

Another colonial report mentions the following:

> Information has been received that two lamas from Tawang Monastery came down in the last week of January 1945 with messages for the Dirang and Talung Dzongpons to start collecting tribute as usual in their respective areas. They have been instructed also to exact free carriage of their loads from the locals and the Talung Dzongpons advised to levy tolls at Amratulla [...] The two lamas returned to Tawang having collected some 40 tankas and some grains from one of the headman of Dirang Dzong. The headman paid as he was threatened with blackmail [...] Intimation has been sent by Tawang to the headmen of Dirang and Kalaktang areas to be ready to pay tribute to the monastic officials who would be coming down shortly. The headmen complain that our present order of monastic tribute being voluntary is not at all satisfactory as the monastic officials would not accept anything less than what they demand.[78]

British ethnologist and administrator J.P. Mills had similar impressions of Dirang in the 1940s: 'The two monastic officials kept a most unpleasant prison at Dirang Dzong, a really horrible place, and had not infrequently inflicted the most brutal punishments' (1950: 157). The 'prison' or dungeon mentioned by Mills lies in ruins in Dirang village today, but bears witness to the punitive practices of the Tibetan regime. An unpleasant legend still circulates about twelve leading householders of Dirang village who were killed because they protested the building of Dirang Dzong, which symbolized the imposition of Tibetan rule. According to the legend, these men lie buried under the *mane* (stone wall constructed for religious merit) that can be seen beside the road leading up to Dirang town (Sarkar 1996: 16).

While colonial writers had their own vested interests in documenting the impact of Tibetan taxation on the Monpas, their writings are corroborated by oral history. These memories of oppressive rule may have influenced Monpa-Tibetan relations even after the Tibetan regime ended (Rose and Fisher 1967). However, experiences and perceptions of Tibetan rule were not necessarily uniform, but differed according to group, family, region, and personal history. Further, not all relations between Monpas and Tibetans were based on tax collection: trade, monastic studies, and pilgrimage forged bonds of friendship and marriage between individuals of the two communities.

78 Extract from a fortnightly report on the Balipara Frontier Tract.

For his part, the Dalai Lama has often said that the present predicament of the Tibetans in exile must be due to their misdeeds in the past, an obvious reference to the taxation system that Tibetan officialdom had imposed on peasants and small traders. But the tax system itself must have been subject to the political fortunes of Tibet as well as the onslaught of modernization. Tibet scholar Melvyn Goldstein (1989) notes that one of the ways the Tibetan government tried to fend off the advanced expansionist aims of imperial powers during the nineteenth century was by attempting to build a modern military force, the maintenance of which depended on public revenue. One can imagine that a regime intent on expanding its tax base and input would thus instil negative memories in the minds of its subject populations from whom the taxes to support the defence forces were raised. It is for this reason that quite a few elderly Monpas offer the view that the change in government (from Tibetan theocratic to Indian democratic) has allowed Monpas to become, as Yangchin Chomu put it, 'more prosperous'.

If the change in regime led to Monpas growing more prosperous, exile brought a different kind of status inversion for the Tibetans, who slipped from their earlier position of a ruling group to become refugees, or people who are not 'rooted' in a fixed national territory (Bauman 2004; Malkki 1995). In a world divided into distinctive nation-states where the concept of people makes sense only when recodified within the concept of citizenship (Agamben 1998, quoted in Bauman 2004: 33), Tibetan refugees are considered 'a people without a nationality' (UNHCR 2011). Devoid of political existence in a nation, refugees also become divested of basic human rights. Thus, while a negative image of Tibetan rule has been perpetuated in Monpa popular memory, this image conflicts with the present disenfranchised status of the Tibetans amidst them. Hence, the past exists but is dislocated from the present.

In Monyul, although people are critical of the old Tibetan polity, they seldom extend the same critical attitude towards the Tibetan refugees living among them. This is possibly because they understand that the Tibetan refugees cannot be held accountable for the actions of the Tibetan tax-collectors of the past. The reversal of asymmetrical power relations through the political disempowerment of Tibetans has helped to blunt the edges of Monpa hostility towards the Tibetan communities today. Many Monpa families have at least one living Tibetan relative. The high level of inter-marriage between Monpas and Tibetans in the border districts also makes acceptance and assimilation easy, besides blurring boundaries between the two groups. Tibetans today are considered separate from the Tibetans of the past. When I asked the two young girls who had helped me

in my transcription work in Tawang whether Monpa-Tibetan marriages were common, they responded, with some awkwardness, 'Nowadays all are the same'.

If harsh rule erected barriers between Tibetans and Monpas, bonds of religion and kinship have partially dissolved those barriers in the present period. Tibetans are no longer regarded as autocratic rulers. The dramatic reversal of fortunes that overturned older hierarchies also seems to have created a distance between past and present by inverting the terms of recognition. If earlier recognition hinged on a lord-subject relationship, in which Tibetans, occupying the privileged position of overlord, had to recognize the Monpas, in the present it is the Monpas as legitimate bearers and also, as I will show later, sharers of citizenship documents who command the terms of recognition. In Kalaktang village, in the south-west parts of Monyul, former headman Netan Dorjee gave a humorous take on the changed Monpa-Tibetan relations. He said, 'Now, Tibetans are no longer *dzongpons*. The other day I had gone to Tawang, met a couple of Tibetans there who said, "you [Monpas] used to give us so much love". Now, if we hadn't given them love we would have got their sticks', he cackled.

While the reversal of fortunes has made the Monpas view Tibetans in a kinder light, it is also the figure of the Dalai Lama, accessible to his lay followers in a manner unprecedented in the history of the Tibetan monastic system, that has brought about significant changes in the popular attitude. While the change of Tibet's fortunes has, on the one hand, recast Tibetans outside Tibet as refugees, it has, on the other hand, allowed the wider public direct access to the once elusive charisma of the Dalai Lama. Traditionally, the Dalai Lama's presence was a felt, rather than visible, form of authority for the lay Tibetans. One Monpa lady told me how her parents had once visited Lhasa to catch a glimpse of just the *shadow* of the Dalai Lama as he strolled in the Norbulingka palace gardens. Contrast this with the influence of the Dalai Lama among today's generations of both Tibetan and non-Tibetan people. After the decline of old Tibet, the Dalai Lama has increasingly become a public figure, who is regularly seen on and heard through television and other media. People eagerly look forward to receiving the Dalai Lama in Monyul, a chance for them to sight their 'god'.

The Dalai Lama visited Monyul while I was conducting fieldwork, making a public appearance in the Buddha Stadium in Bomdila on 13 November 2009. The stadium grounds were packed with people who had come from far-off villages, waiting in the bitter cold since 2 AM for the appearance of the Dalai Lama, who was scheduled to come on stage at 8 AM. The Dalai Lama's visit brings into relief some aspects of Monpa-Tibetan relations. On the

eve of His Holiness's arrival, several banners and streamers were put up by various institutions, organizations, and groups in the marketplace to welcome him to Bomdila. Among the banners by Himalayan Holidays, a travel agency, and Sonam Academy, a private school, I spotted one that said, 'The Tibetan People of Arunachal Pradesh welcomes His Holiness'. The phrase 'Tibetan people of Arunachal Pradesh' indicates that the Tibetans are one group among others in Arunachal Pradesh. It was an open declaration of separate identity in a context where identity is otherwise intentionally blurred because it could hamper prospects of inclusion. After the Dalai Lama's public appearance, he was chauffeured to the monastery at Upper Bomdila for a reception party. The only laypeople allowed to attend this event, apart from monastery staff and privileged guests, were the Tibetans of Tenzingang refugee settlement in West Kameng.

These incidents show how the Dalai Lama provides a mediating influence for Monpa perceptions of Tibetans in Monyul. His Holiness's visits in 2009 and 2017 precipitated a boom of Tibetan Buddhist cultural activities, increased interest in the Tibetan language, and a scramble to register non-governmental organizations dedicated to the aims of Tibetan Buddhist cultural preservation. Visits by other Tibetan Buddhist leaders similarly help to cement the religious ties between the Monpas and Tibetans in Monyul. In April 2010, I saw how the entire district of Tawang came together to welcome the Sakya Trichen Rinpoche, head of the Sakya school of Buddhism, when he visited for a few days.

In response to my query, 'how did Tibetans regard Monpas in the past', my friend Ngawang's 102-year-old, blind grandfather replied that obviously they must have regarded Monpas badly or else why would they impose all the taxes and cruel punishments? What was striking, however, was that he explicitly stated that he did not wish to say anything against the Tibetans now because of the high regard of the (Monpas) for His Holiness. He said, '[I] can say many things about Tibetans, but won't because the Dalai Lama is Tibetan.'

My friend and guide in Dirang, Phunchu Namje, most succinctly expressed the formative role of the Dalai Lama in cementing Monpa-Tibetan ties:

> majority people [in Arunachal Pradesh] are non-Buddhists who do not like us Buddhists because we have given shelter to the Tibetans. We coexist happily with the Tibetans because of the Dalai Lama, whom we regard not just as a political leader but as our spiritual leader. *The Tibetans are his people and to hurt them is to hurt him.* The non-Buddhists [...] in the other districts of Arunachal do not think well of us, because they feel that we shelter the Tibetans and make them tribals [emphasis added].

Figure 14 Crowds at Buddha Stadium during Dalai Lama's visit, Bomdila 13 November 2009

Figure 15 People gather to receive *wang* from visiting Sakya Rinpoche at Tawang Monastery, 23 April 2010

The last phrase 'make them tribals' refers to the pattern of Tibetans illegally acquiring Scheduled Tribe certificates, a practice that I discuss in the following section. What I wish to highlight here is the statement that 'non-Buddhist' Arunachalis do not like Monpas because they favour the Tibetans, who are the outsiders. More revealing is Phunchu's sentiment that to hurt Tibetans is to hurt the Dalai Lama. When criticisms of Tibetan rule are softened by

statements such as 'I don't want to say anything against Tibetans for they are the Dalai Lama's people', it points to the force of the cultural bonds, accentuated through the person of the Dalai Lama, that shape Monpas' tolerance towards Tibetan refugees. British administrator-ethnologist J.P. Mills also commented on the cultural hold that Tibet had over this hilly belt: 'If a hill man gets on in the world he does not buy Assamese clothes, he buys Tibetan ornaments and becomes more like a prosperous Tibetan. He can never be absorbed into any of the Hindu castes of the plains, whereas he knows he can become a nominal Buddhist and be at once absorbed into Tibet' (Mills 1950: 158).

As Monpas increasingly seek to fight off discrimination within present regional networks, they draw on these cultural bonds with their previous rulers, the Tibetans. Tibet might have declined in status as a centre of temporal power and the spiritual core of Tibetan Buddhism, but Tibetan Buddhism is resurgent in an international milieu, building on funds and patronage from richer nations. The international stature of Tibetan Buddhism conditions Monpas' tolerance of Tibetans within Monyul and acts as salve on their recollections of Tibetan rule.

ST Certificates and the politics of documentation

If religion allows the Monpas participation, and possibly partnership, in a resurgent Tibetan Buddhist civilizational community, region gives Monpas membership in and the attendant constitutional benefits of a political community. Thus, region and religion act as tangential forces on Monpa subjectivities, pulling in opposite directions. Phunchu's statement that the non-Buddhists of Arunachal accuse Monpas of helping to make tribals out of the Tibetans pinpoints the main locus of tension between the Monpas' regional and religious allegiances: ST certificates.

Along with Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) can claim certain state-granted rights, such as the reservation of seats in the legislatures, government service, and educational institutions; waivers of part or all of the fees for admission to schools and colleges; and the relaxation of upper age limits for applying to certain jobs. To avail these privileges, a citizen claiming ST identity must have in his or her possession a valid ST certificate, which he/she can acquire by going through the proper application process. An ST certificate is documentary proof of belonging to a Scheduled Tribe, as per the specifications mentioned in the Indian constitution. Within Arunachal Pradesh, Monpas are tribal through their father's line, which they

prove by applying for and securing ST certificates. Proof of an ST certificate is mandatory for claiming affirmative action benefits.

The allegation that Monpas aid Tibetans in becoming tribals means that they help Tibetan refugees acquire false ST certificates through illegal channels. In an anti-immigrant milieu, refugees are already subjects of hostility and suspicion; once they metamorphose into citizens they are seen as a greater threat, for they can then compete for opportunities on an equal playing field. Allegations of this kind therefore cast serious aspersions on Monpas' regional loyalties.

In principle, Monpas are included in an Arunachali regional ideology based on the distinction drawn between the indigenous Arunachali and the immigrant foreigner, and some young Monpa students subscribe to this ideology. However, in everyday practice non-Monpa Arunachalis frequently collapse the identities of Monpas and Tibetans, citing their cultural and physiological similarities. A Monpa friend confided, 'Nishis [one of the groups presently dominant in Arunachali regional politics] do not regard the Monpas as Arunachali. Monpas are called Tibetans by Nishis.' This view was corroborated by a Nishi official stationed at Tawang, who offered the following opinion about the rise of the MARDC:

> *the demand for Mon Autonomous Council is believed by the AAPSU to be a way of protecting Tibetans* [...] AAPSU is not targeting the Tibetans for a number of reasons. Tibetans are very peaceful unlike Chakma-Hajongs who create unrest. If necessity arises, Tibetans can be deported for they have a definite origin, but not Chakma-Hajongs who have no origins. *Last year (2007) AAPSU demanded eviction of refugees but did not stress much on Tibetans because of their links with Monpas.*[79]

This statement locates both Monpas and Tibetans outside the regional context, for both are seen to maintain ties that do not conform to the 'Arunachali' political identity. In other words, the associations between Tibetans and Monpas are politicized by an exclusivist regional ideology that demands a clear-cut dichotomy between the indigenous and the foreigner. It is this duality of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from regional networks that characterizes the position of Monpas in Arunachali regional circuits. This duality, in turn, infects how Monpa youth respond to the

79 A Monpa educationist also told me once that the demand for Mon autonomy is not anti-refugee, and that the MARDC was not involved in the anti-refugee protests in 2007. He said, 'Tibetans and other Buddhist groups are supporting the good cause'.

regional ideology, as becomes evident in their views on the matter of illegal Scheduled Tribe certificates.

While there are many Tibetans who were officially settled in refugee settlements after their exodus from Tibet in Tawang and West Kameng, there are also many who had been living in these areas from before the border solidified. Quite a few Tibetans had simply crossed the border into Tawang during the turbulent period of the 1950s and moved to other areas further south, or came across the border later and settled down in Monpa villages and towns. In everyday affairs, it is difficult for an outsider to distinguish a Monpa from a Tibetan. Monpas themselves recognize only one difference among the Tibetans, articulated as 'pure' and *kaccha* Tibetan. 'Pure Tibetan' means someone who had immigrated from Tibet before 1951 or lived in local areas for a long time, while *kaccha,* meaning 'raw', is used to refer to those who are 'fresh off the boat': new refugees who have not yet assimilated. So, while pure Tibetans might be assimilated if they came between the 1950s and 1970s, *kaccha* Tibetans do not speak Hindi or Monpa, are shy with the local people, and are still struggling to find their bearings in the new society.

This is similar to the categories of 'India-born' (second-generation India-born Tibetans) and 'newcomer' (new arrivals from Tibet), mentioned by Susan Chen in her work on Tibetan refugees of Dharamsala (2009: 44). Chen mentions how newcomers are not only legally outsiders but are also made unwelcome by India-born Tibetans, who were either born in India or sent to boarding schools in India at a very early age, and who, consequently, have been socialized into Indian norms and mannerisms, and even manifest a heightened sense of a Tibetan nationalism compared to the newcomers, who are more in sync with the ground realities in Tibet (Chen 2009).[80] In Monyul, if the difference between pure and *kaccha* Tibetan is prominent, the difference between early Tibetan settlers and Monpas is less so. Since in most cases the Tibetan old-timers who migrated several decades ago are either married to local Monpas or have integrated into local Monpa culture, they can be distinguished from the Monpa members of society only by their 'tone' or the peculiar nuances of their speech, even when they speak the local dialects.

Inter-marriage, mixed parentage, and mixed habitation have blurred the differences between Tibetans and Monpas in Tawang and West Kameng.

80 There is also a legal problem in the assimilation of newcomers from Tibet, as the Indian government discontinued issuing residence permits to Tibetan refugees after 1979. However, it is believed that Tibetans in India sometimes obtain permits through falsifying evidence such as their date of birth or parentage (Routray 2007: 82).

When a Monpa man marries a non-tribal woman, his child acquires ST status. While the Indian state recognizes ST status through the father's line, it makes exceptions in cases where the offspring of a tribal woman and non-tribal man can prove that he or she had been brought up by the mother. In this instance, the child can get ST certificate through his or her mother's name. Further, although property passes patrilineally in Monpa society there is a custom of *makpa,* or sons-in-law residing in their father-in-law's house and inheriting the latter's property in the absence of a male heir (Fürer-Haimendorf 1982: 162; Nanda 1982: 58; Tsering 2010: 3). A child born and brought up in conditions that are the same as their tribal mother may claim ST status.

But ST certificates also travel along less officially recognised circuits. That is, Monpas may procure certificates for their non-Monpa spouses. According to (unconfirmed) allegations that cropped up in the course of fieldwork, Tibetans who cannot otherwise claim ST certificates through marriage have been consistently seeking and acquiring such certificates fraudulently through underground channels or through kinship, economic, or political links with local Monpas. Some Tibetans self-represent as Monpas to procure ST certificates, and once they have these certificates, they claim documented identity as members of a Scheduled Tribe. A well-connected Tibetan businessman may also use his contacts to get certificates for himself and his family through the help of local Monpa politicians. Before some recent changes, people could apparently acquire these certificates relatively smoothly, for all they had to do was go to the *tsorgan* ('village headmen'), who are knowledgeable men of society but unfamiliar with the language of official documents, and get the certificates countersigned or approved by them.

Norbu (name changed), a businessman in his early forties based in Bomdila, who had been educated in Delhi and was an outspoken supporter of the demand for autonomy, regarded the Tibetans as foreigners, though 'most loved guests'. He said, 'I find it illogical when some people who are not indigenous to the area are getting into politics': it was his view that some rich and influential Tibetans covet ST certificates so they can participate in electoral politics. According to him, many prosperous Tibetan traders seek to buy political fortunes by marrying off their daughters to local Monpa men, thereafter acquiring ST certificates for themselves.

In November 2000, a fact-finding committee instituted by the AAPSU claimed in a report that 181 Tibetans in Shyo village in Tawang and 300 Tibetan refugees in Bomdila had managed to obtain ST certificates, which made them Indian citizens. The report said that many Tibetan refugees

settled across various districts in Arunachal Pradesh have moved out of their camps and started to dominate the business and economy of Tawang and West Kameng (*The Assam Tribune*, 30 November 2000). It stated, 'since freedom of Tibet is a distant dream, the Tibetans are trying to settle in various places in the State by acquiring land through inter-community marriage, [and] money power'. The AAPSU report argued that it was easier for the Tibetan refugees in Monyul to acquire illegal certificates because of their various similarities with the local Monpas.

These concerns continue in the present. In July 2015, AAPSU members appeared before the state's chief secretary to claim that many Tibetan refugees settled in the state, by representing themselves as local Monpa or Sherdukpen, had obtained trading and arms licenses, voter identity cards, ST certificates, contractor registration certificates, land allotment certificates, and other documents meant only for ST people of the state. The AAPSU demanded the immediate revocation of these government certificates (*The Arunachal Times*, 1 August 2015).

The matter of ST certificates highlights how a provision by the Indian state to create distinct categories of people is paradoxically used to sanction or facilitate the change of status in Tibetans from refugees to indigenous people. James C. Scott (1999) argues that the modern state is partly constituted through practices of legibility. Borrowing from Foucault, Scott writes that the state constructs its territory and workforce as legible or knowable, and hence governable, through codifying procedures such as population registries, censuses, land records, making last names mandatory, standardizing weights and measures, urban planning, and so on. But in partial contradiction to Scott, Das and Poole (2004) write that while the modern state has rested on legibility through extensive documentation, statistics, and codification of its rules and practices, it is also continually undone by the illegibility of its practices, as seen in the displacement, falsification, and circulation of personal identity papers. Anthropologists studying South Asian bureaucracies use terms such as 'government of paper' (Hull 2012) and 'paper state' (Mathur 2012: 170) to show that bureaucratic documents have generative power, for even fraudulent documents generate the realities they claim to represent. Bureaucratic documentation or 'documentary existence' (Mathur 2012: 179) that rests on fabricated data does not mean an increased legibility or transparency of state processes.

I argue that Tibetan refugees who acquire ST certificates are constituted as state subjects through similar processes of documentation that make the state illegible. While the procurement of false Scheduled Tribe certificates points to the loopholes in state legibility procedures, it also demonstrates

how state procedures can be used against the state's own agenda in order to manufacture citizenship for Tibetan refugees.

Scheduled Tribe certificates are the physical boundary instituted by the state to identify and bound off tribal citizens from non-citizens. In Monyul, the citizen/non-citizen dichotomy, already blurred in practice through marriage and cohabitation, is further blurred by the agency, albeit unintended, of the state. In other words, the identity of the Monpa tribe/citizen is to a large extent 'given' by Scheduled Tribe certificates, which stamp them as legitimate citizens. When Tibetan refugees acquire a documented identity through a process of state 'illegibility', they too become legitimate state subjects. A state provision to demarcate the boundaries between the indigenous and the foreign is manipulated to produce the opposite result: the legibility of the state is compromised; it becomes illegible in the process of making populations legible.

The AAPSU allegations of false ST documents bring to light the fractious identities of the Monpas and their split allegiances between Tibetans and other Arunachalis. It is this fractiousness that the anti-refugee demonstration described at the start of this chapter encoded. The silence in the town and the unofficial curfew that followed in the wake of the demonstration was a charged and pregnant silence beneath which the tensions and problems of identities simmered.

The AAPSU-organized demonstration against refugees in Monyul was an attempt to mobilize a regional consciousness among the Monpa youth. Arunachali regionalists may club together Monpas and Tibetans in the same cultural category, but they cannot deny the Monpas' *de jure* status as Scheduled Tribes. Since the Arunachali regional identity draws force from the common tribal status of its members, it cannot exclude Monpas from its community. The anti-refugee protests were aimed at both performing and promoting an all-Arunachali tribal identity from which Tibetans are excluded.

For their part, Monpa youth are selectively 'interpellated' into the Arunachali regional identity, that is, they are summoned provisionally or momentarily recruited as subjects to regional identity structures (Hall 1985). In 1997, the manifesto of the All Dirang Monpa Youth Welfare Association, a now defunct cultural organization, included an objective to 'end ST Certificate problems'. Apparently, in the organization's heyday, some members would ferret out who had false certificates by inquiring into their family history and lineage, and then they would visit these homes, demand that the certificates be produced, and tear them up on the spot. The actions of the ADMYWA primarily targeted malpractices surrounding ST

certificates in general, rather than the Tibetan communities in particular. The main issue for them was the fear of unemployment, for the proliferation of false ST certificates reduces employment opportunities for legitimate certificate holders.

During my fieldwork I heard claims of ST status being articulated mostly by the younger college-going generation – who move about in Arunachali regional circuits – to distinguish themselves from Tibetan refugees. This generation seems quite happy to call themselves Scheduled Tribes; although a moniker conferred by the Indian government, it gives them material benefits and makes tribal land inalienable. Many feel that the immigration of outsiders to the area threatens the protection they enjoy from the state. Quite a few students of Bomdila College in West Kameng participated in the anti-refugee demonstration I witnessed in the summer of 2007, organized by the AAPSU. A young Monpa woman in Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh, once told me that she thought the biggest problem of Monpa identity today was the Tibetan refugees. Many individuals currently in their thirties, forties, and fifties who studied in regional or national colleges hold similar views.

Although the younger generations speak out against false ST certificates, they have not polarized into camps for or against Tibetan refugees: rather, the refugee issue exposes the ambiguities of Monpa positions towards Tibetans. Most Monpas clam up when probed about the refugee issue, and tend to dismiss the anti-refugee demonstration of 2007 as 'just a student demonstration'. A former village council leader hesitated when I asked him about Monpa-Tibetan relations: 'They are alright' was his short answer. But when probed about the AAPSU slogan 'Go back, refugees', his son, a young government employee, said that that had been a purely student demonstration and students, he implied, hardly knew anything.

A small incident highlights the ambiguity in the attitude of Monpa youth towards Tibetans. In November 2009, I attended a talk by a professor from a reputed institute in Kolkata at Bomdila College, in which she compared the Tibetan populations in Tibet with the people of Arunachal Pradesh. However, her observations on the Chinese role in Tibet in the course of the talk aroused the ire of many in the audience, especially of a young Monpa college teacher, who disapproved of her apparent disregard for the human rights violations committed by China in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). This young man was especially aroused by her comment that China was doing a good job in the TAR, and disputed her statements that Tibetans held 95 percent of jobs in the Tibetan regional administration and that there is regard for Tibetan culture in China. He had the support of quite a

few members of the audience, who seemed to feel that the professor was not sensitized enough to the plight of Tibetans in China.

In the same session, however, the professor also faced a question from a student in the audience in her late teens, whose question drew many embarrassed looks from the faculty. She asked, 'Do you think the Tibetans will dominate us, like the British? They are more developed [than the locals] and so their numbers would increase, they might even [take] recourse to violence.'[81] The young girl asking the question was from the Sherdukpen tribe, the other Buddhist tribe besides the Monpas in west Arunachal Pradesh who had never been Tibetan subjects but had paid some form of tribute. The girl had obviously developed her idea of the Tibetans as being like 'the British' in conversations with friends, peers, or perhaps relatives. However, misconstrued her take on the Tibetans, it represented a regional sentiment in which Tibetans are clearly the outsiders. Above all, her attitude portrayed the idea, current in Arunachali regional circles, that all immigrants are usurpers of both local rights and resources.

I juxtapose this incident with a snippet from a conversation with Tsering, a young Monpa cab driver, who revealed that if Monyul were to become autonomous, non-Monpa Arunachalis would no longer be able to buy land there. In Arunachal Pradesh, tribal land is inalienable, meaning that non-tribals cannot purchase land within tribal territories, and tribals from outside also cannot purchase local land. Tsering justified his statement by arguing that Monpas seldom can buy land in the capital, Itanagar, because of the dominance of the other tribes. In a situation where Monpas view even non-Monpa Arunachalis as outsiders, how can one read the anxiety stemming from a regionalist discourse of refugee influx?

Thus, there is a split in Monpas' subjectivities between subscription to a regional ideology in which Tibetans are cast as interlopers, on the one hand, and the idea of a Tibetan Buddhist community, actively propagated by monks, intellectuals, and educated professionals, in which Tibetans are accommodated, on the other. While the majority acknowledges past injustices by Tibetans, they extol tolerance in the present because Tibetans are the people of the Dalai Lama.

81 The professor's answer, although intended to throw light on how well Tibetan refugees had assimilated into their local societies, was evasive. She had replied, 'In Dharamsala Tibetans speak Tibetan, but in Darjeeling, they do not; they speak the local language. They have been in Darjeeling for 5-6 generations [...] In Bylakuppe, the first Tibetan settlement, they speak Kannada.'

Complicating boundaries: The case of Labopas and Zhospas

The Monpas' ambivalent attitudes towards the Tibetans in their midst are also a function of the border itself, as a location where identities intersect and overlap. I illustrate this through the examples of two groups in Tawang: the Labopa and the Shyopa. The first are inhabitants of a region adjacent to Tawang that is currently outside Indian boundaries, while the second are dwellers of Shyo, a settlement within Tawang.

Within Monpa society, Shyo *basti* ('village') has an ambiguous position. Most lay Monpas consider Shyo to be a Tibetan settlement, while others say that it has a 'mixed' population. When I was probing the issue of false ST certificates, my friend Phunchu suggested that I inquire into the inhabitants of Shyo *basti,* who had been granted ST status by the government. Shyo *basti* attracted media attention when the Arunachal Pradesh state government decided to grant citizenship to around ninety Tibetan refugee families of Shyo village in 2002 (Prasad 2007). Incidentally, the chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh during that time was Dorjee Khandu, a Monpa man known to be devoutly religious and an ardent follower of the Dalai Lama.

The government decision to grant citizenship to residents of Shyo village attracted criticism not only from AAPSU, but also from some human rights observers. One writer (Prasad 2007) questions the special treatment given to Tibetan refugees, and suggests that there should not be any difference between the rights and provisions attached to the Shyopa and the Chakma-Hajong refugees housed in other parts of Arunachal Pradesh, because they all belong to the same category of displaced peoples.

However, the Shyopa do not completely fit the criteria of a displaced people, for Shyo village has an ambiguous position in Monyul. Located below the Tawang monastery, Shyo *basti* was founded around 1681 during the construction of the monastery as part of a monastic tradition whereby a group of people deputed to serve the monastery and its inhabitants would settle near the monastery premises. Every Tibetan Buddhist monastery usually has a *zhol* (Shyo is a distortion of *zhol*) which means 'below', on its premises, with the people of the *zhol* working for the maintenance of the monastery and the monastery, in turn, looking after their needs and tending to their problems.

Lopon Acharya Ngawang Norbu, second-in-command to the abbot of Tawang monastery, explained to me that traditionally, the monastery's administration was under the charge of three monk-officials: *Changje*, the secretary to the abbot; *Dratsangbuk*, who looked after property; and *Nyertsang*, who collected taxes, arranged food provisions for the monks,

and took care of food offerings from ceremonies. Each of these individuals had two or three families from Shyo *basti* working for them. For example, those who worked for the *Dratsangbuk*, known as *mi-se*, were entrusted with getting supplies of bamboo and wood, and with the maintenance of the monastery. The Tawang Shyopas were thus service providers for the Tawang monastery, with which they had a patron-client relationship.

As generations of Shyopas continued to engage in the same duties, they became a distinct community that was neither Tibetan nor Monpa. Lopon Acharya recalls that in 1973, when he joined the Tawang Monastery, there were only ten to fifteen households in Shyo *basti*. The area that is now Tawang town was quite uninhabited, with only two or three houses; the monastery inmates, Shyopas, and a few odd yak herders comprised the total population. It was only from the mid-1970s that shops, markets, administrative offices, and more residential houses came up in the area. Thupten Phuntsok, founder of the Manjushree orphanage in Tawang, argues that since the Shyopas have been living here since the Tawang monastery was built in the seventeenth century, even before other Monpas lived in the area, they must be counted as Indians. They did come from Tibet, but today have mixed with the local Monpa populations. He reasons, 'It is very wrong to call them Tibetans. From 1914, when Tawang became part of India, they have been living here, so how can you call them Tibetan?'

There are two implications in Lama Thupten's statement. To call the people of Shyo *basti* 'Tibetan' would be to call them refugees, even though their forefathers migrated to this part of India 300 years ago. The second implication is more profound. In arguing that the Shyopas are Indians because they had been living here since 1914, when the Indo-Tibetan boundary was drawn, the lama states that which is seldom even implied in political discourses of national boundaries: that there is no innate difference between the people on two different sides of a (ethnic, national, or other) boundary, and that national identities are only an effect of boundary demarcation. *It is the boundary itself that creates and propagates the difference* (Bauman 2004). Hence, everyone who was on the Indian side when the boundary was delineated were automatically drawn into the Indian national fold, no matter what their origins may have been.

Yankyee, a teacher at Lhou Secondary School who hails from Shyo *basti*, has a BA in political science from a reputed college in Delhi University, but returned to work in Tawang because of her family responsibilities. In her 30s, Yankyee is articulate and spirited and has a sense of outrage against the local Monpas for discriminating against the Shyopas for being different

from them. She asked me to write about the Shyopas, including identifying her as a youth from Shyo *basti*.

She displayed anger that Shyopas are frequent targets during anti-refugee demonstrations. She told me that when she was much younger, during the anti-refugee protests of the 1990s, entire shops owned by Shyopas in Tawang's New Market, where her father runs a grocery store, were painted with these slogans. AAPSU leaders would forcibly close down the shops owned by Tibetan traders, while to restore a semblance of 'order' the cops would force them to open the doors again.

Yankyee thinks the local ill-feeling towards Shyopas is possibly because the Shyopas are identified with the Tibetan rulers. But she differentiates Shyopas from the post-1959 Tibetan refugees, or the Tibetan traders who came to Tawang from other settlements in India after 2000. According to Yankyee, one of the main ways locals differentiate between 'them' and 'us' is through speech, but she argues that Shyopa as a dialect is not only different from the Tawang dialect but also from (central) Tibetan. If language is the basis of differentiation then locals should also discriminate against the other Monpa groups, such as those living in Mago-Thingbu, for their dialect is also very different from Tawang speech. In any case, 'Monpa' is the collective term for different communities speaking different dialects and traditionally occupying distinct territorialities; for Yankyee, Shyopa is simply another group of Monpas, such as the Dirangpas. She is currently engaged in an attempt to trace her family tree, identifying Monpa affines. One of her grandmothers/grandaunts supposedly married into Seru village in Tawang. She claims that there cannot be any real difference between Shyopa and Monpa because of the frequent inter-marriages between the two, saying, 'We are neither Tibetans nor refugees, but simply Shyopas'.

By arguing that Shyopas are one among the several Monpa groups of Monyul, Yankyee claims equal citizenship status for her group. From conversations with various members of the monastic community, it also became clear to me that their support rested with the Shyopas. It was mostly lay members of the various Monpa groups, particularly those influenced by a regional Arunachal ideology, who tended to divide Shyopas from the rest of Monpa society.

The Labopas are a second group with a similarly ambiguous status in Monyul. Labopas are the inhabitants of Labo, a region on the Tibetan side of the border adjacent to Zemithang on the Indian side. Labo Tsho Zhi, Labo in short, is a group of four villages on the Chinese side just across the current Monyul border. It would be more accurate to say that this used to be a group of four villages, for the villages do not exist now, having been

depopulated during the India-China border tensions. In the seventeenth century, the Fifth Dalai Lama brought the following areas of Monyul under his control (Tsering 2010):

1 Labo Tsho Zhi
2 Pangchen Ding Drug (Present Zemithang circle)
3 Dagpa Tso Gyey (Presently in Lumla circle of Tawang)
4 Shar Ngima Tso Sum (Present Tawang sub-division)
5 Drang Nang Chu Gyey (Present Dirang Circle)
6 Hrong Nang Toe Me (Present Kalaktang Circle)

Each of these divisions refers to a place that has been roughly reconstituted as a circle or administrative sub-division within present Monyul – that is, *all except Labo*. While Labopas are acknowledged to be Monpas, related in custom and dialect with the Monpas of the adjacent settlements of Zemithang, during the boundary demarcation of 1914 they were put on the other side of the border. As a result, Labopas who emigrated to India during the 1950s were labelled refugees, despite being ethnically the same as the Monpas. The erstwhile Labopas or inhabitants of Labo dispersed to different places, with many now living as Tibetan refugees in the Tibetan settlements in India.

From my fieldwork, it emerged that in the Tibetan taxation system, Labo was counted as part of Monyul, and Labopas were called Lhat or Lha-lang ('servants'). The Labo settlements were under the jurisdiction of the Tibetan government and were regarded as part of the same Mon region by the Tibetan rulers. In Labo, the system of recruitment of monastic novices was similar to the one followed in neighbouring Zemithang, currently on the Indian side. Thus, if three boys were born in a Labo household, the third son would be sent to the monastery at Tsona, and if four boys were born, Tawang *gonpa* would take the fourth son. Many in Monyul told me that Labo was once considered part of Monyul, until the current boundary was delimited.

At present the name Labo Tsho Zhi is almost erased from written records because most of the people dwelling in the Labo settlements fled to India in 1959-1962 and currently live in the Tenzingang Tibetan refugee settlement in West Kameng. The people of former Labo who now live in Monyul are identified as refugees, as opposed to their Monpa counterparts who are identified as citizens. When I went to meet an aged person who was originally from Labo, he told me that he had been sent at a very young age to Gonpa Tse monastery at Tsona to become a monk. He later fled with another monk friend to India via Tulung La in Mago, a less-used border passage, when the

political disturbances started in China. However, he was evasive when I asked him whether he thought Labopas were Monpa or Bodpa ('Tibetan'). He replied, 'Kaun Monpa, kaun Bodpa, bol nahin sakta. China ne abhi bol diya, Pangchen se India hain' ['It is hard to say who is Monpa and who is Tibetan, since China has decreed that all areas from Zemithang and below would be India's']. It is a common assumption of many people in the rural areas that the current boundary was decided by China.

What is striking about this man's response is the recognition that identities are territorially given and not ethnically ascribed. Labopas are refugees only by virtue of having been on the wrong side of the international boundary. Monpa-Tibetan relations in Monyul illuminate the messy social dimensions of an international border that physically divides Tibetan spaces from Monpa/Indian spaces. While a border-normative principle would want to align objective and officially delineated boundaries with subjective ones – whereby the physical boundary cleanly divides people along ethnic, kinship, and friendship ties, in practice, the border is not a clean line that splits transnational subjectivities into national identities. Although the border defines the Monpas as *not* Tibetans by virtue of their location on one side of the border instead of the other, the boundaries between the two groups are often blurred by inter-group marriages and other border-crossing interactions. So, even as identities are defined by an international boundary that marks those who belong from those who do not, they are also reconstituted by actors negotiating complex historical and spatial fields.

The cases of the Labopas and Shyopas show that while the nation-state identities of the world may hinge on essentialist definitions of the indigenous that follow a territorial logic, such definitions may not be sustained in practice. Not only do other Arunachali tribes consider Monpas to be like Tibetans, but they also share bonds with people of Tibet that make them eschew exclusivist identities of indigeneity *vis a vis* Tibetans. In conventional discourses, indigeneity is premised on the distinction between the native versus the outsider, where the latter is considered to maintain roots and ties extending outside national soil. While indigenous peoples are considered to be rooted, refugees are uprooted. But such 'arborescent' metaphors (Malkki 1997) of constructing indigeneity are disturbed when we consider social relations in a border region. Interpellated (Hall 1985) into a regional Arunachali identity, Monpas are enjoined to identify as indigenous *vis a vis* Tibetans, with whom they share kinship, history, and religious connections. But the hybrid or spill-over of identities at the border troubles the regionalist discourse premised on rigid distinctions between indigenous and foreigner.

Contrary to the regional Arunachali ideology, Monpa articulations of indigeneity are ambivalent with respect to Tibetans, and mostly occur in the context of applying for government benefits and using Scheduled Tribe certificates. Even then, their differences with Tibetans are blurred by practices of illegibility when the same Scheduled Tribe certificates are also acquired by Tibetans. The boundaries between indigenous and foreign in the Monyul region are therefore compromised by both historical ties and contemporary practices.

Tibetans and Monpas outside Monyul

Competition for resources in the form of affirmative action benefits doled out by the postcolonial Indian state constitutes one arena in which boundaries between Tibetans and Monpas threaten to surface. Remembrances of past misdeeds on the part of Tibetan officers constitutes another discursive space where this difference is highlighted. But as I have already shown, such memories are mediated by present contingencies, where the Tibetans are seen as disempowered. A third area of friction unravels in certain educational spaces outside Monyul where individuals from the two groups compete for privileges, once again as citizens and refugees. But in this case, it is the Monpas who are disadvantaged, despite being citizens. I draw on the experiences of two Monpa women, one young and the other past middle age, whose real names I withhold for confidentiality. Both women studied in Central Tibetan Schools (CST) and saw how Tibetan students expressed their resentment toward their higher-achieving Monpa cohorts by labelling them as outsiders.

Central Tibetan Schools are administered by the Indian government, specifically by the Central Tibetan Schools' Administration (CTSA), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Human Resources created by the Government of India in 1961 with the objective of educating Tibetan children living in India. There are around 71 CSTs spread across different states in India, from the primary to senior secondary levels, where the medium of education at the primary level is Tibetan and the syllabus, which conforms to the NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) curriculum, includes the study of Tibetan history, geography and culture among other general subjects (http://ctsa.nic.in/; accessed 3 October 2011).

Quite a few Monpas seek and are given admission in CSTs. Previously, it used to be difficult for Monpas to get admission for their children in these schools meant for Tibetan refugee children, and a lot of strings had

to be pulled before any Monpa girl or boy could be enrolled. Usually, only influential Monpas managed to get admission for their children. Then, according to my informants in the field, in the 1990s the Dalai Lama, answering a plea by Monpas on one of his visits to the region, agreed to have ten seats reserved annually for Monpa children in the CSTs across India, and since then, Monpas have found it easier to get admission, and a steady number of young Monpas go every year to the CSTs where the curriculum specializes in Tibet-related subjects. This is in addition to those who go for monastic studies in the various monasteries in India.

Mrs. Nima, who is now in her sixties and comes from a well-to-do and politically connected Monpa family in Dirang, was a student at a CST in the 1960s. She and her brother were admitted to the school at the insistence of their father, who wanted his children to know more about their cultural heritage. But Mrs. Nima was unequivocal in her claim that 'Tibetans do not like us [Monpas]'. She alleged that her notes and preparations for exams used to be sabotaged by her Tibetan peers. Drema, now in her late 20s, who was a student at a CST in the 1990s, was more restrained in her responses, but both women individually reported being the subjects of envy of their Tibetan classmates. This was more often the case when Monpa students fared better in studies in comparison to their Tibetan classmates, who would then accuse the former of being favoured by the teachers because they were Indians. However, both women stressed that the authorities were always helpful and came to the aid of the distressed Monpa students. Drema reports that the warden used to explain to the Tibetan children who tormented her that they should cooperate since they eat of the same *thali* ('dish'), are the same, look the same, dress the same, and so on.

The experiences of these former Monpa students of CSTs highlight chinks in the Monpa-Tibetan alliance. When Monpas reach out to the Tibetan exile community to ameliorate their present regional marginality, they confront the possibility of rejection by the Tibetans. Monpa parents send their children to CSTs in the hope that they acquire a Tibetan-based traditional education, but these children face discrimination because they are not 'proper' Tibetans, so to speak. The Indian-ness of the Monpa students becomes the mark of their difference. That is, they might have the same culture, religion, and traditions, but they have a different national identity, in addition to their once-subordinate status in the Tibetan civilizational hierarchy. More importantly, Monpas have a distinct political identity; they are not refugees, and so cannot aspire to the concessions given to refugees.

In other words, if the ST certificate is the peg on which hangs the identity of the citizen *vis a vis* the non-citizen in the rhetoric and politics of regional

identity, then the special provisions for refugees in India enable a similar positioning for Tibetan refugees, in reverse. Tibetan students in CSTs explain the relatively better performance of their Monpa classmates with respect to grades as the result of a nationality bias; Indian teachers would naturally give higher grades to Indian students. It is striking that in such practices Monpas, otherwise cast to a corner in Indian nationalist imaginations, are placed squarely within the Indian nation. That is, in Tibetan expressions of a distinct Tibetan identity through classroom rivalries unfolding mostly outside Monyul, Monpas are invested with a nationhood that is denied to them in official nationalist discourse, which sees them as borderline Indians. Further, both the ST certificate issue and the Tibetan-Monpa competition for grades in CSTs point to the material practices around which these issues of identity play out.

This friction between Monpas and Tibetans is countered by the efforts of the Tibetan Buddhist religious leadership within Monyul. During the Tibetan protests against Chinese atrocities on monks in 2008, monks, nuns, and villagers in Tawang took out candle-light processions in a display of their solidarity with the Tibetans. Similarly, in 2009 when there was worldwide protest against the Chinese oppression of monks in Tibet, the Indian government prohibited Indian nationals from engaging in any show of solidarity with the Tibetans. Despite this, T.G. Rinpoche defied state injunctions to lead a procession from Tawang monastery ('Dalai Lama's Arunachal visit cleared', 2009).

In previous chapters, I have showed how the discourse around the demand for autonomy, and especially the struggles around Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa in the cultural sphere, indicate a gradual reaching out to the Tibetans on the part of the Monpas. This is further evident in Monpa narratives of origins that trace genealogical connections with Tibet, the systematic drive to restore local place names, many of which have Tibetan associations, and the mushrooming of monasteries and Tibetan Buddhist cultural institutions in the region. I have argued that these practices reflect incipient imaginations of pan-Himalayan identity in Monyul that draw upon a Tibetan Buddhist cultural heritage. Many Tibetans are supporters of Mon autonomy because they too share in this vision, despite not being Monpa.

The growing alliance between Tibetans and Monpas is, however, not devoid of tensions, and this chapter is an attempt to indicate particular spaces and contexts in which differences between the two communities threaten to become polarized, and which emerge most tellingly in exclusionary definitions of the Arunachali or Monpa tribal citizen *vis a vis* refugees, and in the matter of Scheduled Tribe certificates. The formation of an

Arunachali regional identity has also had an impact on Monpa subjectivities, and this regional consciousness coexisting with the memory of exploitative Tibetan officials threatens to drive a wedge between Monpas and Tibetans. However, region and religion act as mutual checks on each other. While I came across many old people willing to share their experiences of hardship during Tibetan rule, there were others who stated that they did not wish to say anything against the Tibetans because they were the 'Dalai Lama's people'. Many Monpas who were not even connected to the monastic circuit expressed their differences from Tibetans as 'just political'. Historical relations reinforced in the present through the figure of the Dalai Lama, and current possibilities envisaged by the Monpas of participating in a resurgent Tibetan Buddhist community constitute a buffer against the Arunachali regional ideology.

Conclusion: Corridors, Networks, and Nodes

> [I]t has become increasingly clear that all human cultures are shaped and transformed by long histories of regional-to-global networks of power, trade and meaning [...] it has become possible for scholars to accept the idea that powerless minorities have accommodated themselves to global forces (Tsing 2005: 3).

Monyul is a place bypassed by states and geopolitics – a former trade corridor (Aris 1979b) caught up in, first, colonial boundary-making and then postcolonial nation-building processes, eventually turning into a 'geographical blind spot' (Harris 2013). Monpa trade narratives and oral histories of migration enable an image of Monyul that counters its current representation as a remote periphery. Yet, neat spatial analogies are seldom possible, as competing allegiances complicate Monyul's identity.

As I detailed in Chapter One, in its premodern political geography Monyul was the geographical and cultural borderland of Tibet. As the seat of temporal power (the *Kashag* or 'governing council') as well as spiritual authority (the Dalai Lama), Central Tibet was the 'core' in relation to peripheral Buddhist regions, and Monpas were subordinate to Tibetans in both political and economic terms. Yet common ties of religion and culture, and trade exchanges between Bhutan, Tibet, and India via Monyul, alleviated Monpas' peripheral status. Seasonal trans-Himalayan migrations, arising from trade, pilgrimage, transhumance, and tax-collection, constructed Monyul as a corridor in a 'transnational circuit' zone (Rouse 1991). Although the pre-colonial and colonial routes have now disappeared or become defunct, current politics give renewed vigour to older memories and narratives of cross-border trade, pilgrimage, and kinship.

I do not suggest that Monyul's corridor status can be revived or that earlier networks connecting Tibet to its borderlands can be retrieved in the present. Other social and political arteries, including national as well as regional postcolonial identities that have assumed prominence with the reorientation of Monyul from Tibet to India, have ensured that present geographies cannot be coterminous with the geographies of an earlier period. As explored in Chapters Four and Five of the present work, the political events in Tibet in the 1950s, especially the 1962 India-China boundary war, led not only to Monyul's disconnection and loss of its role as a corridor but also to its simultaneous fashioning into a militarised zone and marginal border.

However, following the diasporic spread of Tibetans, which has increased the worldwide popularity of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions and extended international recognition and hospitality for the Dalai Lama and his people, a set of discourses and practices, spearheaded by monks, has emerged in Monyul to call for the reinvigoration of Tibetan Buddhism in the region. Since the Monpas' experiences are shared by other Tibetan Buddhist minorities of the Indian Himalayas, as well as in regions beyond, the ideas and politics gradually taking shape in Monyul are not occurring in isolation but instead inter-regionally. These new alliances, corresponding to and influenced by global and regional factors and forces, have led to new imaginations of community, which in this book I have identified as a Himalayan geography.

Borrowing Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) terms *deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization,*[82] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997) explain 'deterritorialization' as narratives or actions resulting from migration, exile, or global financial and cultural flows that challenge the link between people and their cultural and political homelands, and 'reterritorialization' as new modes of place-based identities that emerge in spite of processes of deterritorialization. If the reorientation of Monyul from its former Tibet-centric networks can be considered a process of deterritorialization, then the imagined geography represented in the discourse and politics described here constitute a reterritorialization.

Reterritorialization is a different geography, not only in form but also in content: here, it is characterized by the movement of Tibetan Buddhist monks in Monyul from their customary duties in the monastic sphere to political action in the public sphere.[83] The reterritorialized geography is also, paradoxically, one to which the Indian state has actively contributed by supporting and promoting Tibetan Buddhist cultural programs and institutions. As submitted in my introduction, in this spatial order Monyul is neither reinstated as a corridor, nor relegated to a blind spot, but potentially reconfigured as a node in a network.

82 For Deleuze and Guattari, dimensions of territorialization/deterritorialization/reterritorialization are the processes by which social and spatial boundaries are inscribed/erased/reinscribed. Territory is the stabilization of an 'assemblage', a whole whose properties emerge from the interconnections between its parts (e.g., family is territorialized in a house, a corporation in an office, a community in a neighborhood, etc.), but it is always subject to deterritorialization; deterritorialized elements are recombined once again into new assemblages through a process of reterritorialization (Dovey 2009: 17, 18)

83 In a different work, I argue that Tibetan Buddhist monks' adaptation to democratic institutions in Monyul, manifested through their participation in electoral politics, is a survival strategy for monks in a world where they are gradually being divested of spiritual authority (Gohain 2017a).

Mapping moral geographies

I have argued that, by posing a counter to a normative national geography, the Himalayan imagined geography offers an ethics of post-sovereignty. In this sense, the spatial imaginations connecting the Tibetan Buddhist people of the Himalayas constitute a moral geography. The Himalayan geography aspires to be a moral geography because it cannot be a physical geography, but instead arises out of the collective experiences and cultural collaboration of Tibetan Buddhists in the Indo-Tibetan borderlands.

The discussion of how 'Himalaya' as a term has also come to transcend the geographical was a key point raised in Chapter Two. It is worth noting that 'Himalaya' often acts as a substitute for 'Tibetan', especially during negotiations between Tibetan Buddhist monks and the Indian state that call for the preservation of cultural traditions. This alternative identity emerges when Tibetan Buddhist communities outside Tibet have need of a politically neutral banner under which to mobilize. In such usages, Tibet is constantly present in the background, but only as a distant origin point – for it cannot be physically accommodated in the new geography. Instead, what is stressed is the community of Tibetan Buddhist populations in which the Tibetan exile community is included (although frequently with caveats, as I have shown). Rather than Tibet itself, it is the Tibetan Buddhist traditions that take centre stage, and the primary architects of this imagined geography are correspondingly the religious or spiritual leaders of the Tibetan Buddhist system who also command economic resources and social influence.

Imagining the Himalayas as a moral geography by taking into account only its Tibetan Buddhist features creates an exclusive social space, for the boundaries of this imagined place overlap with the cultural boundaries of Buddhism. In this sense, the Himalayan imagined geography is a normative geography envisioned by monks. In its normative association with Tibetan Buddhist religious traditions, it includes some and excludes others who live in the physical region we know as the Himalayas. In this way, too, it is an imagined geography, because actual habitation does not automatically allow membership within it.

The Himalayas, so imagined, may further be conceived as a moral geography because it is underpinned by a normative vision of what should constitute correct moral behaviour.

DeRogatis (2003) notes the conflation of physical and moral landscapes in the discourse of American Protestant missionaries in the context of the settling of the American frontier. The inhabitants of the 'wild' frontier were seen as encountering not only physical dangers but also moral degeneration,

and the missionaries' call to frontier emigrants to refrain from immoral habits (e.g., swearing profanely, cheating, drinking excessively, etc.) forged a moral geography.

Here, in Monyul, there are similar allusions to such a moral landscape with regard to values said to be sourced from Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhist leaders lament the loss of the compassion and peace extolled in Buddhist scriptures, which they consider the result of immigration and new cultural imports (e.g., Christianity). In doing so, they impose a moral geography onto the already articulated cultural geography. The Monpas' regional dominance by other Arunachali groups is attributed to certain Monpa qualities, such as peaceful, non-violent, or passive temperament, considered to be an outcome of Tibetan Buddhist influence.

The project proposal for the establishment of the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies in Dahung, a copy of which Lama Tashi gave me in 2009, contains the following observation:

> It is seen that despite the best intentions, neither the national plans for educational development have proved adequate and appropriate for these communities in the trans-Himalayan belt with their rich cultural heritage, nor have any worthwhile local plans been initiated. [...] What an irony that the culture of *karuna* [compassion], *ahimsa* [non-violence] and *maitri* [friendship] that are now being adopted in the West, are allowed to stagnate in parts of the country of their origin.

In the context of contemporary cultural politics in Monyul, the moral charge of degeneration is accompanied by a defined course of action. In other words, the Himalayan geography is not a place of diffuse imaginings without structure or direction. Although it does not present a formal, crystallized structure, it is also not simply a space of 'hope' (Crapanzano 2003) – a waiting characterized by non-directional, non-specific desire. Instead, it is a space of activism forged mainly by monks with practical aspirations, through concrete programs for Tibetan Buddhist culture preservation and promotion, and anticipates material outcomes from these efforts. It is a space of pragmatism, for it identifies specific measures that need to be taken to ensure the survival of Tibetan Buddhism in the Himalayan region.

Returning to the campaigns for Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa from Chapter Two, the rhetoric of minority rights that characterizes these campaigns suggests that the envisaged moral community has clearly defined practical ends that can be achieved through constitutional methods. There is the

realisation in the Monpa leadership that representing community cannot rest on a moral charge alone, but must be an active attempt to bring about the desired legal and constitutional amendments. To push forward such practical objectives requires a unity derived from more than cultural identity. Political unity is not an option, since Tibetan Buddhist communities are dispersed in different states of India. If common territoriality or homeland cannot be the form of the organization, then something else must stand in for it. A clue to what might fill this gap can be found in T.G. Rinpoche's words: 'Our Buddhists are very unfortunate in terms of organization and set-up. Christians, Muslims, Sikhs [are organized]. Buddhists are worst in organizational set-up. We don't have umbrella organization [...] That is why trans-Himalayan religious brotherhood is needed.'

'Brotherhood' is a very loaded term, used to refer to a range of widely varying contexts – from metaphorical blood ties and common caste membership (as in the term *biradari* in northern India), to descriptions of clan bonds between male members of a patrilineal society, as among the Pashtuns of Afghanistan. It is also possible to excavate T.G. Rinpoche's particular usage for deeper implications about gender exclusions practised in Tibetan religious and civil spheres. Women are, in general, considered to be the second sex in Tibetan society, by virtue of karma or past deeds, and hence there are prescribed rituals that promise liberation and rebirth as men in the next life. Women, including nuns, are excluded from certain pilgrimage routes, such as the circumambulations of the Dag-pa Shel-ri or 'pure crystal mountain', a ritually important peak in Tibet's Tsari region (Huber 1994). While lay discourses justify this prohibition by citing certain negative feminine traits (impetuousness, irreverence, arrogance, etc.), clerical discourses justify it on the basis of feminine bodily traits (women's bodies as ritually polluting and sexually dangerous/distracting) that would defile the purity of the sacred peak. Women are also excluded from both male monastic and civic spaces in Tibetan society (Huber 1994: 363). Even today, membership in the Tibetan Buddhist clergy has a male bias, for nuns have a secondary position compared to monks and are rarely associated with higher positions within the monastic echelon. Previously, nuns could not appear in examinations that would qualify them for the Geshe rank, the highest degree that can be conferred in the monastic educational system. The Dalai Lama conferred Geshema degrees on nuns for the first time only in 2017. Use of the term *brotherhood* may thus imply the authority, decision-making power, and capacity for action traditionally vested in monks as opposed to nuns in the Tibetan Buddhist system.

Here, however, I bring up the notion of brotherhood simply to observe what it means with regard to the organization and mobilization of populations who have a sense of being religious minorities in the milieu they inhabit. First, when T.G. Rinpoche remarks that 'spiritual leadership [is] not capable of this kind of organization', he differentiates spiritual community from temporal organization. Unlike *spiritual community*, which refers to followers of a set of religious and spiritual principles, *organization* has a more action-oriented tone. T.G. Rinpoche attributes the disorientation of Tibetan Buddhists in India to their lack of organization, comparing unfavourably with religious communities who do possess an organization. For Indian Buddhists, this means overcoming their enclave existences and presenting an organized front. Thus, his statement indicates not only a mood of urgency but also an action-oriented one that hints at the need to act if they are to salvage their heritage. The systematic drive to represent Bhoti as the primary language of different Tibetan-related peoples across the Indian Himalayas during the census operations (in order to get a constitutional mandate for it) suggests one effect of such organization.

Second, while the modalities of this organized community are not yet formalized, they do indicate a certain process. Organizations may be both centralized and decentralized. Invoking the need for organization may therefore redistribute power or authority from a centre to more diffuse, non-hierarchical locations. Today, the previous vertical (north-south) and hierarchical ties between Tibet and its southern borderlands are being replaced by a lateral solidarity among the community of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners. The pan-regional identity that emerges as a consequence shies away from a Tibet-centric discourse, towards a decentralized space where there may be not one but several loci along a lateral axis. Thus, if the border dispute plays a part in determining the lateral outline of the imagined geography, cultural ties sketch its internal contours. In an international milieu where Tibetan Buddhism is resurgent, peripheral Tibetan Buddhist communities of the Himalayan region led by the Buddhist clergy ally with each other to forge a trans-border, pan-regional (Himalayan) community based on a shared heritage. In this idealized horizontal solidarity, Monyul may hope to become a node in the Tibetan Buddhist cultural zone in India, as the trend of constructing Tibetan Buddhist universities, libraries, monasteries, and monuments in the region seems to indicate. Discourses about the preservation of Himalayan Buddhist culture in Tibetan Buddhist pockets of India and in its trans-border areas arise separately from, and yet in sync with, one another. It is only by apprehending the intent of alliance and organization among Tibetan Buddhist monastic populations that we can realize this.

Of nodes, networks, and non-territorial space

The Himalayan geography does not conform to conventional political geographies of the world. The Himalayas are not mapped as a discrete territorial identity formed of contiguous spaces, but rather, archipelago-style, as a confederation of dispersed populations, all of which can lay claim to the imagined geography through their common Tibetan Buddhist heritage. As a result, this space is not represented as politically continuous, but is instead divided into various provincial units within the Indian Himalayan region, and sometimes even beyond.

In this respect, 'Zomia' (now a well-known term in the social sciences) presents an interesting parallel as well as contrast. Originally coined by Willem Van Schendel (2002) as the collective term for dispersed, mostly hill-dwelling minorities living in the highlands of different Southeast Asian states, Zomia was reworked by James C. Scott (2009) to include the highlands of Asia from the western Himalayan Range through the Tibetan Plateau and all the way to the lower end of the peninsular Southeast Asian highlands. Van Schendel's term was designed to be deliberately imprecise because, although it rested loosely on geographical features, it was defined more by the political criteria of marginality and exclusion (Michaud 2010: 203). Van Schendel's objective was mainly to make a statement against the area studies framework that blocks off world regions into, say, Central (Inner), South, East, and Southeast Asia and arbitrarily constructs cores and peripheries. His notion of Zomia is therefore more of a critical tale for area studies, for he demonstrates how non-contiguous, peripheral regions can be shown to cohere via certain common features, and thereby, colloquially speaking, he turns area studies on its head.

Scott's notion of Zomia includes certain areas that Van Schendel left out, although it does overlap with another geographical category termed the 'South East Asian Massif' (Michaud 2010: 203). He argues that the hill populations of Zomia are not to be understood as backward tribes left behind by an advancing civilization, but rather as people articulating a political stance – that is, the rejection of state rule – by taking refuge in areas that are more or less inaccessible to state agents. While conventional conceptualisations of hill-valley divisions have always invested the hills with backwardness and lag and inflated the valleys as repositories of civilization, such conceptualizations, in Scott's view, are ahistorical; they do not take into account the fact that hill-dwellers may have willingly chosen to remain outside civilization, or rather outside of state spheres, to be more free of tax, surveillance, or corvée labour.

Both Van Schendel and Scott attempt to understand place and identity within a non-contiguous territorial frame by describing a political positioning that gives rise to a distinct spatial identity. In explaining what makes Zomia a region, Scott elaborates the common basis that unites these territorially disconnected units: 'Zomia is knitted together as a region not by a political unity which it utterly lacks, but by comparable patterns of diverse hill agriculture, dispersal and mobility, and rough egalitarianism [...] The single most distinguishing trait of Zomia *vis a vis* the lowland region it borders is that it is relatively stateless' (2009: 19). The Zomia hypothesis thus presents an example of a spatial identity that is not dependent on territorial proximity. Both of these scholars make significant interventions in seeing the relations between people and places in a different light through the questioning of taken-for-granted spatial orders.

My argument in the preceding chapters has a similar enterprise, which is to theorize a place that is not territorial in the conventional sense. I show how Monyul is transformed into a Himalayan imagined geography through practices that operate in an inter-regional and sometimes transnational milieu. Although the space thus formed is not politically continuous, as it is divided into various provincial units within India, or into different nation-states (e.g., India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet), it highlights a non-territorial basis for place-identities. The projected horizontal solidarity among the different Tibetan Buddhist pockets that make up the Himalayan geography also makes it easier to conceive of each of these as nodes in a network.

My conceptualization differs from the notion of Zomia in that it concerns geographical imaginations that are subjectively informed and promoted by the monastic communities in Monyul. That is, it is a self-ascribed term, for both lay people and monks refer to themselves and other Tibetan Buddhists of the region as Himalayan peoples. This is not the case with Zomia. As Michaud remarks, 'We can also suppose that notions such as Zomia, the Southeast Asian Massif, the Himalayan Massif, or Haute-Asie, have never been needed by the subjects themselves', and hence, 'such an overarching notion as Zomia has never been proposed locally by any of the societies dwelling there customarily' (Michaud 2010: 212). The terrain covered by Zomia consists of populations and areas that are vastly diverse, and the societies that are part of it have not conceived of any unity amongst themselves. In contrast, the cultural imaginations that I foreground in this book are subjective, held together by a collaborative, although primarily male monastic, vision and program, and in the foregoing chapters I have highlighted how 'Himalaya' is a term that is consciously adopted by different individuals and organisations.

International attention on Tibetan Buddhism, and conversely the participation of Monpa monks in international Tibetan Buddhist forums, has aided the project of reviving Buddhist traditions in Monyul. Huber (2001) shows how an essentialized modern Tibetan national identity, formed by the leadership of the exile community and selectively based on the anchor of Tibetan Buddhist religious tradition, arose out of interactions between Tibetan Buddhist leaders from Dharamsala and South Asian Buddhist leaders in international Buddhism conferences and groups, such as the World Fellowship of Buddhists (founded in 1950) and the World Buddhist Sangha Council (founded in 1966). The latter's precepts and principles of world peace directly contributed to the formation of an exiled Tibetan identity that rested on the representation of an essential, non-violent Tibetan identity, which nonetheless excludes other religious traditions of Tibet such as the Bon religion (Huber 2001: 362).

Similarly, networks forged within wider Tibetan monastic circuits have supported the (re)imagining of Monyul as a Buddhist place. The personal histories and career trajectories of monks returning from monastic circulation bear this out. T.G. Rinpoche was the most prominent of the monks who returned to Monyul with the defined agenda of working for Tibetan Buddhist cultural preservation. Recognized as the thirteenth reincarnation of the Tsonawa by the present Dalai Lama, T.G. Rinpoche was born in Tawang on 19 August 1967 and studied at the Drepung Loseling monastery in South India, from where he graduated with the degree of Geshe Lharampa, the highest monastic degree equivalent to a Doctorate in Buddhist philosophy. He returned to Monyul in 1987 and took over charge of the Gaden Rabgye Ling (GRL) monastery in Bomdila. He acted as president of the Himalayan Buddhist Culture Association, regularly participated in international Buddhism conventions, and was the first Buddhist representative from the Himalayan region to be invited to the Millennium United Nations World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in August 2013. Along with the Dalai Lama, he appeared on a daily Buddhist programme, 'Noble wisdom' on Sadhna Channel, an Indian spiritual television network, from 6.40-7.00 PM, where he delivered philosophical teachings (Kamal 2011). As already mentioned, he founded the Buddhist Culture Preservation Society (BCPS), which set up and ran the Gaden Rabgye Ling monastery school for monks, the Jangchub Choeling Nunnery school for nuns, the Shanti Deva Vidyalaya school for children from the poorer sections of society, as well as a traditional Sowa Rigpa centre for disseminating the Tibetan medicine system, besides being involved in various projects to renovate and restore ancient Buddhist sites and monuments in Monyul. Many Monpa religious leaders currently

engaged in preserving and promoting Tibetan Buddhist traditions in Monyul are similar monk returnees from the Tibetan monasteries of South India, as mentioned in Chapter Two. I briefly present the life stories of two monk returnees to illustrate how they have contributed to the transformation of the region's cultural landscape.

Jigme Rapten Rinpoche of Dirang was recruited from his village at the the age of nine by some visiting monks from South India, who took him to study at the Ganden Jangtse monastery in Mundgod, Karnataka. His father was the headman of Dirang village. After completing his Geshe Lharampa degree, he returned to his native village in 2004. My first meeting with him was in 2009, when he had just started work on a monastery located above the Dirang market. I interviewed him in the small shed that he had had erected next to the construction site so that he could personally oversee the work. An incumbent state minister of the Indian National Congress party had given him donations for the monastery, in return for his spiritual guidance during the 2009 elections. In his calm voice, Jigme Rinpoche recounted how, after returning to Dirang, he started a local non-governmental organization, the Himalayan Culture and Tradition Preservation Society, under the mentorship of his *gelong* ('teacher') based in Karnataka. He felt that Buddhist people in Monyul followed rituals without really understanding Buddhist philosophy, and so he devised the idea of building a monastery that would also function as a cultural centre. In 2008, he began the project to build what he hoped would be the largest Gelug monastery in Dirang town, which had hitherto only had small village *gonpas*. In 2009, his plan was still in the blueprint

Figure 16a Blueprint of Thupsung Dhargyeling Monastery 2009

Figure 16b Ongoing construction of Thupsung Dhargyeling Monastery 2013

Figure 16c Thupsung Dhargyeling Monastery 2017

stage, but by 2017, during my return field visit, it had evolved into a grand golden structure, the Thupsung Dharghyeling Monastery, with residences for the monks and a monastery guesthouse for visitors. The monastery was inaugurated by the Dalai Lama on 5 April 2017.

When I met him again in 2017, playing with four shaggy sheepdog puppies in the monastery grounds, Jigme Rinpoche gave me an update about his monastery's activities. He told me that since 2011 he and a few monk associates had been holding daily morning classes on 'Buddha, Dharma and Sangha' – teaching about the Buddha's life, religion, and how Buddhism can help people lead a peaceful life, as well as the proper conduct of Buddhist rituals. People of all ages participated in the classes and by 2017 around 50 people from Dirang had already become proficient in Bhoti. He claimed that since the monastery was built, local people have become more interested in Buddhism; 58 children were sent from Dirang to study at a new school started by the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, and 48 were sent to the monasteries in Karnataka. He was proud of his work and spoke to me of his future dreams of building a school in the monastery premises and preparing a new generation of students well versed in Buddhist thought. Jigme Rinpoche explained, 'Hum log Himalaya ke hain. Kuch accha karne ke liye soch ke, culture ka acha karne ke liye soch ke [...] public ke liye, humne non-governmental kaam shuru kiya.' ['We are Himalayan people [...] I am interested in preserving our culture [...] I wanted to do something for the public good, and so I started non-governmental work'].

Gelong Ngawang Dhondhup is another monk returnee who, although not as active in constructing monasteries, had strong opinions about how to improve the lot of Buddhists in the region. He had studied until class seven in the local school of Sangti village, and then had run away to Senge. Villagers found him and returned him to his parents. He was then sent to a monastery, embarking on further studies at Sera monastery in Mysore in 1972. He never learned Hindi or the local Monpa dialect, but only Tibetan. After teaching for three years in Bodh Gaya and then in Bomdila monastery school for a year and a half, he joined Kalaktang higher secondary school in April 1995. In 1997, he joined the Dirang higher secondary school, and was still teaching Bhoti there when I met him in 2009. He became visibly upset when telling me about the problems of Bhoti teachers and complained that monks with degrees earned a pittance teaching Bhoti and had to go from house to house to perform pujas to earn supplementary income. This was just before the 2009 elections; Gelong Dhondhup was the religious mentor for Phurpa Tsering, the candidate opposing the incumbent minister in the election. Not believing that the incumbent minister would help the cause

of the monks, Gelong Dhondhup was overjoyed when Phurpa won, for he had promised him a huge fund to construct a monastery in Dirang, as well as to improve the pay scale and work contracts of Bhoti teachers. Gelong Dhondhup's dream was to start a branch of his alma mater, Sera monastery, in Dirang. There were several other monks in Monyul, including Lama Tashi, Dr Thupten Shakya, Lama Lobsang Gyatso, and others that I have mentioned in previous chapters, who returned after completing Buddhist studies outside the region. Occupying prominent positions and being able to communicate easily with the people, they play a key role in shaping the discourse of the region.

Many high-ranking monks in Monyul maintain contact with foreign donors in Western or rich Asian countries, and these contacts have helped hundreds of poor villagers find foreign sponsors for their education. There is one story of a monk who apparently carried with him a sheaf of applications (with the photographs of potential wards) every time he went abroad; after his preaching was over, he would leave them with the audience. In this way, he helped many poor boys and girls find wealthy sponsors of their education, both secular and monastic. Several new monasteries are being built in Monyul today and yet more are being planned. It is difficult to find out how these monasteries are financed, but when asked, local people mention Japan, Taiwan, and America. To give an example, the Chilipam gonpa – a Nyimgma monastery in Rupa, West Kameng – was originally a small structure surrounded by the living quarters of the monks and the chamber of Guru Rinpoche (abbot of Tawang monastery, considered by some to be the reincarnation of the founder saint Padmasambhava). But the new one, which was completed around 2009, is huge, golden, magnificent, and full of innovative Buddhist designs, with the *tsam* ('meditation') area for monks going into retreat specially constructed atop a nearby hillock. A high-ranking monk in Sangti village, Dirang who was constructing a *gonpa* in his village was reluctant to divulge the sources of its funding, but stated that government funds were highly inadequate for the construction of monasteries. While the Tawang monastery receives money from the central government for its maintenance, the construction of a monastery of the kind that is seen today requires vast amounts of money, which mostly flows in from abroad. Monk returnees who maintain, and even actively cultivate, their links with Tibetan Buddhist networks enable Monyul's positioning as a node.

In 2009, the government of Arunachal Pradesh announced the creation of a new Department of Karmic and Adhyatmik Affairs, or DoKAA (*chos-rig*), for Tawang and West Kameng districts within the Department of Culture,

which was entrusted with the subject of Buddhist culture preservation. T.G. Rinpoche was placed in charge.[84] The Nine Point Agenda of the DoKAA department, a document that I collected from Dorjee Norbu, the then-secretary of the Buddhist Culture Preservation Society in Bomdila, includes tasks such as the maintenance and renovation of monasteries, promotion of religious studies, including arts and Sowa Rigpa, and the support of research and workshops related to local traditions and the Bhoti language. The document projects the culture of the West Kameng and Tawang areas as overlapping with the Tibetan Buddhist traditions.

The objectives outlined in this Nine Point Agenda tally with the resolutions adopted at a joint Himalayan conference at Lumbini, Nepal, which was attended by political representatives and civil society leaders from Nepal and India and Tibetan Buddhist leaders from the Himalayan world as well as abroad. The Lumbini Declaration includes protection of the Bhoti language, preservation of important trans-Himalayan and Indo-Tibetan cultural sites, and the promotion of monastic education and 'the welfare of disadvantaged followers of Tibetan forms of Buddhism ('Resolution to create the International Buddhist Confederation', 2011). The points of convergence between the two documents show the common practices or politics that are being forged among Tibetan Buddhist communities of the Tibetan borderlands, both inside and outside of India. Although the specific strains and pressures on the Buddhists of Monyul are not the same as the strains and pressures on those in, say, Ladakh or Nepal, these communities have identified a common space of belonging.

Taking these fragmented but connected happenings into account, I wish to make a suggestion about the shape of the Himalayan imagined geography and how it may redistribute cores and peripheries. While in the previous Tibetan Buddhist circuits Monyul was a participating trade route, in the new envisioning of a Tibetan Buddhist alliance, where Tibet is absent as a centre, Monyul is offered the promise of a partnership that was not previously available to it. As a potential node in cross-border networks and flows, Monyul is more empowered than it was as a trade corridor. In some statements, the Dalai Lama has indicated that he may choose to be

84 Rumor has it that T.G. Rinpoche gave an application to a senior politician in Delhi for the creation of such a department in Arunachal Pradesh, since such a department already exists in Sikkim, Bhutan, and Ladakh. The politician told him to get the signatures of at least fifteen MLAs (Member of Parliament) from Arunachal Pradesh. He could get only two. He went back and told the politician that his one person represented lakhs of people (i.e., his followers), and he left the proposal on the desk and walked out. The story goes that three days later, he got the permission for the creation of the department.

reborn outside China, and there are speculations as to the important role Tawang may play if the fourteenth Dalai Lama chooses to reincarnate in Tawang itself (*The Economist*, 10 April 2017). The Dalai Lama has already taken birth in Tawang once, in his sixth reincarnation. Many residents of Tawang are aware of the significance of Tawang in the absence of a strong centre within Tibet and hazard the opinion that today 'many look at Tawang for direction when it comes to preserving Tibetan culture and heritage' (Jambey Tashi, quoted in Mukherjee 2009). With the Dalai Lama predicting that his successor would be from India, the relocation of the spiritual locus of Tibetan Buddhism to locations south of Tibet is certain. If Monyul is repositioned within the trans-Himalayan frame, the periphery may be redrawn.

The opposite case may be true as well. It is possible that in an alternative geography, new cores and peripheries are being formed where Monyul's location is still ambiguous. While many political projects disguise spatial relationships, it is hardly ever the case that there is no core. Certain criteria come to define who can belong and who are excluded. The core, then, can be detected by the people it indicates as belonging. The question then arises of whether all of the new nodes are equal.

It is equally possible that the Himalayan geography may evolve into a multi-centred one, where previous enclaves connect and become nodes in cross-border flows, possibly routed through newly established institutes of learning. As previously mentioned, the CIHCS institute has plans of offering students of Arunachal Pradesh – who are otherwise deprived of education in 'traditional subjects' because of their distance from Tibetan and Buddhist research institutes – the opportunity for higher education in Buddhist cultural studies, among other things. The CIHCS project proposal contains a list of six future subjects, in addition to its regular courses, which would focus on Himalayan cultural history, Bhot language and literature, Buddhist studies from Pali, Sanskrit, and ancient Indian arts and sciences, Indian Ayurveda, *Jyotish* (the traditional Hindu system of astronomy and astrology), crafts, and other subjects preserved in Bhot language. The proposal further projects Monyul as one of the places where Buddhism 'originated' and locates the institute as a participating node in a network of institutes concerned with disseminating Buddhist studies. While the re-imagined Himalayan geography is not a physically unified entity, it is a cohesive set of discourses and practices promoted by the Tibetan Buddhist leadership and channelled, one may surmise, through an inter-connected network of institutions of learning and research that are positioned in nodes.

Security, territory, and the state

In discussions of the campaigns for Bhoti and Sowa Rigpa in the preceding chapters, I pointed out how Monpa leaders negotiate with the Indian state for the constitutional recognition of these practices. But the state also makes concessions and allowances to Monyul to keep this disputed border region within its spheres of influence. Both the Indian state and the local actors are thus involved in mutual negotiations. The state frequently takes on the role of mediator in Monyul's relations and interactions with transnational networks in a bid to retain control over this border. In fact, it is the peculiar location and history of Monyul, as well as its disputed border status, that explains the particular interventions made by the state in this region.

Christian Lund (2016) shows how state authority, on the one hand, and property and citizenship, on the other, are mutually constitutive. In return for the state's recognition of their rights over land and property, citizens recognize the political authority of the state in the form of taxes, tributes, labour, and so on. Lund argues that while property is not the only resource that shapes state power (security, knowledge, etc., being other forms), it is key to showing how state authority emerges dialectically and processually. The second point Lund makes is that government institutions are not the only source of state effect; in fact, the dynamic between authority and property is more visible in semi-autonomous (or technically, non-state) institutions, since it is these latter that aspire to a state-like quality by their ability to define citizenship through property. Consequently, Lund argues, it is only in moments of rupture or times of epistemic and practical shifts in history that we can understand how states are produced through the production of property rights, since during moments of stability the rights appear to be flowing from governing institutions.

Using the notion of rupture in relation to Monyul, it is possible to see how its reorientation away from Tibet and incorporation into the new political economic networks of independent India, which signalled a moment of rupture, created a condition of mutual recognition between the Indian state and the border communities. When the administration of Tawang monastery shifted from the hands of Tibet's religious government to that of the Indian postcolonial state in 1951, earlier sources of monastery income, such as villagers' taxes, also lost their compulsory character. Correspondence between high-ranking monks at the Tawang monastery and the office of the Deputy Commissioner in Tawang records the official nature of the negotiations that went on during this period of political and social transition. Administrative documents from the 1950s until the 1980s that

are preserved in the Deputy Commissioner's office in Tawang show the amount of government money and effort that was invested in rebuilding and renovating *gonpas* ('monasteries'), nunneries, and monastery schools, in providing financial sustenance for monks, and in giving grants to villages and monasteries for the organization of religious ceremonies and festivals. In exchange for recognizing Indian sovereignty, the monastery elite and village heads sought to gain certain leverage from the new administration in the form of material aid. The local and state administration also responded to these appeals for financial help from monastic institutions, and encouraged the monastery schemes for improving and repairing monastic structures. When monasteries and local laypeople alike had to access government funds for various activities, they were concomitantly forced to recognise the postcolonial Indian state (see Gohain 2017b). The rupture therefore enabled the production of the Indian state in the Monyul border.

The postcolonial Indian government also recognized quite early on that the strong influence of Buddhism and Buddhist institutions in Monyul could be harnessed for the goal of nation-building. The Indian administration aspired to secure its legitimacy among the local population by promoting their cultural activities. Government patronage of Tibetan Buddhist institutions and cultural traditions was a careful, deliberate measure to integrate Monyul into the political and cultural networks of the Indian state. Giving aid was not a disinterested move by the Indian government, but rather one intended to bind recipients in bonds of obligations – through the process of giving and receiving aid, the state came to be recognized as a concrete entity (Yeh 2013).

In 1964, in the aftermath of the India-China war of 1962, the Indian government sanctioned the construction of the Nehru Gonpa, a monastery in the memory of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, in the newly evolving urban spaces of Tawang. Locals narrate how stones and bricks from an older *kakaling*, a square arch that served as an entrance gate to the area, were used to lay the foundation of the new *gonpa*. The Tawang monastery soon took over the charge of the Nehru Gonpa, which now stands in Tawang's Nehru Market area as a symbol of the relationship between the Indian state and Tibetan Buddhist institutions in frontier areas that was forged in that early postcolonial period.

The continuing border dispute, which makes Monyul a relatively tenuous state space compared to other core areas of the nation, provides the Indian state with further justification for performing rituals of state-making in the region. At times, it has attempted 'soft' cultural imperialism to propagate national or dominant symbols and contribute to the process of nation-building in such borderland regions. In some nationalist narratives,

Buddhism is promoted as an indigenous offshoot of Hinduism, with India as its birthplace – and hence, by extension, Buddhist borderlands become part of the Hindu cultural and mythological universe. Even though many scholars (e.g., Omvedt 2003) disagree with the thesis, this view of Buddhism has been deployed for mobilizing nationalist pride among marginal Buddhists of India. For example, in 1997 Hindu nationalist leader L.K. Advani was instrumental in inaugurating the Sindhu Darshan Festival in Ladakh at a specially constructed Sindhu Ghat on the banks of the river Indus (Aggarwal 2004: 223, 224). Since its inauguration, there has been a *yatra* or pilgrimage to it every year in June, and activities during the festival, apart from worship of the river Indus, include reviving patriotism through a flag hoisting, the chanting of hymns to Mother India, and so on.

While such overt cultural nationalism is not openly visible in Arunachal Pradesh, the mushrooming of Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya (VKV) schools in the region indicates a future trend. These schools, which adopt a 'culture-based' curriculum that emphasizes a blending of Buddhist cultural preservation with nationalism and patriotism, show an attempt to seamlessly assimilate Hinduism, Buddhism, and nationalism. In 2013, when I met Dinesh Nair, principal of VKV Kitpi, he told me that the aim is to target tribal areas so that the 'simple' people there are not diverted to other religions. There are 34 such VKV schools across Arunachal Pradesh, with the one in Kitpi village of Tawang being the most recent.

Efforts and strategies for strengthening the state's presence through cultural patronage continue today. Each year since 2012, the Department of Tourism of the Arunachal Pradesh government, with help from the central government, has been organizing the five-day Tawang Festival and, since 2016, the three-day Buddha Mahotsava festival in Bomdila ('Buddha Mahotsava kicks off in Arunachal', 2016). Before this, the Tawang district administration had organized three editions of the Buddha Mahotsava festival in the Tawang monastery premises to commemorate the life and teachings of the Lord Buddha, which were oriented towards developing Tawang as a site of 'spiritual tourism' (*VIth Buddha Mahotsava*, 2006) These festivals are mainly intended to showcase the monastic dances traditionally performed in monastery premises. In 2017, the Department of Karmik and Adhyatmik Affairs (DoKAA) brought out a series of official guidebooks on the pilgrimage sites of Monyul, with the note that one of the main reasons for publishing these books is 'to give the message about life story of the ancient great scholars (manifestation of Buddha) and their achievements'.

On 3 December 2012, the then-chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Nabam Tuki, announced that the government would give a fund of 40 million

Figure 17 Vivekananda Kendra school, Tawang

rupees (663,950 US dollars) for the Tawang monastery, in addition to more than one million rupees for various development measures in Monyul (*Meghalaya Times,* 12 December 2012). At the same meeting, he announced that the state cabinet had approved the regularization of the services of 36 Bhoti teachers and the upgrading of the middle school at Zemithang to the secondary level, besides completing the important Lumla-Tashigang road. The state government's support of the Tawang monastery and Bhoti teaching was clearly oriented towards sustaining the goodwill towards the regional and national political leadership in a disputed border region. In this way, fears of national security paradoxically enable the transnational mapping of Monyul as a Buddhist place. The Himalayan geography is therefore a negotiated one, mediated not only by the transnational networks in which it is embedded, but also by a nation-state anxious to protect its borders. It is also fractured by oppositional tendencies from within and without that influence its shape and scope.

This ethnography is an attempt to call attention to the beginning of a process. It proposes the category of a Himalayan imagined geography to outline some contemporary currents from which it is possible to forecast some general trends. As to the future direction of this imagined geography, there can be no conclusive answer. Any work of social science can only predict possibilities that are open-ended. This work projects a future in which the Himalayan geography that is now emerging could precipitate new relations and a new politics of alliance between Tibetan Buddhist minorities of India and transnational spaces.

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