

In Origins and Migrations in the
Extended Eastern Himalayas

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TRANS-HIMALAYAN MIGRATIONS AS PROCESSES, NOT
EVENTS: TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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INTRODUCTION

Many studies of ethnic group origins focus on two questions: where did the (name of group) come from, and how did the (name of group) get to their current homeland? Some scholars address these questions by examining migration routes recounted in myths of origin or shamanic journeys. Although ontological narratives provide important emic perspectives on how a group came into being, they often leave the impression that, at some distinct point in time, the group in question moved *en masse* to their current homeland, settled, and then ossified into a distinct ethnic community. The punctuated equilibrium model of migration, characterised by long periods of stability interrupted by brief periods of mobility, glosses over a fundamental, well-documented feature of human movements: although migrations can start as singular events, they typically evolve into protracted processes. As archaeologists have noted, small-scale movements of people are historically more frequent yet less easy to pinpoint than large-scale migrations. Nevertheless, small-scale movements can act as important initiators of social and cultural transformations (Hegmon, Nelson, and Ennes 2000). Focusing exclusively on a seminal migration event, rather than the diachronic process, misses a great part of the story of how communities form over time.

The purpose of this paper is to develop a theoretically-informed approach to studying how migration, as a protracted process, has shaped settlement patterns and social structures in the Himalayan region. Although scholars have unearthed a wealth of data to document the settling of Himalayan valleys (e.g., Oppitz 1968; Jackson 1978; Ramble 2008), none have developed an explanatory framework that rests upon formal theories of migration.¹ The situation is partially accountable to the fact that migration theories are designed to be empirically tested using

¹ Wim van Spengen's geohistory of Tibetan trade routes (2000) draws on Braudel's theoretical melding of history and geography to document the development of trade routes between Tibet and South Asia. Albeit not a study of migration per se, van Spengen provides an excellent example of how a scholar can use theoretical insights to provide a more robust and historically contextualized explanation of Himalayan settlement patterns.

data from surveys and interviews—data that simply does not exist in the historical archives. Nevertheless, I contend that systematic research on contemporary migrations can yield novel insights about historical migrations. To accomplish this objective, I draw upon migration theories to address three fundamental questions: Why do people move? Who in a given community is most likely to migrate? How do networks influence the scale and direction of migrations? The theoretical discussion forms a backdrop for the second part of the paper: a case study on the settlement history of Sama, a village in Nepal.

PART I: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Disciplinary orientations exert a powerful influence on the types of theoretical questions a researcher studying migration is likely to ask (see Brettell and Hollifield 2000). For example, a demographer may want to investigate how migration affects birth and death rates of both sending and receiving populations, whereas an economist is more likely to focus on the macroeconomic forces that motivate people to move in the first place. For the purpose of this paper, I am concerned with questions more rooted in anthropology, namely, how migration is facilitated by social networks, and how migration influences the social organisation of communities. I draw upon two bodies of theoretical literature. The first seeks to explain motives behind migration, while the second examines how social networks facilitate the movement of people.

Why Do People Migrate?

Any study of migration must first identify the nature of that migration. Brettell (2000:99-102) provides a summary of migration typologies that starts with five identified by Gonzalez (1961). *Seasonal migration* is a movement by individuals or families that usually occurs once a year in response to seasonal labour opportunities. *Temporary, nonseasonal migration* is usually undertaken by young, unmarried individuals who leave their places of origin for varying lengths of time in order to gain skills, experience, education, or resources before returning to settle down. A temporary, nonseasonal migrant generally sets out with the intention to return, although may end up leaving permanently. *Recurrent migration* is an intensification of temporary, nonseasonal migration. This typology describes people who continually leave home for varying periods of

time throughout their productive years. Margolis (1995) refers to recurrent migrants as sojourners, and coined the term 'yo-yo migrations' to emphasise that many migrants never intend to remain detached from their original communities. *Permanent migration* covers those who move permanently from one place to another. Permanent migrations often start as temporary or recurrent migrations by individuals, but then develop into the movement of entire families. *Continuous migration*, a relatively rare phenomenon, usually involves nuclear families that move from job to job and live in temporary residences. Such people have little if any contact with a home community. To these five categories, Gonzalez adds *conflict migration* (1989) which creates a distinct category of migrant, the refugee. Although refugees do not necessarily move willingly, the realities they face in terms of making a living and forming social networks are similar in many ways to other types of migrants (Malkki 1995).

Migration typologies emerge within a context of migration auspices, or 'the social, economic, political and historical contexts within which migration begins and proceeds' (Grieco 1998:706). Migration auspices can be framed as push factors (those that impel people to leave a place) and pull factors (those that induce people to move to a place). The most widely analyzed push and pull factors in contemporary research are wage differentials that stimulate the movement of people from poorer to wealthier nations. There is certainly merit in using such an approach to study relatively recent migrations throughout the Himalayan region, for example, research on social changes induced by Sherpa migrations to Darjeeling (Ortner 1989, 1999), or the impacts of circular labour on subsistence strategies and old-age care in Helambu (Goldstein and Beall 1981; Bishop 1998:71-80). On the other hand, the wage differential model of migration has less explanatory value the further one moves back in time. In the context of historical trans-Himalayan migrations we therefore need to focus on other push factors, including safety threats (political turmoil, including war or the threat of persecution), health threats (epidemics), subsistence threats (drought, flooding, and crop failure), and demographic factors (increasing population density induced by natural growth and/or in-migration). Legends and first-hand observations provide evidence that people have moved throughout the region in response to some of the push factors listed above. To cite three examples, the Sherpas claim to have fled their homeland in eastern Tibet to avoid a war (Oppitz 1968; Wangmo 2005); a settlement in Shöyul, Nepal, was abandoned due to the failure of its irrigation system (Ramble 2008:45); and some people in southeastern Tibet abandoned

their villages in response to an epidemic (Bacot 1912). Pull factors include the availability of under-utilised resources in areas that lay on the margins of political control. This resource-based pull factor entails either the existence of uninhabited land, or the existence of land utilised in a limited manner so that potential migrants can envision negotiating access rights or driving previous occupants away.

Microeconomic theories of migration treat people as rational actors who make individual choices to maximise net returns on their labour. One microeconomic theory, however, moves away from treating individuals as autonomous entities by focusing on the household as the decision-making unit of analysis. The 'new economics of migration' emphasises that decisions are typically made collectively in order to maximise benefits to the household (Stark and Bloom 1985). Because the household mediates between the individual and the outside world, a focus on households allows one to better understand how decisions are made in consideration of economic, political, and social conditions, as well as cultural norms (Brettell 2000:107).

Using the household as the unit of analysis has certain advantages. Massey and colleagues cite numerous studies to document how migration decisions are not mutually exclusive (either move or stay put). Rather, they often represent household-level strategies to diversify income sources by retaining some members at home who engage in local production while sending others outside, either temporarily or permanently, to capitalise on external opportunities (Massey et al. 1993:439). The new economics of migration retains the assumption that people are rational actors, and that the intent of migration is to maximise returns on labour. In addition it recognises that people in households respond to economic and political circumstances collectively, rather than individually, when deciding who should migrate, and to where.

Both macro- and microeconomic theories acknowledge that the propensity to migrate is not uniform across any society, but varies in relation to a range of individual characteristics. Simply put, in any given environment some people are more likely to migrate than others. This point is abundantly clear when examining a relatively recent trans-Himalayan migration, the flight of Tibetan refugees to South Asia starting in 1959. Based on the composition of the exile population it is safe to conclude that the original migrant population was comprised of more males than females. Furthermore, a large percentage of the refugee population inhabited border regions (e.g., Kyirong and Tingri) from where it was comparatively easy to cross into exile. A disproportionate number of the

aristocracy and clerisy fled knowing they could be targeted for persecution. In comparison very few members of the lower strata of society left Tibet, presumably influenced by the hope that they would benefit from China's redistribution policies. Gender, age, proximity to the border, and social status all had a bearing on the propensity to migrate.

Gender is an important variable to consider with respect to the propensity to migrate. Cerrutti and Massey (2001:187-88) point out that neo-classical theories of migration tended to treat women as passive agents who had little if any role in the decision-making process; a woman's propensity to migrate was pegged to that of her husband. Brettell further argues that neoclassical approaches implied that 'women represented the traditional pole of the continuum and men the pole of modernity' (2000:109). Many researchers clearly recognise that women do have influence in migration decision-making, albeit their influence varies from one society to another and may not be readily apparent (Riley and Gardner 1993). In general, studies find that men's intentions are more closely related to their income-earning roles, while women's intentions are more closely related to their family-support roles (De Jong 2000; Cerrutti and Massey 2001).

How Do Migrations Perpetuate?

Most migrations commence with the movement of a few enterprising individuals or pioneers, people who have a higher propensity to take risks or explore new options. If successful, the information they gather and the networks they form influence the propensity to migrate for others, leading to the perpetuation of a migration stream and the intensification of social networks between places of origin and destination. Network theory is devoted to studying the ways that social networks form and facilitate the continuing movement of people (Massey et al. 1993).

Networks are multilocal. In other words, 'they encompass a variety of geographical destinations' (Wilson 1998:395-96). At a surface level it is easy to envision the migrant network as a dyad composed of a sending and a receiving community. However, networks are typically far more complex and involve links with numerous localities. The multilocal nature of networks allows them to operate as a form of social capital, defined as 'the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structure' (Portes 1995:12). As social capital, people use networks to learn about where to go, how to find employment, and how to manage their daily

lives in unfamiliar surroundings. Networks thereby reduce the costs and risks associated with migrating, and in the process help develop and maintain migration streams.

Networks can be based on weak ties, strong ties, or a combination thereof. The strength of ties varies according to 'the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterizes the tie' (Granovetter 1973:1361, cited in Grieco 1998:705). Weak ties represent relationships between acquaintances and people of common origin, in contrast to strong ties which are relationships among close friends and kin. Strong tie networks are more densely clustered and are comprised of individuals who have stronger emotional bonds, interact on a regular basis, and share the same information. Weak ties are more diffuse and are comprised of people who have sporadic contact with each other and few emotional commitments.

Two important points can be made with respect to strong and weak ties. The first is that migration auspices (discussed above) influence the nature of social networks that develop at migration destinations (Grieco 1998). When individuals rather than families or communities move they tend to form weak networks among themselves, while seeking to enhance their ties with members of the host community in order to adjust to the new environment. One result is rapid assimilation. In contrast, when entire social units move (e.g., families or communities), they tend to form stronger social networks among themselves and resist assimilation by establishing distinct ethnic communities (Grieco 1998:706).

The second point is that networks expand through 'the strength of weak ties' (Wilson 1998:397-98). According to Granovetter (1982) weak ties act as information conduits between more densely clustered networks of kin and friends. Diffuse social networks in the form of weak ties constitute a form of social capital. A rise in the number of migrants increases the quantity of weak ties thereby increasing the volume of social capital available to the migrant group as a whole. Furthermore, the strength of weak ties is greater among higher socioeconomic groups because they have access to more information and resources (Wilson 1998:398). Members of higher status social or economic groups are in better positions to disseminate information through weak networks because of the volume of information they possess, as well as the resources that facilitate their movements and communications with other members of a weak tie network.

Massey integrates network theory with macro- and microeconomic perspectives through the concept of 'cumulative causation', or the

dynamic interplay between migrant communities and their places of origin (Massey 1990; Massey et al. 1993). Like network theory, cumulative causation examines the complex feedback mechanisms that contribute to the self-perpetuating movement of migrants. Ideological forces in a sending community, referred to as the culture of migration, change over time in response to political and economic forces, and the ensuing migration process. The culture of migration continually influences the propensity for individuals to migrate by shaping peoples' receptiveness to the idea that moving elsewhere can lead to a better life. If receptiveness to moving becomes deeply embedded, that is, if a strong culture of migration develops, then the propensity to migrate increases for more people. The culture of migration is therefore central to the argument embedded in the cumulative causation model that 'each act of migration alters the social context within which subsequent migration decisions are made, typically in ways that make additional movement more likely' (Massey et al. 1993:451).

To summarise, various push and pull factors shape the environment within which migration decisions are made. Except in the case of forced migrations, people generally weigh the costs and benefits of migration options, which can include moving *en masse* (a household or entire community), or only sending selected members outside. Migration decision-making is best described as a relationship between the propensity to migrate (as influenced by migration auspices, the culture of migration, individual human capital attributes, and household characteristics) and the motivation to migrate (as influenced by social networks and various push and pull factors). The most appropriate unit of analysis for migration decision-making is the household. The next objective of this paper is to use the theoretical perspectives presented above as a means for shedding new light on the settlement history of Sama, a village in the highlands of Nepal.

PART II: THE PROCESS OF POPULATING SAMA

Sama is a village of roughly 500 inhabitants situated at an elevation of 3500m in the Nubri Valley, Gorkha District, Nepal. The village is populated by an admixture of ethnic Tibetans who migrated from the north, and ethnic Ghailes who entered the valley from the south. The following sections detail Sama's social and religious organisation, sketch the village's settlement history, and deploy theoretical perspectives to better understand the long-term processes that formed the village's unique

character. In the final section I argue that the networks established through previous in-migrations influence the contemporary pattern of out-migration and thereby continue to play a role in shaping the social and religious organisations of Sama.²

Social and Religious Organisation

Sama's society is comprised of four patrilineal descent lineages (*rgyud pa*). Listed in order of descending prestige these are Ngadag ('Possessing Power'), Pönzang ('Good Rulers'), Yorkung ('Irrigators'), and Chumin ('Low and Inferior'). The Ngadag are a lineage of householder lamas (*sngags pa*) who descend from Tibet's medieval emperors. The Pönzang, as their name implies, were once associated with political leadership. They claim to descend from Kyika Ratö, a legendary illegitimate son of a Tibetan queen who fled to the Himalayas. More concretely, Pönzang members claim to have migrated from Barpak, an ethnically Ghale village to the south of Nubri. Yorkung and Chumin members comprise the majority of Sama's population. According to oral accounts they are descendents of Sama's original settlers.

Sama is a Nyingmapa Buddhist community. The Ngadag lamas are especially devoted to the teachings of the Changter School (*byang gter*, 'Northern Treasure') that is associated with Rigzen Gödemchen, a fourteenth century cleric who revealed many hidden teachings (*gter ma*) that, according to legend, had been concealed in the eighth century by Padmasambhava. Rigzen Gödemchen's revealed corpus includes keys to opening, and guidebooks for entering, *beyül* (*sbas yul*), or 'hidden lands'. *Beyül* are remote, difficult to access valleys situated in the Himalayan borderlands. Tibetans believe that *beyül* were concealed by Padmasambhava, who designated them as settlement destinations to be opened during times of political conflict, moral degeneration, and religious decline. One such hidden land, Kyimolung, is situated within the Nubri Valley.

Sama's Settlement History

The earliest reference to Nubri dates from the late tenth or early eleventh century when the intrepid yogi Milarepa (1040-1123) reportedly

visited the area to meditate in a cave near the present location of Sama. According to his account, Milarepa encountered a 'land of a different language' which he characterised as a 'pitch-black realm of ignorance where the dharma had not yet spread.' If Milarepa's account is accurate,³ then Nubri in the eleventh century was inhabited either seasonally or permanently by a non-Tibetan speaking people that practiced a religion other than Buddhism.

During Milarepa's lifetime Gungtang, a kingdom founded by descendants of Tibet's medieval emperors, extended its domain to encompass the Nubri Valley. Around 1280 Gungtang's rulers marked their control over Nubri by erecting Black Cliff Fort; its remains are still visible across the river from Sama. The garrisoning of this fort probably represents the first settling of Tibetans in the valley and may coincide with the establishment of Sama by the ancestors of today's Yorkung and Chumin lineages.

During the height of Mongol hegemony in Tibet (c. 1249-1349), the Gungtang rulers formed a marital alliance with Sakya, the most powerful Buddhist order due to their priest-patron relationship with the Mongol overlords. However, by the late fourteenth century the Gungtang rulers shifted their alliance to the Nyingmapa. They patronised the Changter School by inviting Rigzen Gödemchen to reside at Palbar Monastery in Kyirong. From there he reportedly set forth to 'open' Kyimolung, a hidden land situated within Nubri Valley. A guide to Kyimolung reputedly discovered by Rigzen Gödemchen states that 'Tibetan is spoken in the upper part [of the Nubri Valley].' If Rigzen Gödemchen was the author (rather than discoverer) of this guide,⁴ then Sama, which is situated in the upper portion of Nubri, was definitely inhabited by Tibetan speakers at the dawn of the fifteenth century.

The downfall of Gungtang closely corresponds with another migration into Nubri, in this case the entrance of a single individual who has left a lasting legacy on Sama's social structure. In 1620 the king of Tsang conquered Gungtang and exterminated members of its ruling family. According to *beyül* prophecies the demise of Gungtang signals the time

³ The historical validity of Milarepa's descriptions are suspect because many of them circulated exclusively in oral form for centuries before being compiled and committed to paper in the late 1400s. His references to borderland peoples appear to be tropes as much as reliable descriptions.

⁴ Michael Aris 1988 raised the proposition that treasure revealers, such as Pemalingpa (1450-1521), composed many of the written teachings that they reputedly discovered. Similarly, because prophecies contained within guidebooks to various *beyül* contain very specific references to historical events that occurred centuries after Padmasambhava visited Tibet, I suspect that these texts were written contemporaneously with their discoverers; Childs 1999.

² Elsewhere I have extensively described Sama in ethnographic (Childs 2004a), demographic (Childs 2008:105-133), and historical (Childs 2000, 2001) terms. I refer readers to those publications for further details, including discussions of primary source materials.

when descendants of Tibet's medieval emperors should seek refuge in places like Kyimolung. The lamas of Tradumtse Monastery, located to the north of Nubri, belonged to precisely such a lineage. According to oral accounts the people of Sama invited Yönden Puntsog, the younger brother of Tradumtse's head lama, to establish a temple and reside in their village. Through marriage and procreation Yönden Puntsog became the ancestor of all the Ngadag lineage members who live in Sama today. Based on the Ngadag lineage's genealogy Yönden Puntsog was born close to 1600 and therefore moved to Sama around the time that the King of Tsang eradicated Tradumtse's patrons, the Gungtang rulers. The presence of Yönden Puntsog or his descendent is historically attested in 1688 when a lama from Kutang, the lower part of the Nubri Valley, recorded meeting 'the Ngadag lama' in Sama. Katog Rigzen Tsewang Norbu, who visited Nubri in 1729, also mentions the Ngadag lamas of Sama in several of his writings.

In 1642 the Mongol Gushri Khan bestowed the Fifth Dalai Lama with secular power over Tibet, and by the early 1700s Tibetans had organised their domain into districts (*rdzong*). Nubri became part of Dzongga District and paid taxes to the Tibetan government via the district commissioner of Dzongga. Shortly thereafter the Pönzang ancestors entered Sama. Their descendants claim to be ethnic Ghales who migrated from the village of Barpak. Gurung society is comprised of four major clans, one of which, the Ghale, held the traditional position of leadership. Pignède conjectures that Ghale is etymologically related to *rgyal*, the Tibetan word for king, and supports this argument by noting that the traditional kings throughout Gurung territory were invariably Ghale (1993:168). According to one legend the Ghale ancestors came from the Tibetan Plateau and established several small kingdoms in central Nepal before being usurped by Rajputs, including those who established the Kingdom of Gorkha (Pignède 1993:162-165, 197-198). The Pönzang ancestors were presumably Ghale rulers who fled Barpak, situated between Gorkha and Nubri, to escape their enemies. Their lineage name, Pönzang ('Good Rulers'), implies a traditional role of political leadership, making them prime targets for the usurping Rajputs. Also, during the 1700s Sama was part of Tibet thereby placing the Ghale refugees beyond the reach of their enemies.

The Kingdom of Nepal, formed under the leadership of the Gorkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah during the late eighteenth century, incorporated Nubri into its domains in 1856 following a war with Tibet. A century later Sama became a safe haven for Tibetans fleeing Chinese

rule. From 1959 through the early 1960s hundreds of Tibetans passed through the village. Whereas most transited through the area on route to Kathmandu, several families settled in Sama. Since that time, with the exception of in-marriage men and women, nobody has settled in Sama as a migrant. To the contrary, the current trend is out-migration. These days many parents send their children to Kathmandu, Nepal, and various Tibetan encampments throughout India to attend secular schools or to reside in monasteries. The majority of these children never return except to visit.

In summary, Sama was first established by members of the Yorkung and Chumin lineages. They were later joined by the founder of the Ngadag lineage, members of the Pönzang lineage, and Tibetan refugees. The evidence leaves no doubt that Sama was settled over a period of centuries by successive migrations, the nature of those migrations varied according to political and economic circumstances, and the migrations have shaped the social organisation of the village as it is found today. In 1997 the composition of Sama according to lineage/origin was as follows: Chumin (31.6 percent), Yorkung (18.9 percent), Pönzang (18.0 percent), Ngadag (16.9 percent), Tibetan (4.4 percent), and others (11.2 percent). The latter category comprises individuals, mainly women, who married into the village.

Theorising Sama's Settlement Process

Destinations for migration are rarely the product of random choice. To the contrary, they are intentionally chosen on the basis of information passed through social networks. One facet of trans-Himalayan networks is represented by yogis who play a unique role as migration route pioneers and disseminators of information about potential destinations. The pioneering role of yogis is attested in a Tibetan cultural template, described by Huber (1997), for making landscapes amenable to human settlement. The process involves Padmasambhava who lays the groundwork by converting malevolent deities into 'defenders of the faith'. Henceforth, a place is primed for being opened through ritual procedures by a yogi, such as Milarepa, who leaves imprimaturs throughout the natural surroundings—tangible evidence of his miraculous deeds that convert the landscape into a habitable realm. Once an area is opened, others can visit for meditation, pilgrimage, or even settlement. The residents of many areas throughout the Himalayas, including Nubri (Childs 2004), Solu-Khumbu (Wangmo 2005), Langtang (Ehrhard 1997;

Lim 2004), and Helambu (Clarke 1980) refer to the sequential subjugations of Padmasambhava and Milarepa as an important precondition for human settlement.

Moving beyond the legendary nature of these events, we know for sure that Milarepa travelled widely and attained considerable fame. During his lifetime Milarepa visited hundreds of valleys throughout the Himalayas. Milarepa's biography (Lhalungpa 1996) and collected poems (Chang 1977) are filled with descriptions of the landscapes that he visited and the people he encountered. If the corpus of writings that is attributed to him merely approximates the extent of his endeavours, then it is safe to conclude that he traversed a vast terrain. Milarepa was thereby involved in an extensive, multilocal, weak tie network that involved religious practitioners, patrons, disciples, and villagers. Through his travels and teachings Milarepa placed himself in a position to convey a considerable amount of information to others about Himalayan geography.

The inhabitants of Nubri, Solu-Khumbu, Langtang, and Helambu also conceive of their abodes as hidden lands (*beyül*). Padmasambhava reputedly concealed these valleys, and left prophesies stipulating when each *beyül* could be opened, and by whom. Treasure revealers (*gter ston*), especially those involved in the opening of hidden lands, conceivably played pioneering roles similar to Milarepa. Regional rulers often patronised these individuals, and facilitated their movements as part of a strategy to extend political domains (Ehrhard 1999a, 1999b). Damar Migyur Dorje (born 1675) is credited with opening the hidden land Namgo Dagam which currently lies in Nepal's Langtang Valley (Ehrhard 1997). The news of his discovery prompted a wave of migration (Lim 2004:45). Similarly, the Sherpas envision their valley to be the *beyül* Khenbalung. According to tradition Rigzen Gödemchen (1337-1408) opened Khembalung during his lifetime. Then in the mid-1400s when the Sherpas were fleeing Mongol-initiated strife in Kham, the lama Sangye Paljor recalled a prophecy: Khembalung could be opened when the world was overcome by wars. Sherpa legend states that he dispatched his son and disciple to seek out Khumbu. They established hermitages that gradually developed into settlements (Wangmo 2005:22-23).

Because the initial populating of Sama by Tibetans occurred after Milarepa's visit, one cannot rule out the possibility that he played a role in prompting people to settle in the upper part of the Nubri Valley. The settlement process probably commenced as seasonal migrations of people periodically crossed passes from the north in search of resources, such as pastures. At some point the migration turned from seasonal to

permanent when entire families began to settle in Sama. Because the locals practice lineage exogamy in marriage, Yorkhung and Chumin families must have settled simultaneously. Otherwise, settlers would have had to either import wives or marry incestuously. Pull factors would include the availability of land in a relatively lush, forested environment where agricultural production did not require the building and maintaining of an irrigation system. If the settling of Sama did coincide with the establishing of Black Cliff Fort by the Gungtang rulers, then the migration transpired under the auspices of a local polity's territorial expansion.

The settling of the Ngadag ancestor in Sama, an example of permanent migration, is consistent with seventeenth and eighteenth century movements of Nyingmapa practitioners toward the Himalayan borderlands in response to attacks on their teachings and institutions by Mongol and Tibetan enemies (Ehrhard 1999b). The Ngadag migration occurred under specific auspices, namely, political instability associated with the demise of the Gungtang rulers. Push factors included a general atmosphere of persecutions against the Nyingmapas and the loss of Tradumtse's most important patron, the ruler of Gungtang. A pull factor included Sama's close proximity to Kyimolung, a *beyül* prophesied to be a destination for descendents of Tibet's medieval emperors (e.g., members of the Ngadag lineage) under the precise auspices detailed above. The fact that Rigzen Gödemchen is credited with opening this *beyül*, and that he was supported by the same Gungtang ruler who patronised the Tradumtse lamas, points to the role of the yogi as a migration pioneer and the influence of weak tie networks in identifying potential places for migration.

The Ngadag migration also illustrates the household-level nature of migration decision-making as it applies to a specific type of family, Nyingmapa householder lamas (*sngags pa*). In many Nyingmapa communities such as Nubri (Childs 2004), Solu-Khumbu (Ortner 1989), Langtang (Lim 2004), and Helambu (Clarke 1980), these lamas control village temples and their associated estates. Succession operates according to the rule of primogeniture: the eldest son inherits his father's estate. A younger son is ineligible to inherit his father's position but by virtue of his bloodline has the potential—if given the opportunity—to form an independent, collateral lineage. Clarke (1980) documents the expansion of collateral lineages in Helambu through the founding of new temples by younger sons of lamas, a process that transpired from the seventeenth through the twentieth century. In the case of the Ngadag migration, the villagers of Sama invited Yönden Puntsog, the younger brother of Tradumtse's incumbent, to establish a temple within their midst. The

decision to accept the offer was no doubt made as a household in consideration of the costs (loss of one member) and benefits (expansion of the lineage) associated with migration and founding a new temple. This case, and the case of Helambu, illustrates how birth parity affects the propensity to migrate among members of householder lama families; younger sons had a heightened propensity to migrate by virtue of their ability to form collateral lineages.

The movement of Pönzang lineage ancestors to Sama is an example of conflict migration. If my conjecture about the timing and reasons for their move are correct, then a major push factor was the belligerence of political foes. Similar to the Ngadag case, the Pönzang ancestors' social status was closely associated with their propensity to migrate under specific political auspices. Sama was not a random destination because this village and Barpak have a long history of trade relations and therefore a preexisting network that facilitated Pönzang lineage members' incorporation into the community. However, because of the weak tie nature of this network, these ethnic Ghales assimilated to the point where they are culturally and linguistically indistinguishable from the original Tibetan inhabitants of Sama.

The propensity to migrate also fluctuates in association with constraints and opportunities imposed by political administrations. From the early 1700s until 1856 the majority of central Tibet's residents were subjects of estates held by one of three landowning institutions: the government, the nobility, and the monasteries. Each institution registered its population and controlled the movement of its subjects. A person had to obtain a 'human lease' (*mi bogs*) to move from one place to another. The contract entailed payment of an annual fee to one's lord in exchange for mobility (Goldstein 1971). However, a heavy tax burden and chronic indebtedness often prompted Tibetans to escape penury by slipping across the border into Nepal. The prelude to a 1958 government household register from Kyirong District alludes to this practice by warning:

Heavy punishment will be levied to those persons who are found to throw blame onto others or who suppress facts of the smallest nature even to the size of a sesame seed. If any such misdeeds are found later the persons involved will take full responsibility as everything will be exposed like a chronic disease diagnosed. Similarly, arrangements of marriages, entering into religious life, and exchange of subjects are not permitted without prior permission, [this applies] *especially to those ignorant ones who flee to other lands thinking that they will be more secure and have a better life*. Such persons making flimsy excuses to flee from the country must be stopped with tight security and the leaders and people have taken oath that

such incidents will not be allowed to occur, for which cause the following persons have undertaken the oath: [seals of witnesses] (Childs 2008:281).

Placing barriers on movements no doubt impacted the culture of migration by making mobility a difficult to achieve prospect. Until 1856 Nubri was a part of Tibet, so fleeing there would not have placed a person beyond the reach of his lord.

After 1856 Nubri became a part of Nepal and thereby a potential destination for people fleeing Tibet. Perhaps some people did enter Sama in this manner, but if so they left no evidence in the form of new patrilineages resulting from marriage and procreation. The situation changed dramatically in 1959 when Nubri became an important escape route for people fleeing the turmoil in Tibet after a failed rebellion against Chinese rule. Tibetan refugees (forced migrants) represent the last wave of people to enter Sama. In this case a major push factor was the fear of repression under Chinese rule. Although most Tibetans merely passed through Sama, several families did stay. Not coincidentally, those who remained are nomads who had long-lasting trade relationships with the people of Sama. Once again, weak networks shaped the migration and settlement process.

Thus far I have focused on the populating of Sama by its four main lineages and Tibetan refugees. In addition, an equally important but less visible process has introduced a continuous trickle of new residents into the village. Patrilocality, the customary post-marital residence pattern in Nubri, has resulted in the circulation of women among neighbouring villages. Because most marriages are arranged between families, the locus of the marital migration decision is the household, not the individual. Furthermore, social networks shape the propensity for women to migrate. For example, Ngadag families aspire to contract marriages with females from the most prestigious local lineages, notably the Lamzha lineage in the neighbouring village of Lho. Virtually all the women from Lho who married into Sama are members of this lineage, while conversely the majority of Sama's women who married into Lho are members of the Ngadag lineage. The pattern of exchanges between the Ngadag and Lamzha lineages illustrates how strong networks shape the ongoing stream of marital migrations between these two villages.

In summary, migration auspices have influenced trans-Himalayan migrations and shaped the ways that communities, such as Sama, have formed. Historically, the multilocal weak networks through which religious adepts moved facilitated the dissemination of information about potential migration destinations. Depending on circumstances, in some

cases entire families migrated to Sama (Yorkung, Chumin, and Pönzang ancestors), whereas in other cases only individuals made the move (the Ngadag ancestor Yönden Puntsog, and women who married into the village). In every case the propensity to migrate has been influenced by political and economic auspices, and varied along a range of variables including social status, religious affiliation, and gender.

*Cumulative Causation:
How History is Shaping Contemporary Migrations*

Currently, more people are moving out of Sama than moving in. A salient trend is for parents to send one or more of their children to distant schools or monasteries. Massey's cumulative causation model helps explain how the current situation has developed in recent years. Until the 1980s very few parents sent children outside the village. However, the situation changed in response to demographic circumstances. As argued elsewhere (Childs 2004b), foreign patronage stimulated a building boom of monasteries founded by Tibetan refugees living in Kathmandu, Nepal. This in turn stimulated an increase in the number of recruits needed to fill the ranks of the new institutions. The explosion of monasticism coincided with a dramatic drop in the fertility rate among Tibetan exiles. As a result, many monasteries turned to the ethnically Tibetan highlands of Nepal to recruit novices. One important lama summarised the fulfillment of his recruitment needs in the following terms:

During the time of the decrease in my merit, the Buddha Dharma in the land of snow (Tibet) was diminishing. This was especially the fate of [name of monastery] . . . At that time I became a refugee and did not know where to go.

During this time of hardship, having the motivation to keep my monastery alive, I purchased a small piece of land in front of the Great Stupa of Boudhanath in Kathmandu, Nepal and built [in 1982] a small monastery, which I named [name of monastery].

After building the monastery in Boudha, it was difficult to find children who wanted to become monks. I decided to ask some people I knew about finding children who wished to be monks. They said, "Nowadays all people want to go to school and study or to do business and earn much money. It's almost impossible to find children to become monks."

After hearing this, I was very depressed and disappointed but nevertheless I made a fruitful aspiration with good motivation and put many Chakras (mandalas) of the Sangha and Harmony of the Sangha into the main Buddha statue of the monastery. As a result of that, [person's

name] became the first monk from Nupri Village [Nubri Valley], Gorkha [District], Nepal. Eventually the number of monks grew and flourished and soon there were almost as many monks as in the monastery in Tibet.⁵

The monastery and associated secular school run by this lama in Kathmandu are now two of the primary destinations for Sama's parents to send their children. The case illustrates a principle, embedded in Massey's cumulative causation model, that each case of successful migration alters the culture of migration. When I first worked in Sama in 1995 parents were willing to send sons outside the village to monasteries but were very reluctant to send either sons or daughters to secular schools. That situation has changed to the point where sending both boys and girls is considered a normal, acceptable, and beneficial practice.

Ngedön Öseling Monastery in Kathmandu is another major destination for Sama's parents to send their sons. In 1997, 17.3 percent of all males aged 5-24 (19 out of 100) from the village were monks residing in this particular monastery. How it came to be a major destination illustrates the importance of historical networks in establishing and maintaining streams of migrants. Urgyen Tulku, a high-ranking Nyingmapa lama, spent time in Sama after fleeing from Tibet. As a widower, he took the daughter of one of Sama's Ngadag lamas to be his second spouse. During the 1980s Urgyen Tulku established several monasteries in Kathmandu, including Ngedön Öseling whose abbot, Tsoknyi Rinpoche, is Urgyen Tulku's son born of his bride from Sama. Because of these important connections many parents send their sons to be ordained as monks who study under Tsoknyi Rinpoche's tutelage.

The decision to become a monk is typically made by the parents in consideration of many factors. Pull factors can be both cultural (parents acquire merit for donating a child to the clergy) and economic (the institution subsidises the rearing and education of a child). Family composition is important; monks are often redundant members of households with more than one son. Parents also use the monastic option as an economic diversification strategy. Monks, once educated and mature, can earn income through the performance of rituals. Some of that income returns to village-dwelling families in the form of remittances.

According to the typologies outlined above, the majority of movements today can be classified as nonseasonal migration. However, distinguishing the intentions of movers is problematic because decisions are made by parents, not individual migrants. In reality many current moves are destined to become permanent due to a lack of pull factors

⁵ www.rinpoche.com/Nupri/englishletter.htm, accessed June 2005

(i.e., vocations for monks and educated individuals) to attract return migrants. Furthermore, by becoming a monk a boy becomes ineligible to inherit his father's property. He also nullifies his ability to perform physically demanding tasks that are necessary for survival in Sama but that contradict the cultural expectation that monks remain detached from mundane social and economic activities. Although monks can and often do visit their families, the absence of formal institution for celibate clerics has made it problematic for them to reside long-term in or near their natal villages.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have used this opportunity to demonstrate how certain theoretical frameworks can assist in the interpretation of historical migrations. In the process, I have argued that migrations are best analyzed as interrelated processes rather than singular events, and that viewing migrations as diachronic processes helps elucidate how social structures and ethnic identities form over time. I have extended the analysis to the present to argue that a theoretically informed, historically grounded perspective on migration is an essential building block for understanding contemporary patterns of movement. Although Sama represents one unique case, I have referred to other Himalayan valleys in Nepal, notably Solu-Khumbu, Langtang, and Helambu, to highlight similarities in the ways that Tibetan communities lying south of the Himalayas came into existence. Parallels can also be found in the eastern Himalayas, suggesting that the phenomena described in this paper are more widespread. Specifically, Sardar-Afkhami (1996) records numerous incidents from the eighteenth century onward whereby Tibetans responded to political strife by following Nyingmapa lamas toward the hidden land Pemakö, which lies south of the Himalayan massif near the deep gorges of the lower Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) River. In the early twentieth century Bacot (1957) visited several abandoned villages in Kham, eastern Tibet, from which people reportedly had fled in search of Pemakö. Bailey (1957:34-38) later visited a village named Mipi where the remnants of this Pemakö-seeking expedition were living under adverse conditions, beleaguered through constant skirmishes with their non-Tibetan neighbours. Bailey also visited a village named Kapu where he found people from eastern Bhutan who had settled after searching unsuccessfully for Pemakö. Compelling similarities between all these cases include a Tibetan cultural template for migration that is linked to an emic concept

of sacred space, the pioneering role played by itinerant yogis, the historical auspices that prompted many trans-Himalayan migrations, and the function weak networks play in disseminating geographical information. Together, these similarities help explain why many valleys situated south of the Himalayas were populated sequentially by people who came seeking refuge from turmoil, whose religious affiliation is Nyingmapa, and whose clerics are householder lama devotees of the Changter School whose corpus of teachings includes a particular conception of sacred space, the *beyül*.

One topic left unaddressed is the role that women have played in trans-Himalayan migrations. Men in Tibetan societies are generally more mobile and therefore play a greater role in scouting migration destinations and initiating moves. However, transforming a potential destination into a full-time place of residence requires both men and women in order to constitute a productive and reproductive community. Unfortunately, the nature of historical data from the region tells us far more about male agents than female agency. The role of gender has received considerable attention in the Himalayan region with respect to marriage (Schuler 1987), social organisation (Watkins 1996), and religion (Schaeffer 2004), but still needs to be worked out in far greater detail with respect to migration in both historical and contemporary settings. At this juncture we can only assume that women had more than passive voices in the momentous, household-level decisions to pack up and move their families.

To conclude, the deployment of theoretical frameworks for the study of contemporary migrations is considerably easier than for historical migrations due to the nature of the data on hand. Himalayan historical archives do not easily yield data that is amenable to the formal testing of theories. Nevertheless, my goal in this paper has been to demonstrate how a combination of archival and ethnographic data can be interpreted in light of migration theories. By doing so, one can attain a more nuanced understanding of migration as a process that has left tangible imprints on the social and religious fabric of contemporary communities.