

Chapter 6

MORAL NETWORKS AND ENDURING HIERARCHIES



Within the context of what was predominantly a subsistence economy in the beginning of the 2000s, Panam farmers were part of extensive and complex networks that they could turn to for practical assistance in preparing and harvesting the land, house building, travels and more. They also needed help to perform other vital activities, such as the performance of the yearly cycle of household rituals and life cycle events – rituals that are both labour intensive and costly. These relationships shaped emerging social hierarchies and were themselves shaped by enduring hereditary divisions. Although people, of course, establish individual relations within the community, crucial moral networks of mutual assistance and social control were fundamentally based on house membership. These relations might be individually contracted, but once formalised into relations defined as networks of mutuality, the points of connection changed from individuals to houses. Hence, houses cooperate with houses – as corporate bodies – and within these relations individuals assist individuals based on their house membership. Participation in these extended networks was of vital importance, and the loss of access to these upon exclusion from a house was yet another incentive for the younger generation to remain within their natal home. The dynamics of inter-house relations also informed the local rationale of polyandry and the desire to keep sons together in one house.

The centripetality and orientation towards containment in the social organisation in Panam is striking. Polyandry keeps brothers, land and material and immaterial resources together. Economically, new income is invested

into the household, and domestic rituals and architecture aim to contain that which is driven inwards, to the core of the house. This centripetal sensibility brings me to the parallel dynamics of independence and interdependence, autonomy and collaboration, noted in other Tibetan communities as well.¹ So far, this book has primarily dealt with the autonomy of the individual houses, and we now turn to the interdependence between these. While collaboration and networks are extensive, they are not socially neutral; they involve different forms of mutuality, of reciprocity, and thus, morality. Looking first at the networks of which individual houses are part, and secondly at how social dynamics play into the formations and limitations of these, I want to bring houses and kinship into a broader sociocultural context of classification and hierarchies. Houses as social institutions are most visible in the interactions (and lack thereof) with others, and a closer look at inter-house connections can bring otherwise muted social exclusion mechanisms to the fore.²

Issues of classification and hierarchy – namely, hereditary social divisions and what can be called caste-like dynamics – address an aspect that is often left out in ethnographies from Tibet.³ These dynamics are based on notions of pollution and involve restrictions on certain forms of relationality and village cooperation between the farmers and those classified as being part of a hereditary low-ranked group. In the case of Panam, this low rank was called *menrik* ('low kind'), *mi tsokpa* ('unclean people') and sometimes *rik ngen* ('bad kind'). The groups identified as *menrik* were blacksmiths, butchers, funeral workers (called *baru* in local vernacular) and beggars. Investigating issues of low *rik* is a delicate matter in Tibetan communities, also in Panam.⁴ Also in conversations with people from a blacksmith or butcher background, getting direct access to their experiences of exclusion, stigmatisation and discrimination and to their perceptions of pollution, is complicated by the taboo of openly recognising another person's low *rik*. When I asked questions about hereditary rank I often received superficial answers, such as 'it used to be like that, but now we are all the same'. Villagers of other than *menrik* background were also reluctant to talk about social exclusion and pollution – these issues were handled with a sense of idiosyncrasy. Given these challenges, I found that exploring the extent and limitations of individual and house relationality and participation in village networks provides an alternative, indirect way to unpack these enduring, and in new ways emerging, social hierarchies.

Mutual Networks of Care

Tibetan communities are known for their intricate and elaborate mutual aid networks.⁵ The exchange networks serve different purposes, the moral obligations involved vary, and the temporal and spatial entanglements also differ.

However, these networks are well developed and clearly outlined, and, most importantly, they operate on the principle of mutuality.

In farming villages, the various relations of exchange are activated in different spheres of life: some for agricultural production, some for travel assistance, some for house building, and some for life cycle rituals. In Sharlung, villagers talked about assistance and mutuality as something that had been an established practice for a very long time. People took part in social networks of friends (*drokpo*), relatives (*pun*), of houses (*ganyé*, *kyiduk ngalak*), co-villagers and people from the region (*yul chik*). Associated with these relations are various obligations and expectations; however, common to all is a sense of closeness that can be contextually activated. Some of these relations were individual, others were house-based. The house-based and long-term relations entailed a morality of obligation, while individual relations largely involved a morality of expectation. In addition to these long-term social relations, people were involved in labour exchange (*lérok*) and wage labour (*milak*); these were contracted between individuals and households and were not house-based. Morality and reciprocity informed the social distribution of (restrictions to) participation in the various networks, and the issue of temporality, of open and closed relations, came to be of particular concern in interactions across the boundaries of *rik*.

Ganyé – the Near and Dear

Ganyé is a contraction of *dga' po* and *nye bo*, meaning 'likeable' and 'close'.⁶ The term denotes both a close and dear associate and the particular ego-centric network that these associates constitute. *Ganyé* relations are formed on the basis of house membership – that is, a set of *ganyé* follow upon inclusion into a house and the same set remain within the house after exclusion (upon partition or death). Individuals might establish new *ganyé*, but these relations must then be consolidated within their respective houses. Thus, if a person moves out and becomes a member of another house, he/she loses all original *ganyé* and gains a new network – that is, the *ganyé* of the new house. The establishment of a new household also involves developing new *ganyé* relations. The term itself cannot be modified – close or distant *ganyé* is not possible – and it is a permanent relation that does not decrease or increase in quality or strength, although it has to be activated in the necessary situations and contexts.

Based on interviews with farmers from Tsang living in India in the 1970s, Aziz (continuing Beatrice Miller's work from 1956) provided a detailed analysis of *ganyé* relations as found amongst her informants. She argued that *ganyé* networks were of crucial significance for cohesion and reciprocation,

not only in the exiled community of study but also in their place of origin in Tsang. Aziz described *ganyé* as a moral system that had a ‘particular nature, distinct from the moral systems that guide other social behaviour, e.g. family ties, economic choices, and piety’ (1978b: 48). It was a wide social network, a set of people (often known to each other) forming an unbounded category with no corporate aspects in terms of common goals or functions (hence, they should not be defined as a ‘group’).

In Sharlung, everyone I asked reported to have a number of *ganyé* relations, although the extent of these networks varied greatly. There was a clear association between polyandrous houses of some size and large sets of *ganyé*. When I asked the leader of Norchen, one of the former *trelpa* houses in Sharlung, to name their *ganyé* in the village, he replied: ‘We have many, many *ganyé*. Norchen is old and has a long history of *ganyé*. It is the same for all the *khyimtsang* – there are many *ganyé* now.’ This was also the case for smaller households transitioning to named houses, such as the Wangchö. This house had expanded after the Household Responsibility System reform, through a combination of economic strategies and a beneficial constellation of people. Jampa, the household leader, narrated a success story; he had been a *yokpo* in the Lungko house before the Democratic Reforms but had since then taken up political positions in the village, built a large house to live in, chosen a marriage form that secured the transfer of intact land, and sent his children to school for them to later take up leading positions around the valley.⁷ In this process, Wangchö had become one of the wealthiest houses in the village, and during our stay in Sharlung, many people tried to develop *ganyé* relations with them because, as one villager said, with an expression that they were stating the obvious: ‘they are important people.’ The size of the *ganyé* network is indeed an indication not only of the history of a house but also of its contemporary socio-economic position and rank.

The Public Handling of Achi’s Passing

Aziz argued that one of the core obligations of *ganyé* relations is information exchange – that is, securing the flow of relevant information from the community to the individual (or his/her house), and the other way around. This is a moral obligation and concerns both the reputation of the individual and his or her proper participation in the community. Similar concerns were also important to *ganyé* relations in Sharlung. In addition, *ganyé* helped to protect an individual against emotionally painful situations. In a way, *ganyé* was like oil in the social machinery, smoothing interactions from individual to community levels.

A concern with avoiding emotionally difficult situations became clear upon my return to Sharlung for my last stay. When I arrived in Lhasa, only

two days passed before I received the tragic news about the passing of the *achi* in the Takrab house. It was Samdrup who told me. Rinzin, a man in his thirties from the village, had taken upon himself the task to inform us, and he had done so at some cost. As Sharlung was without phone coverage at that time, Rinzin had hitchhiked to the county seat and made the call to Samdrup from there. Why did Rinzin find it important to inform us about *achi*'s death before we arrived in Sharlung? There is obviously an emotional side to this, as Rinzin knew that we both felt connected to her and would appreciate knowing as soon as possible that she had passed away. However, what is more interesting in this context are the implications that Rinzin's doings had for my arrival (that year without Samdrup) in Sharlung some months after her passing.

Hearing the news of *Achi*'s passing in advance enabled me to prepare properly to enter the mourning Takrab house. Upon my arrival in Sharlung, I presented an envelope with a monetary gift and a *khatak* to the house while uttering my condolences, as expected by a visitor to a house in that situation. I knew I should be careful not to mention *Achi*, and I avoided both the otherwise common small talk about the health condition of all family members and talk about our previous experiences together. As is well known in many societies across the world – described as early as 1922 by Frazer – in Tibet it is considered improper to mention a person who recently passed away. This taboo is not so much because of ritual repercussions, but rather an emotional concern that it will remind those left behind of their loss and their sorrow – it brings sadness. The main mourning phase of a house lasts for one year, and throughout this period a range of taboos need to be observed, and failing to do this would have been emotionally painful and embarrassing, not only for the residents of the house but also for me, the visitor.⁸

In a conversation about the different networks in the village, I asked Rinzin about the circumstances of his phone call to Lhasa and whether Tashi-la had asked him to inform us. He strongly denied that Tashi-la had any role in this. On the contrary, he said, 'I don't think he knows that I called you. He was mourning then; he could not think about other things. I called because it is my obligation. We are *ganyé*, right. That is what we have to do.' By making that phone call on his own initiative, Rinzin – the Takrab house's *ganyé* – contributed to a socially controlled and emotionally smooth return of an outsider into the house.

Involving the corporate houses, *ganyé* relations are defined by long-term obligations to assist in particular contexts and with particular concerns. This obligation is based on the morality of mutuality; more so than with kin relations but in a less direct and strict sense than other mutual aid networks.

Kyiduk ngalak – *in Happy and Sad Times*

As with *ganyé*, *kyiduk* is an institution of some pride among Tibetans. Today, *kyiduk* has come to be understood as (welfare) ‘associations’ of people of the same origin but residing elsewhere, such as the Sherpa and Mustang Kyiduk in the US and Mugum Kyiduk in Kathmandu and Amdo, Kyirong or Gyarong Kyiduk among exiled Tibetans in India. Also, people sharing experiences and challenges forms associations, such as the New Arrivals Kyiduk in Dharamsala (Swank 2014).⁹ In Sharlung, *kyiduk* and *ganyé* coexisted, and although they occasionally overlapped, they were distinct in terms of history, function and meaning. Both networks are based upon mutuality, but *ganyé* leaned towards the social and emotional, and *kyiduk* towards the material and was administered by written records.

In their work, both Miller and Aziz described reciprocity (*ngalak*) as fundamental to the *ganyé* bond. Aziz wrote that local concepts of reciprocity are connected to *ganyé* as *ganyé ngalak*; this is a specific form of mutual return where the mutuality lies in the obligation to return in equal kind, be it the provision of grain or labour assistance or anything else (1978b). In Sharlung, *ngalak* was central to local networks of cooperation but connected to *kyiduk*, often also termed *kyibö ngalak*, rather than *ganyé* (as described by Aziz). *Kyiduk* is a contraction of the words *skyid po*, meaning ‘happy’, and *sdug cag*, meaning ‘bad’. *Ngalak* is a combination of *snga*, which indicates a previous action, and *lag pa*, meaning ‘hand’. Hence, *kyiduk ngalak* can be understood as ‘the return of a hand in good and bad times’ – that is, mutual assistance. The functions of the *kyiduk ngalak* networks vary throughout the Tibet ethnographic region, but in Panam these were networks of associated houses that were obliged to provide help during life cycle rituals. As an old man in the Samchang house explained: ‘*Kyibö ngalak* come for wedding celebrations and funerals. These are very costly events – too expensive for one family. So people bring *chang*, grain, butter and food. And money of course.’ *Kyiduk* brings material support.

Similar to what Aziz pointed out concerning *ganyé* reciprocity, in Sharlung *kyiduk ngalak* was a reciprocal relation in which each house was obliged to return exactly the same as received and registered. When house A receives butter from house B for a wedding, house A must provide butter for the next wedding in house B. Each house kept a record of these exchanges on a paper roll or notebook that they stored in the *taptsang* and that they consulted when needed. The record of happy events – primarily weddings – was tied with a white thread or a *khatak* and called *karto* (the white list), while the record for bad events – that is, funerals – was knotted with black thread and called *nakto* (black list). Due to the relatively seldom occasions that *kyiduk* were mobilised, correct reciprocity depended upon consultations to

these lists. In his essay *The Gift*, Mauss pointed out that in gift exchanges an increase in the counter-prestations is fundamental to the continuation of an exchange relationship; one cannot simply reproduce the original transaction between two parties (1990 [1950]). The dynamics of exchange are found exactly in the reinforcement of an increased return; while Aziz noted that returns of the same kind ‘hold the relationship equal’ (1978b: 60), it is also the increase in the amount of the return that holds the relation open. The question of openness of exchange relations is a core issue when unpacking inter-*rik* relations in Sharlung, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Kyiduk ngalak is financially demanding, and many of the poorer households did not have the means to establish and maintain such relations. When talking with the elderly woman in Magnub about the wedding of their two adopted children, described in Chapter 2, she explained: ‘There was a small celebration. We are poor and had little to offer.’ ‘How about *kyiduk* – did somebody come with offerings for the wedding?’ I asked. She continued:

No. *Kyiduk* did not come. Only some relatives (*pun*) came. Tsering’s (her adopted son) father came from (his natal village); some came from Dagpo (her adopted daughter’s natal house). That’s all. There was a celebration for two days, and we had enough food for those few who came. They brought a little *chang* and some tea, but not much. *Kyiduk is ngalak*, isn’t it? But we are so few people, and too poor, so we cannot help others. . . . People know who made offerings, so they know that we have not given anything. . . . It is the same with *bangsöl* (baby cleansing); only a few relatives came. Sedön’s mother brought new clothes for her and the baby, that’s all.

Life cycle events are usually large-scale celebrations that last from three to seven days, and most of the village houses send at least one representative to participate. As with *ganyé*, a large set of *kyiduk* was considered a sign of high rank, and much village talk concerned the scale of the celebrations in the different houses. Not being able to contribute to these celebrations not only reflected badly upon a poor house, such as Magnub, it also reduced the help they could expect to receive for their own ritual arrangements. Limited *kyiduk* networks thus complicate and slow down a potential social mobility process.

Ganyé and *kyiduk*, as relations of moral obligation, do not exclude the importance of kin relations. Relatives outside the house – that is, patrilineal kin (*pa pün*) and matrilineal kin (*ma pün*) – were also close associates who might provide material or immaterial assistance. In an article on corruption in Mongolia, David Sneath points out that although many material transfers are reciprocal – that is, they precondition a direct or indirect return – many are not. He takes food supply from pastoralists to their relatives living in the city as an example of a substantial material transmission so common

and expected that ‘they can be seen as materialisations of the social relations themselves’ (2006: 96). Sneath suggests that such materialisations of social relations, or rather social statuses, could be termed ‘enactions’ and should be held separate from ‘acts of material transfer – transactions’ (ibid.: 90). Enactions and transactions could be seen as two ends of a moral continuum, in which hospitality and sharing are placed at one end, and instrumental, conditional and impersonal transfers are placed at the other. Sneath’s point is that rather than employing a reciprocity model, we need to focus on the concept of obligations in social relations when analysing material flows. This separation of enactions from transactions can help in understanding differing moral networks and social relations in Panam as well. Relatives and close friends are expected to help each other; material transfers should be seen as enactions of established social relations, of being kin or friends. Material and immaterial transfers in *ganyé* and *kyiduk ngalak* networks were also enactions of social statuses in the sense that these flows of values were materialisations of defined (*ganyé* or *kyiduk*) relations. However, these entail different expectations and obligations, and various degrees of reciprocal commitment. ‘Kin (*pün*) are like good friends,’ people often told me. *Pün* differ from *ganyé* or *kyiduk* because a *pün* relation is characterised by a (strong) expectation of receiving help and being able to return it but with no obligation to do so. In other words, the relation itself is not based upon a moral obligation of reciprocity. Separating expectations from obligations can further develop the analytical potential of enactions as different from transactions. Although many *ganyé* and *kyiduk*, or friends, are relatives as well, they are not necessarily so. While relatives were perceived to be close, this form of relatedness did not define particular rights and duties. By contrast, *ganyé* and *kyiduk* did. There was a significant distinction drawn between material flows as enactions of social relations, such as *ganyé* and *kyiduk* on the one hand, and labour exchange (*lérok*) and material transactions such as wage labour (*milak*) on the other. This distinction corresponds, as we shall see, to social hierarchies based on *rik* and is reflected in social relations across *rik* boundaries.

Both Miller and Aziz described *kyiduk* as a corporation conceived in economic and business terms only, and Aziz in particular argued that *kyiduk* and *ganyé* are two sets of relations never to be associated (1978b: 70). The main difference between these two sets, she held, is the lack of social and emotional elements in *kyiduk* relations, on the one side, and the corporateness of its members, on the other. People also separated *ganyé* and *kyiduk* in terms of emotional involvement in Sharlung. However, contrary to Miller’s and Aziz’s descriptions, I found no evidence for *kyiduk* being a corporate group. On the contrary, it seems that establishing *kyiduk* was an ongoing process between many houses, and that, similar to the *ganyé* set, these relations were egocentric (the ego then being the house).

While villagers of all social backgrounds in Sharlung have had, although very limited, a set of *ganyé* for as long as they can remember, the *kyiduk ngalak* was a more recent establishment for many people. This increase in the distribution, and emphasis, of formalised mutual aid networks could be seen in a broader context of social and economic changes in the rural areas. The celebration and marking of life cycle rituals, such as weddings, birth celebrating rituals and funerals, had taken on a more elaborate form since the 1980s, and stronger participation and assistance from various associates had therefore become more important. Further, in a social organisation of strong autonomous corporate households, the establishment and continuation of formalised, long-term mutual aid networks not only facilitates significant village cooperation but also produces new relations of dependency and contributes to the reproduction of old social hierarchies.

New Relations of Dependency

Who, and for whom, were *ganyé* and *kyiduk* in Sharlung and the neighbouring villages? Investigating the networks of the various houses, three patterns stand out. First, there was a correlation between the social standing of a house and the size of its networks; second, there was a new social distribution of dependency between the houses; and third, the low-ranked, traditional skilled workers did not participate in these mutual aid networks. Before 1950, *trelpa*, and particularly *genbo*, were associated with extended networks of *ganyé* and *kyiduk*. During my time in Sharlung, a large *ganyé* set indicated social influence and high esteem, much in the same way as described by Aziz (1978b), and the villagers were involved in ongoing processes of establishing new relations and reconfirming old ones. In these processes, social status and rank were negotiated and new constellations of networks established.

The various Chinese reforms and interventions have, as we know, dramatically altered Tibetans villagers' relations to land, and since the 1980s, access to fields has been based on equal distribution. The Household Responsibility System with its redistribution of land and provision of autonomy for households also changed the fundamental criteria for social classification and differentiation in local village organisation. This reform provided people of all social backgrounds with new opportunities, enabling many to embark on a process of social and economic mobility, in ways that have blurred the traditional social hierarchies and also brought new ones into being. These coexisting social hierarchies reflect two underlying and contested criteria for rank among the lay population in Central Tibet; namely, economic status and hereditary background (*rik*).

While the local response to the Household Responsibility System has led the majority of villagers in Sharlung to establish a larger corporate household, with polyandry and a *trelpa*-like structure of the house, it has not been possible for all villagers to take part in these socio-economic transformations.¹⁰ Instead, poorer households have instigated dependency relations with larger houses. The relations have taken the form of patron–clientship, where the two parts share a flow of values based upon personal connections and a sense of reciprocity.

Patronage and Dependency

Patron–client relations are not new to Tibetan village organisation. As already described, pre-1950 agrarian communities in Central Tibet were based upon a hierarchy where some claimed the taxes, some extracted the taxes from the estates, and some farmed the land. The latter were to a large extent dependent upon landlords – the patrons – as a source of regular income as well as help with more extraordinary events.¹¹ After 1980, dependency relations took a new form.

According to Goldstein and his colleagues' studies in Panam at the end of the 1990s, most people expressed that they were better off than they had been in the past, yet 31 per cent of the participants in their studies were defined as poor – that is, unable to feed themselves by their own fields or income (2003: 769). In the household survey that I did in Sharlung in 2002, sixteen – out of 44 – households relied on external help for food to sustain themselves throughout the year. Of these, nine considered themselves and were considered by others to be trapped in a chronically poor and dire situation, while the remaining seven were periodically poor (their situation strongly depended on the result of each harvest). One of the main strategies that the chronically poor households used to sustain themselves was to establish relations with more affluent houses in the village.

The relations between Sobnub and Takrab can serve as an example. Sobnub, the small, unpainted house briefly described in the previous chapter, is the neighbour to Takrab towards the east. The house consists of Wangmo, her old mother, her husband Palden, who married in as a *makpa*, and their three children, who were at the time aged four, seven and ten. During the land division in 1980, it was only Wangmo and her mother who lived together, and, because Palden did not inherit land to bring as a *makpa*, the Sonub house only had fields for two persons. This was clearly too little to feed three adults and three children; they were amongst the poorest in the village, and every year they had to rely on help to have sufficient grain.¹² Moreover, they depended on help to be able to cover the expenses of the mandatory schooling of the children, and they did not have

the means for extra activities, such as inviting religious expertise in times of need.

During my stays in the Takrab house, I noticed the regular presence of people from Sobnub. However, they were not treated as guests in the sense of being seated in the *taptsang* and served *chang* or tea, or entertained in other ways. Rather, they seemed busily engaged in practical issues. Wangmo and Palden, as well as their two eldest children, provided Takrab with different forms of labour. Most often, they helped with agricultural chores and Palden also worked as a repairman. Further, Palden assisted Tashi-la on his travels, either by driving the tractor or simply by keeping him company. He also conducted religious offerings on behalf of the Takrab, if for various reasons they could not travel. In daily life, their daughter often helped the women in Takrab to fetch water, make wool, clear the courtyard and boil *chang*.¹³ When I asked Palden and Wangmo about their friendship with Takrab, Wangmo explained it this way:

Tashi-la is a very good man, very helpful. If we have difficult times, we can ask him, and he never says no. When my mother was ill, he gave some money so we could go to the hospital and buy medicine. And he gave some money to buy our son's school uniform. This was very expensive. It was indeed. We have good relations . . . Our fields are not so many, you know. So, many years we do not have enough barley. Now, we can buy barley cheaper from the government, but it is not so cheap. It really isn't. So, when we need barley, Tashi-la gives us. Takrab has quite a lot of barley, so he is able to offer some to us. But then, he cannot sell it, you know.

I asked him whether Takrab was their *jindak*, or patron. 'Yes, yes, *jindak*, it is. He is very generous. We can ask for help.' 'But when you stay in the house, it seems that you also help them,' I continued. Palden answered: 'No, no, we don't do much. Sometimes I travel together with Tashi-la, or sometimes I do something with the animals, but really – it is not so much.' This humbleness also points to the one-directional flow of support in the *jindak*–client relation. When I talked to Tashi-la about their relation to Sobnub, he explained it in a different way:

Sobnub are our helpers (*rokpa*). They help with many, many things. Sometimes I don't know what they do (he laughs). They just do it! . . . I can't say no when they come. It is like that. They come because we have good relations. But when they come, it is often also very useful. Like last week, Palden went with Orgyen (the youngest son) to look after the *dzo* grazing. This was good for Orgyen.

Looking back at discussions on theories of patronage and brokerage in anthropology in the 1970s, Paine argued that the most salient place to search

for 'the diacritica of the roles of the patron and the client, respectively, [is] *within patron-client transactions*' (1971: 10, original italics). By doing so, he suggested, we can establish a point of departure that enables us to see beyond the asymmetrical, and thus unequal, power relations associated with dependency. Paine's point was that patron–client relations must be investigated empirically in order to determine the social dynamics of various elements within these transactions: mutuality, reciprocity, as well as power relations and particularly the definitional power of the flow of values. What constituted these transactions between Takrab–Sobnub? The relation of the flow of values and resources was simple; Sobnub provided help in a general way, while Takrab provided grain and occasionally money when needed. It was, however, Tashi-la, as the patron, who made the decisions on the amount of financial help to provide, although he was informed by a moral obligation to be generous. Palden and Wangmo had no rights, or position, to challenge his authority, but at the same time, they could, and did, increase their participation in Takrab activities, which intensified the moral obligation of Tashi-la to be generous and, hence, influenced the amount he gave them. As Tashi-la said above, 'I can't say no when they come. It is like that.' And their relation was produced and reproduced by the manipulation of personal relationships of reciprocity. Throughout daily life, Palden provided his help and friendship to Takrab members by simply initiating his own participation in Takrab activities, indicating a more nuanced power dynamic in which the inferior part can instigate a flow of values and resources and also maintain this flow. At the same time, this complementary aspect should not blur the significance of the definitional power that Tashi-la, as the patron, had.

These relations of dependency and autonomy were not absolute nor static. The establishment of these valuable relations was a constant concern for many leaders of poor households. There were ongoing processes to initiate, negotiate, terminate, expand on and renew relations of material and labour transfers, within which people of most social categories had some power to influence the nature of these relations. As with the other poor households in Sharlung, Sobnub initiated their position as a 'helper' to Takrab by offering their labour during the harvest time. The harvest was thus a time when social divisions became apparent, not only in terms of the economic differences seen in the amount of harvested produce but also in the distribution of labour and the clustering of helpers in the fields of the (potential) patrons.

Although most of the poorest houses in Sharlung had *lérok* relations with more affluent houses, some did not. Chakpa, for instance, had not been able to instigate and consolidate such relations and depended upon occasional support from the village or township leaders, or relatives, friends and neighbours. Chakpa was a small house located in the eastern part of the village, not far from the Lungko and Nyikar houses, with whom they were related. The

house consisted of Pempa, his wife and two young children, and his mother's sister, a nun who moved in with them after the closing of the nunnery in 1959. His wife explained why Chakpa did not have *jindak* relations with other houses in the village:

Sometimes we ask for help from our neighbours, but they are not so wealthy. We don't have good relations with our relatives. You know, Pempa is the illegitimate child (*nyelu*) of Lungko *achung* (the youngest husband). He never supported them, and now we have bad relations. So, they are wealthy, but we don't have good connection.

I asked whether they could approach some of the more affluent houses that were located at the other end of the village, and she continued:

Yes, yes, we can, but it is difficult. Ani-la's health is not so good. She cannot work or look after the children. So, I have to watch the children, and Pempa is often away working with the tractor (for income). So, who shall we send as helpers? If you want good relations and maybe to receive help later, you have to offer much help. Perhaps you have to come every day in the first year, or offer to help often. We are too few people to be able to do that.

Chakpa's problems reflect the underlying importance of having some defined connections before establishing dependency relations that involve long-term moralities of reciprocity and mutuality. In Sharlung, these were usually connections of relatedness, of friendship, or of being neighbours. Yet, I think a favourable household composition (more than connections) determined whether helpers could be sent to potential patrons (and stay for a sufficient amount of time) and hence enact the role of a client. The advantage of polyandry is again evident, as a large household not only enables a group to diversify their economy but also, in cases of poverty and precarious agricultural production, to send individuals to establish valuable relations on behalf of the house.

Beyond indicating patron–client relations, the organisation of the harvest also exposes fundamental and enduring social hierarchies of a different kind. Looking closer at the participation of various helpers in the fields of the relatively affluent houses, it was striking that none of them were from the traditional skilled workers households – that is, they were not blacksmiths (*chak zowa*), butchers (*shenba*) or funeral workers (*baru*).¹⁴

Enduring Social Exclusions

A complementary power perspective might be taken to indicate an underlying relativism in terms of authority and influence, but that is not my intention. While a client positionality does provide considerable possibilities to instigate, continue and terminate a relation to a patron, the patrons have the important power to define the flow of values in the relation. As such, there is a form of power complementarity in the relation, but within a defined hierarchical model, much in the same way as with gender relations within and beyond marriage. More rigid power structures were apparent in the exclusion of certain people from the mutual aid networks, and particularly from *ganyé* and *kyiduk* relations; namely, those identified as being of a low or unclean 'kind' (*menrik*). The lack of long-term and continuous transfers across *rik* boundaries points both to the distinction between social and ritual rank and, on a more general level, to the intrinsic material aspects of social relations. Also, it illustrates the relevance of the differences – the particular moralities – between transactions and enactions.

Low-ranked groups in Panam were blacksmiths (*chak zowa* or *gara*),¹⁵ butchers (*shenba*), funeral workers (*baru*) and, in a distinct category of their own, beggars (*longkhen*). Pre-1950, members of these groups performed services – skilled work – for the villagers across the valley and were not involved in agriculture.¹⁶ They were, and continue to be, defined and internally ranked by notions of ritual pollution (*drip*) and termed the 'lower kind' (*menrik*). *Drip* has a double connection to *menrik*; their work is seen to be polluting, and their physical body (particularly the bones, hence the patrilineage) is inherently polluted. Hence, they share many experiences with low caste and Dalits among Hindus to the south. Similar to what we know about caste identity from India and Nepal, *menrik* status in Tibet is not determined merely by occupation but social status is hereditary, handed down from parents to children (Ramble 2019: 154). The first three decades of the Chinese annexation of Tibet had a major impact on the status of the low ranked.¹⁷ First, as part of the emancipation ideologies, they (particularly the blacksmiths) were given political positions by the new regime; second, they were included in the collective communes and farmed the land together with the other villagers; and third, the decollectivisation reform also provided them with land and animals on equal terms with the rest of their communities. Hence, since the 1980s, the former skilled workers have been performing the same agricultural work as their co-villagers; in the case of *baru* and butchers this has been in combination with their traditional skilled work. This opens the questions of mutual aid networks again because with fields to farm these former skilled workers share the need for labour assistance.¹⁸

Politico-economic settings – that is, relations to land and control of political power – have often been described as the foundation of social differentiation and position in Tibetan society pre-1950 (see Carrasco 1959; Stein 1972). In one of the very few papers dealing explicitly with hereditary social divisions in pre-1950 Central Tibet, Ugen Gombo strongly argued for an important correlation between what he called ‘caste’ and the socio-economic position of a person. He wrote that: ‘even vertical ritual (status) stratification in the Tibetan context can be seen as ultimately determined by socio-economic status’ (1983: 50). Following Ugen Gombo’s argument, we could expect that the implementation of the Household Responsibility System led to a significant alteration in status and esteem for the lower stratum in Tibet, as the reform provided equal shares of land to all households, including the traditional skilled workers. Along the same lines, others have argued that the low rank of the skilled workers was likely an implication of what would be the different nature of their work, and hence, the formation of and participation in different work exchange networks. Because the skilled workers traditionally were not engaged in agriculture, they were excluded from the significant mutual aid networks of the farmers.¹⁹ How the change of livelihood has influenced the position of the former skilled workers in Tibetan villages after the Chinese invasion then becomes an interesting question. Contrary to what Gombo’s argument suggests, the experiences of blacksmiths and butchers in Panam show that although access to land has led to a greater degree of equality in terms of socio-economic position, it has not led to a significant alteration of ‘ritual stratification’.²⁰

Economy is certainly crucial to social status and rank in rural Tibet, and this recognition of economic success also applies to the traditional skilled workers. One of the *baru* houses in Sachung and one of the butcher houses in Bargang, for example, were amongst the most affluent in the valley, and this was positively recognised by others in the villages.²¹ Yet, economic success did not transform, or encompass, rank based on an ‘unclean’ *rik*, and participation in village life remained restricted for those identified as *menrik*. The endogamy of the low-ranked groups in Tibet is well known in the literature describing the pre-1950s,²² and in Panam such restrictions on inter-*rik* marriage were strong. In Bargang, for instance, the affluent butcher house mentioned had tried to invite a *nama* from a non-butcher household; however, they did not succeed. When talking with commoners in Sharlung, it was unthinkable for them to establish affinal ties with *menrik* houses. Sexual contact with someone of *menrik* background was a moral offence that might also lead to serious pollution and illness, and *rik* was the first issue to be investigated in the search for a marriage partner.

The lack of inter-*rik* marriages, also among the affluent former butcher and blacksmith households, did not surprise me. However, I was expecting

that with the transition of livelihood to farming former skilled workers would participate in the various village networks, but this was not the case.

Individual Friendships: Inter-*rik* Relations

The villages in Kyiling township are small, both in layout and in population, and not surprisingly, people find friends, amongst their peers, depending upon age, gender and also social differentiation. While socio-economic position of one's house was of little importance when establishing friends, *rik* was. This part of Panam had a reputation in Lhasa for being a place with many lower ranked people; as noted in the Preface, Sachung village was said to be the home of many blacksmiths, and the neighbouring Bargang village to host many butchers. When I asked commoners about their relation to people of blacksmith, butcher or *baru* backgrounds, I often got a quick reply that it was 'good'. They *could*, they said, have had close relations, but for reasons unclear to them, they simply did not. At the same time, some of the former skilled workers still performed their traditional occupations (especially the butchers and *baru*, who earned a significant income from this), and the villagers happily used these services. These services were paid for; they were transactions rather than enactions, if we follow Sneath's distinction.

During fieldwork, I spent as much time as possible in (former) blacksmith households, particularly in Sachung village. Asking about their family history, in the beginning they would tell me that their relations with the local community were no different than those between their co-villagers. Yet, with time and conversations passing, I learned that the relations of blacksmiths, *baru* and butchers to their neighbours and co-villagers were both limited in extent and restricted in kind, and the cause of a sense of exclusion. The main obstacle for inter-*rik* relations was the pollution (*drip* or *driptsok*) perceived to be carried by those of low rank and the associated fear of contamination. While the effects of *drip* can be controlled by observation of taboos in social life (particularly of touching mouths and bodily substances) and proper post-contact physical and ritual cleansing, most commoners felt it was too much effort and therefore social interaction with people of *menrik* background was rare.

In the three villages in Kyiling that I visited most, I only came across one person who had the habit of visiting a *menrik* house simply to socialise. Rinzin told me that he was friends with a man from a *baru* household in Sachung. Rinzin and Lhakpa were *changdrok* or beer friends; they enjoyed each other's company. This friendship, although being close per definition, came with some restrictions, and these were related to the potential transfer of pollution (*drip*) from Lhakpa (and his house) to Rinzin (and his house).

Therefore, they took measures to avoid this such as never sharing cups, no matter how drunk they would get, which is otherwise common among friends. Moreover, Rinzin did not sleep in Lhakpa's house, because he would then have had to use their bed covers through which *drip* might be transferred. In addition, to avoid pollution, Rinzin explained that he cleaned Lhakpa's cup in a particular way; by turning it upside down and putting it aside in a place in the shade for two to five days. This was done because 'nobody likes to touch a warm *rik tsokpa* cup', and because the pollution is less potent when cooled, he explained. Also, a cup turned upside down signals to the children in the house that they should avoid it. This was an important point for Rinzin because, he said, 'children are more open for *drip* than adults'. After two to five days, he washed the cup in a thorough manner, preferably with soap and always without sharing the water with other cups or utensils. When the washing was completed, he put the cup outside for it to dry completely in the sun. After it was dried, the family used the cup again as any other utensil. Rinzin pointed out that he had never been affected by *drip* from his friend, precisely because he had taken these precautions and done the necessary cleansing procedures.

Had Rinzin not taken the cleansing precautions he described, he would have risked being contaminated by pollution. This pollution is of a ritual kind, and while in Lhasa people tend to separate *drip* (pollution) from *tsokpa* (dirt), in Panam the two terms were used interchangeably, and even combined into *driptsok*. *Drip* is potentially everywhere, not only among the traditional skilled workers, and there are, in fact, much more serious forms of pollution elsewhere.²³ Even so, if one is affected by pollution from a person of low *rik*, it could result in physical illness, such as a sore throat, blisters and spots, or a swollen tongue, or in severe cases (usually caused by sexual contact) it could hinder a person's rebirth. These perceptions vary to a great extent, but the belief in physical illness caused by *drip* is widespread, also outside Central Tibet.²⁴

Other villagers talked about Rinzin and Lhakpa's relation as a curious friendship that could best be explained in terms of an exceptional personality. Lhakpa, being from an affluent *baru* house, was seen as a good person, despite his family background.²⁵ The connection implied here between *rik* and personality is found in the very constitution of a person – in the substances of the body. As described in Chapter 2, *rik* is inherent in the father's sperm and materialises as the child's bones (*rü*), which are the template of the body and as such constitute a strong influence, not only on the child's physical traits but also on their personality. Levine argued that the concept of *rü* denotes not only the physical bones and a group of people sharing the same bones (*rüpa*) but also the 'ranked hereditary social strata' (Levine 1981: 56). The interchangeability of *rü* and *rik* indicates the essential character

that hereditary social status has in Tibetan kinship, as the *rik* is the bones that constitute the body and the mind. Being of a ‘bad’ (*ngen*) *rik*, blacksmiths, butchers and *baru* are perceived to be more likely to act immorally (Fjeld 2005, 2008; Ramble 2019). These notions of moral inferiority also influenced *menrik* participation, or the lack thereof, in the local networks based on mutuality and obligations, such as the *ganyé*. Friendship across *rik* boundaries was possible by observing prescribed taboos; however, friendship was an individual relation that did not involve their respective houses. While friends expect loyalty and assistance from each other, they were not obliged to provide this. Contrary to these ‘loose’ expectations of individual help, *ganyé* relations were formalised relations between houses in which the moral obligation to assist was fundamental and unbreakable. Within the context of formalised mutual aid, *menrik* remained on the symbolic outskirts of rural village organisation.

***Menrik*, Mutuality and Reciprocity**

When talking with interlocutors about *menrik* and their participation in mutual aid networks, people often said similar things as the Darkhang *achi*: ‘They could have been our *ganyé*, that is not a problem.’ However, I did not find any examples of commoners who had mutual aid relations, *ganyé* or *kyiduk*, with *menrik*.²⁶

Despite the great potential for change over the last four decades, not only endogamy but also exclusion from inter-house mutual aid networks have maintained two distinct social categories in Panam: commoners and those of low rank (*menrik*). These two categories are fundamental in the sense that they cannot be negotiated or modified – that is, all houses are clearly classified as ‘unclean’ or not. Not including those classified as ‘unclean’ in exchange networks was seen as pragmatic, as a way to avoid practical problems, such as the distribution of food and drink during the help-receiving and help-providing events. To be able to get help, a house must provide quality food to those who come. Because of the strict observance of not sharing cups, or food, with *menrik*, it would be necessary to prepare two different servings. The help-receiving house would have to provide an extra cook (of *menrik* background) to make separate food for the low-ranked guests because, as one old woman put it: ‘nobody wants to share food with *mi tsokpa* (unclean people).’ These practical requirements, many said, would increase the economic burden on the help-receiving house. However, people of low *rik* were obliged to, and participated in public work (*chilê*) in the village, and the food practicalities during those events were easily solved (primarily by bringing their own food). The fear of engaging in somewhat

close inter-*rik* relations is more complex than observing the taboo of not sharing cups and cutlery. We might understand this reluctance through looking at the moralities involved in notions of reciprocity. Mauss made the general point that a (material or immaterial) gift must be returned, and if it is not done immediately, if there is a delayed return, the receiver finds himself (or his group) in a vaguely defined debt situation that they must reciprocate in some way at some time (1990 [1950]). A relation of ongoing gift exchange is an *open* relation. The lack of reciprocal relations of mutuality between commoners and *menrik* is also, I argue, an unwillingness among commoners to engage in relations with delayed return— that is, a reluctance to establish and maintain open relations with people of low *rik*.

Being outside the reciprocal spheres in which commoners interact, people of blacksmith and *baru* background exchanged labour and aid among themselves. Several of the *baru* families descended from one of the blacksmith houses generations back, and these kin relations were easily activated in times of need. The butchers, on the other hand, invited relatives from further away when they needed help, which they claimed was only very seldom; having established large households, they had sufficient labour resources among themselves.²⁷ Relatives who came to help in the butcher houses in rituals brought gifts and food, but their participation was not classified as *kyiduk ngalak* and their gifts not recorded.

When talking with members of blacksmith or *baru* houses about inter-*rik* relations, they also spoke hypothetically and told me that *could* have had a larger set of *ganyé* or *kyiduk* but that they simply did not. They also did not have mutual aid networks with butcher houses. The explanation they gave was similar to that of commoners – that is, the practicalities of food preparations and sharing. Just as a commoner avoided the ‘mixing of mouths’ with *menrik*, there was a hierarchisation within the category of *menrik* as well, and this implied restrictions on sharing cups amongst the blacksmiths, butchers, *baru* and beggars, and none of them share cutlery if not related by kin.²⁸ The mutual aid networks of the lower ranked, then, consisted to a large degree of relatives.

Some of the *menrik* households were large and relatively wealthy, having received land during the decollectivisation reforms, and having arranged polyandrous marriages and continued to provide skilled services for payment (slaughtering animals and arranging funerals, primarily). Hence, they had many fields to harvest and houses to build, and when these more affluent *menrik* houses asked for labour assistance, they did so within the frames of what was called *milak*, a commercial exchange relation where the worker is paid immediately after the service has been completed. As the *nama* of Dochang, a blacksmith house in Sachung, explained:

We have many fields, but not enough people. So often we have to ask for help. We ask different people; it doesn't matter because it is *milak*. Usually we have to pay ten yuan per person per day. Sometimes we pay more if they bring their own *dzo*. Other people can ask their relatives (*pün*) when they need help, but we do not have good relations (with the relatives). So, I send one daughter to Tromo (a neighbouring village) to make salary, and then we can pay *milak* when we need help.

Baru, butcher or blacksmith services were paid for in money (or in kind).²⁹ When I asked Rinzin whether the work of the smiths or the butchers could be seen as labour exchange (*lérok*), he explained:

If you need something from a blacksmith, let's say new shoes for your horse, you go to ask him to make it for you. When he has made the shoes, and put them on your horse, you pay him his salary. After that, there is nothing more to say. This is *milak*; it is not *lérok*.

Milak, then, was a commercial relation that involved immediate exchange of labour and salary. Contrary to *lérok*, *ganyé* and *kyiduk ngalak*, *milak* did not carry an obligation of a postponed return and was completed upon payment. *Milak* was not an enactment of particular social relations; rather, it was a terminated material transaction. As such, *milak* could be seen as what Bloch and Parry, in their Introduction to 'Money and the Morality of Exchange', described as a 'cycle of short-term exchange which is the legitimate domain of the individual – often acquisitive – activity' (Bloch and Parry 1989: 2). They defined two related but distinct transactional orders that coexist and that people could transgress in any given society. These transactional orders are 'on the one hand transactions concerned with the reproduction of social and cosmic order; on the other, a "sphere" of short-term transactions concerned with the arena of individual competition' (ibid.: 24). Their main concern was the flow of money within these two transactional orders and the processes of conversion between the two. They argued that with these conversions there is in all economies an ideological space for individual acquisition where this type of activity is 'consigned to a separate sphere which is ideologically articulated with, and subordinated to, a sphere of activity concerned with the cycle of long-term reproduction' (ibid.: 26). The individual, short-term acquisition must be subordinated to the transactions concerned with reproduction of social and cosmic order because it is rendered irrelevant in a long-term perspective. In the case of reciprocal relations across *rik* boundaries, the point is not the flow of money or objects in the transaction but rather the inherent moralities of these spheres – that is, the expectations and obligations of the two transactional orders. Returning to Sneath's distinction between material transactions and social enactments, the 'cycle of long-term reproduction' could

perhaps more accurately be termed an enactment of social relations, rather than a 'transactional order.' In Panam, labour exchange relations between commoners and the traditional skilled workers took the form of short-term transactions between individuals, and not houses. As such, the corporate groups to which the individuals belong were not defined as part of a social relation of some closeness; rather, the material transaction was short-term and implied no obligations or expectations beyond the immediate payment. This is a contrast to practices among the commoners, who consolidated *lérok*, *ganyé* and *kyiduk* as reciprocal group networks that, ideally, last over generations. As such, these relations would 'reproduce social order', in the words of Bloch and Parry. Labour exchange and mutual aid are hence moral networks in which the material (and immaterial) flow of values must be seen as enactments of the established social statuses of being a *rokpa*, a *ganyé*, or a *kyiduk ngalak* partner from one house to another.

Enacting the Individual and Short-Term Relation

The lack of long-term house-based relations between commoners and traditional skilled workers was also evident in the exceptional cases where *menrik* participated in a ritual in a non-*menrik* house. I heard about only one event in the recent past where a person of *menrik* background had attended a wedding, funeral or birth celebrating ritual (*bangsöl*). This event had its origin in the friendship of Rinzin and Lhakpa described above. When Rinzin's daughter was born, Lhakpa attended her *bangsöl*, as did Rinzin's other friends, neighbours, relatives and *kyiduk ngalak* relations. During the celebration, there were only a few restrictions on Lhakpa's participation, and they all involved the avoidance of mixing of mouths. For example, while other guests put a small piece of butter into the mouth of the child, Lhakpa offered the butter to one of the parents, who then gave it to the baby, to avoid touching the baby's mouth directly. When I later asked Rinzin about Lhakpa's participation in this ritual event, he explained: 'He came as my *changdrok* (drinking buddy), that's all. I had not really invited him. I did not mind that he came. We just had to be careful.' 'But when Lhakpa made offerings to the baby of Menshö [Rinzin's house], did he not also start *kyiduk*?' I continued.

No, no. It is no like that. Lhakpa is only my friend (*rokpa*). He has no connection to Menshö, and we do not have that to Drachen (Lhakpa's house). No, no. That would not be possible. It is not possible to have that kind of long relationship with *baru*. They cannot have long relations with us also – it is the same.

The temporality involved in their relation and the emphasis Rinzin put particularly on the prolongation of time, is important. Mauss argued

convincingly that a gift is an opening of a continuous relation within which the parties stand in a defined position with each other throughout the time of the material or immaterial exchange – a time that might stretch over several generations, depending upon the gift return. In a Maussian perspective, the gift that is transmitted is essential to sociality, and an emphasis on such transmission is fruitful as it highlights the gift's ability to materialise a social relation. Karen Sykes notes that, to Mauss, '[the] gift makes the ideal relationship a material fact because giving and receiving gifts creates and changes human relationships. The gift also makes the relation substantial' (2005: 60–61). Essentially, the flow of what Mauss calls *prestations* and counter-prestations substantiates the relation – it produces social obligations and long-term bonds between the receiver and the giver. Material transfers, such as food, drink and gifts but also labour, can create relationships between commoners and *menrik* that can be changed to long-term, close and amicable relations. Independent of whether or not values are exchanged or given as a result of obligations, reciprocal relations are open before the value has been returned, and it is the inherent morality of this openness that complicated commoner house relations with *menrik* houses. The result is an enduring social hierarchy and an exclusion of people based on a status inherited from parents to children, sharing some resemblance with caste dynamics in South Asia. However, this does not mean that persons of low-rank were not involved in amicable individual relations, or that *menrik* houses did not have networks of assistance to help with farm work and life cycle rituals. Rather, relations across *rik* boundaries were either individual or, if involving the house, short-term exchanges that were indisputably closed when the transaction was completed.

Exclusion and Unity

The processes involved in the exclusion from long-term exchange relations identify and express the difference that makes the difference, to use Bateson's well-known phrase. At the same time, exclusion of some brings others together. As Howell pointed out in an article on exchange amongst Lio in Flores Indonesia, reciprocal relations not only perpetuate opposition but also unite members into a higher unity. She describes how among Lio both inter-house and inter-village exchanges negate internal differences by joining them in a common pursuit. She reminds us of Mauss' point that the 'unity of the whole is indeed more real than each of the parts' (1989: 435). Such double implication of reciprocal relations resonates with inter-house networks in Panam. The process of establishing relations of dependency between poorer and more affluent houses – by the exchange of labour for

care and security – perpetuated opposition and manifested power relations that, although being contextually complementary, defined one part as inferior to the other. These negotiations formed emerging social divisions and hierarchies. At the same time, these long-term exchange relations were social manifestations wherein the involved parties constituted a unity in a moral whole. This shared morality was based upon mutuality and open relations, a form of relationality that could only be easily shared by people of the same kind (*rik*), reminding us of the ranked nature of houses as social institutions and the unequal distribution of positions and possibilities in processes of social and cultural change.

Notes

1. Robert Desjarlais has pointed to the continuous tension between the two cultural values of autonomy and interdependency among Yolmo in Nepal and argues that these frictions seem to ‘derive from sociocultural dynamics common to Tibeto-Burman peoples of the Himalaya region’ (1992: 47). Ortner, on the other hand, argues that while Sherpa religious principles value closure and autonomy, social bonds such as those expressed in mutual aid relations value openness (1978: 56). Related, Goldstein has also pointed to the balance of centralisation and decentralisation in the political and village organisation of traditional Tibet (1971b).
2. As noted by Lévi-Strauss (1983: 178).
3. The concept of caste implies a relational organisation – that is, there must be more than one group of people for caste to have any meaning. In Tibet, the lowest ranked share fundamental characteristics with the low castes in India, such as ritual pollution leading to restrictions on the sharing of substances; however, we do not find higher ranked grouping that could be termed as castes. The traditional nobility, for instance, share a particular political and economic character, but they are not higher ranked in terms of ritual purity. Therefore, I use hereditary social divisions, the Tibetan term *rik* or ‘caste-like’, rather than ‘caste’.
4. While silversmiths and goldsmiths are also defined as of hereditary low *rik* in Lhasa, this is not the case in Tsang. See Fjeld (2005, 2008b) on caste-like dynamics in Lhasa.
5. See Miller (1956) and Aziz (1978b) for early examples from farming communities and Langelaar (2019) for a recent example. After 1959, some of these networks, particularly *kyiduk*, gained new meaning and agency among exiled Tibetans and in migration processes from the high Himalayan villages in Nepal (Swank 2014; Craig 2020).
6. Miller quoted her informants in Darjeeling and Sikkim and translated the meaning of *ganyé* as ‘social friend’, ‘close friend’ or ‘neighbourhood friend’ (1956: 158). Aziz noted that some of her informants from an exiled community of refugees from Dingri claimed that the origin of the term is not *dga*, as in ‘being fond of’, but from *tkar*, meaning ‘white’. This, Aziz argued, should not be seen as contradictory, as both translations denote ‘the bond of closeness’ (1978b: 49). In Panam, *ganyé* is pronounced *gani* but often with a weak *r*, as in *garni*. However, my interlocutors were adamant that *ga* is an abbreviation of *dga bo*.
7. Jampa’s children married monogamously (in the 1970s), and while he wanted to arrange polyandry for the next generation, he only had one grandson. Of Jampa’s sons, two are

- township leaders and one works for the post office in another nearby township. Of these three, only one son is a member of the Wangchö house and thus entitled to its inheritance. The two other sons do, however, contribute economically to their natal house.
8. These include the avoidance of singing and dancing (and hence, celebrating festivals) and larger social gatherings in daily life, as well as limitations on some ritual activities and expansions of others.
 9. After the dispersal of Tibetans in exile, *ganyé* relations regained their importance in new contexts. One Tibetan woman who grew up in India told me that when she was planning a trip to New York, her stepfather in India gave her a name of his *gabo nyebo* (as he said) living in New York. He told her that she could contact him and ask for his assistance, because of this man's *ganyé* status (Tsomo Svenningsen, personal communication, Oslo, 2005).
 10. Childs and colleagues also noted this pattern of consistent social hierarchies. They found that 'Eighty-five percent of households that are now in the top 25% in landholdings started in the top quarter. In other words, most large households in 1982 remain large today, while most small households remain small' (Childs et al. 2008: 74).
 11. For an example of pre-1950 dependency relations, see Bischoff (2013).
 12. Subsidised grain from the county government was also available to Sobnub for purchase.
 13. This care also extended to us, as guests in the Takrab house. During our stay, Sobnub members took it upon themselves to make sure we had everything we needed. Wangmo would bring us fresh butter and, occasionally, eggs, and their son developed a particular interest in, and sense of responsibility for, entertaining my daughter.
 14. I was not able to observe harvest practices in Bargang village, where most of the butchers live. Hence, the ethnographic examples are from Sachung and Sharlung primarily. However, everyone I asked in Sharlung claimed that butchers did not assist non-butchers in the harvest period in Bargang.
 15. '*Gara*' is a condescending word for blacksmith that also serves as a generic term to describe *menrik* in general. When addressing people from blacksmith families, the descriptive term 'iron maker' (*chak zowa*) is considered more polite, hence I use this term here.
 16. They were also excluded from entering monasteries as monks (Jansen 2018: 50–52).
 17. See Ramble (2019) for a discussion about the novel *Phal pa'i khyim tshang gi skyid sdug*, written by Trashi Palden and first published in 1995, in which one of the main characters is a blacksmith man with a rising political career and declining moral standards after the Chinese invasion and during the first period of reforms.
 18. The so-called beggars (*longkhen*) are an exception from this pattern; after the land distribution in 1980s, all *longkhen* households, most being travelling musicians, leased out their land and slaughtered, consumed and sold the animals they received. The income from the lease was not enough to sustain themselves, and they have continued to travel, play and beg. In addition, they do not marry polyandrously. Commoners explained the stigmatisation of beggars in terms of what they saw to be economic irrationality and immoral behaviour.
 19. Martin Mills, personal communication, Lhasa, 2002.
 20. See Fjeld (2008b) for a more detailed analysis of slowly changing hierarchies in Panam.
 21. Butchers and blacksmiths were paid in cash or kind for their services, and while there had been a decline in local iron production, leading to less income for the blacksmiths, the services of the butchers were very much still needed and secured a good income for these houses. Moreover, the funeral workers (*baru*) were paid in kind and cash, and in addition, they received the clothes and jewellery that accompany the deceased

- to the burial. These items were often sold and provided an extra income for the *baru* houses.
22. See Kawaguchi (1995 [1909]); Passin (1955); Carrasco (1959); Taring (1970); Gombo (1983); Yuthok (1990).
 23. See, for instance, Lichter and Epstein (1983); Schicklgruber (1992); Diemberger (1993); Rozario and Samuel (2002), Samuel (2003); Tidwell, Nianggajia and Fjeld (forthcoming).
 24. See Fjeld (2005: 47–52) on notions of pollution in Lhasa. See Ramble (2019: 154) for an example of contamination by pollution following sexual contact with artisans in South Mustang.
 25. Bad *rik* (*rik ngen*) is commonly associated with bad personality. As an illustration, Ramble notes on author Trashi Palden's description of Lhakdor, the blacksmith protagonist, in his novel: 'Whether by literary design or through alignment with the world view that would have been part of his formative social environment, he conflates Lhakdor's heredity, profession, and personality into a single disagreeable composite' (2019: 155).
 26. Investigating hereditary social divisions among Tibetan-speaking communities in Mugu, western Nepal, I found that none of the members in the Mugum Kyiduk in Kathmandu were from blacksmith households either, despite there being a rather substantial number of blacksmith households in Mugum village.
 27. The beggars (*longkhen*) did not exchange either labour or any form of aid, as they did not farm and arranged only small-scale, less costly, life cycle rituals.
 28. People of various *menrik* backgrounds share the perception that skilled workers (with the exception of their own category) are inherently polluted, and they look down upon the other categories. The reason given by both is the same – namely, fear of contamination of *drip*. This is similar to what we know from caste dynamics in South Asia as well.
 29. At the beginning of the 2000s, all butcher and all *baru* households were still practising their traditional occupations. The two main *baru* houses in Sachung had divided the township between them, where they conducted the sky-burials of one part each. Butchers have a less ordered service system and are called upon from different areas. Many blacksmiths, on the other hand, have stopped their production. This is mainly due to the increase in both factory-made iron, offered cheaply on the county market, and iron produced by beggars (*longkhen*) in Gangkar village. This has left the traditional blacksmiths without a market.