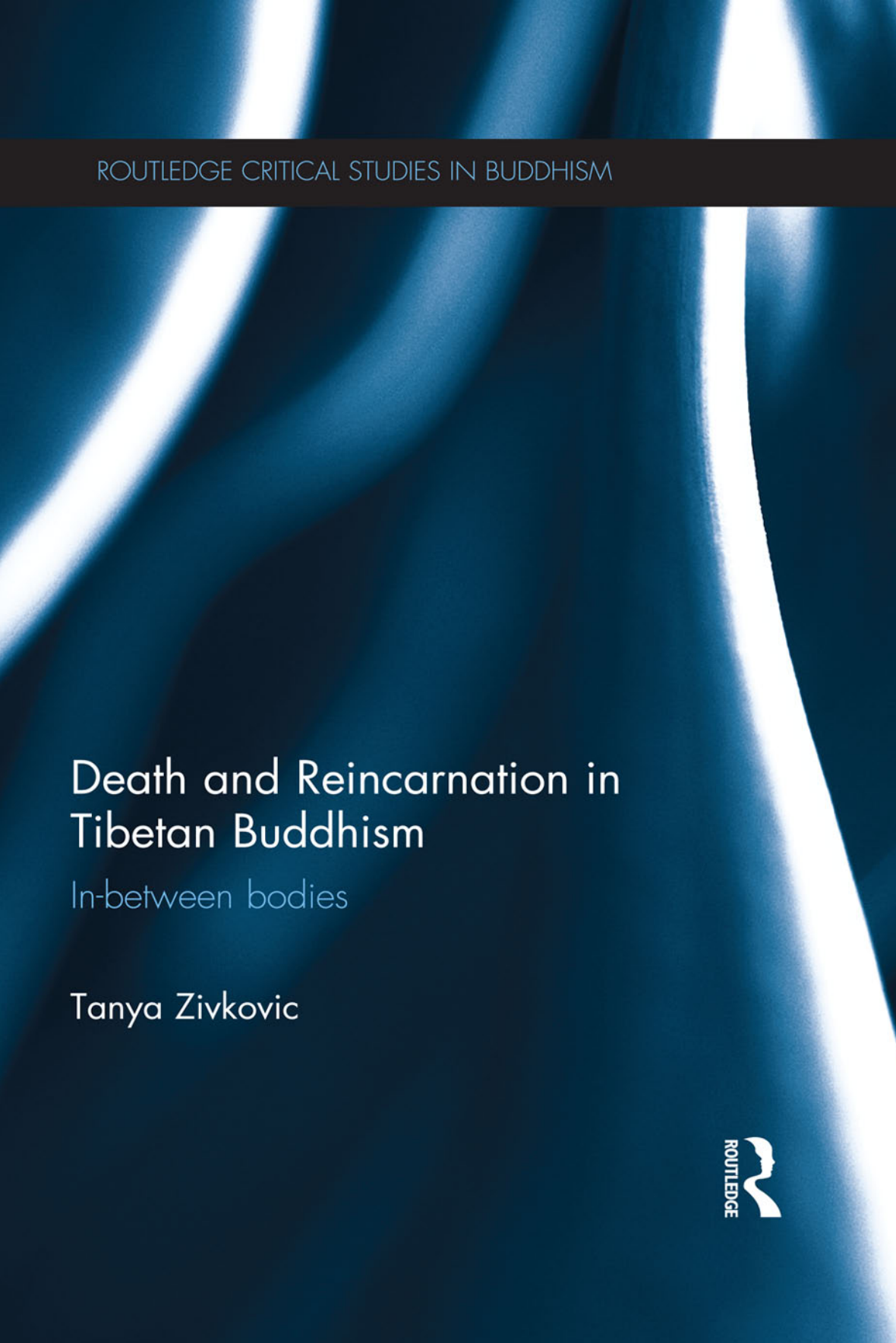
ROUTLEDGE CRITICAL STUDIES IN BUDDHISM
Death and Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism
In-between bodies
Tanya Zivkovic
ROUTLEDGE

Death and Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism

Contextualizing the seemingly esoteric and exotic aspects of Tibetan Buddhist culture within the everyday, embodied and sensual sphere of religious praxis, this book centres on the social and religious lives of deceased Tibetan Buddhist lamas. It explores how posterior forms – corpses, relics, reincarnations and hagiographical representations – extend a lama's trajectory of lives and manipulate biological imperatives of birth and death.

The book looks closely at previously unexamined figures whose history is relevant to a better understanding of how Tibetan culture navigates its own understanding of reincarnation, the veneration of relics and different social roles of different types of practitioners. It analyses both the minutiae of everyday interrelations between lamas and their devotees, specifically noted in ritual performances and the enactment of lived tradition, and the sacred hagiographical conventions that underpin local knowledge.

A phenomenology of Tibetan Buddhist life, the book provides an ethnography of the everyday embodiment of Tibetan Buddhism. This unusual approach offers a valuable and genuine new perspective on Tibetan Buddhist culture and is of interest to researchers in the fields of social/cultural anthropology and religious, Buddhist and Tibetan studies.

Tanya Zivkovic is a Research Fellow in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Adelaide, Australia. Her research explores the body and cultural trajectories of the lifecourse.

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Preface

Awashed through the temple courtyard and with saturated luggage and attire, my arrival at the Sakya Guru Monastery in Ghoom coincided with the beginning of the monsoon. After a year of correspondence, and inside a damp room exposed to the Darjeeling Hill region's ubiquitous fog, I met with the resident monks. Over beverages of heavy butter tea they asked me curiously about my interest in Buddhism. Questions about *wang* (*dbang*) or 'empowerments' received from high-lamas advanced any queries on my family life back home. In Australia, I had attended public talks and several empowerment ceremonies led by Sakya Trizin Rinpoche, the head of the Sakya lineage. Having listed these to an attentive audience, I instigated an echo of appraisal. The verdict was unanimous: I had been blessed by a great lama and was considered incredibly fortunate to receive *wang* from him.

Engaging in some public initiation rituals when they were offered by the head of the Sakya lineage during his 2003 visit to Australia was an attempt to develop a familiarity with some of the sensibilities of Tibetan Buddhist culture. I did not anticipate that they would form the focus of my initial conversations in the field or shape the way that others perceived my interest in Buddhism. Something had been transmitted, connecting me to the monastery before arriving in ways apparently more substantial than written communication. Thus, as soon as I entered the monastery I became aware of the value accorded to particular types of social transmission as I was, according to my monastic acquaintances, already caught up in a nexus of relationships.

Monks arranged my accommodation in a house that belonged to two Tibetan widows and that bordered the monastery. Living next door, I had access to monastic residents, yet could remain within the parameters of Tibetan cultural codes of conduct. I was able to attend early-morning rituals, receive lessons in Tibetan language and Buddhist philosophy, eat meals with the monks and then retire to my own quarters before the monastery gates were locked at night. These arrangements reflected the limitations of being a young, female researcher; monastery staff informed me that if I were male, or even an older woman, I could board inside the monastic compound. Throughout my time at the monastery, engagements with monks occurred in public and open spaces. Conversations took place along busy village pathways and roads, in family houses, at cultural events and

sporting occasions, in the outer grounds of the monastery or the reception office; teachings and ritual activities usually occurred in classrooms, teachings halls and inside the temple.

While my project diversified to include other Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and traditions in the Darjeeling Hills, the village of Ghoom remained my fieldwork base due to its proximity to the conveniences of Darjeeling town and because of the strength of relations established in the early fieldwork period.[1] In the monastery monks and laypersons alike talked of and engaged with a deceased abbot in his multitude of forms. Chapter 2 details devotees' understandings of the death, relics and reincarnation of this lama and the everyday religious practice through which his biography was extended in their own lives.

My first venture beyond Ghoom took place with the Sakya monks. At the invitation of a nearby monastery they performed a ritual sand *mandala* or *kyil khor* (*dkyil'khor*) in Mirik village as part of the funerary rituals for a renowned incarnate lama (*bla ma* Skt. *guru*). Straddling the Nepali border and 48 kilometres south of Darjeeling, Mirik, at the time of my fieldwork, housed a rapidly expanding monastery that overlooked the region from hilltop. It was here that the traditional 49-day mortuary ceremonies and subsequent commemoration rituals were held, transforming an ordinarily quiet locality into a hive of activity. Hundreds and on occasion thousands of disciples arrived to receive *jinlab* (*byin rlabs*), commonly translated as 'blessings', from the deceased lama and other major figures in his Kagyu lineage who presided over the rituals. I returned to Mirik periodically, both in order to attend various ceremonial events and to meet with monastic and lay practitioners during informal occasions. Here I met a large number of international Buddhists who had flown in to pay their respects to the lama. Like the monastic and local populace they were there to receive blessings and to pray for the lama's swift reincarnation during the critical juncture when he remained in-between bodies. The cross-cultural understandings of Tibetan Buddhist embodiment that came to the fore during these ceremonies are examined in Chapter 5.

Life-stories of lamas presented a recurrent theme in Ghoom and Mirik. Narrated tales of these lives emphasized a mastery over death and the importance of documenting their manner of dying in hagiography. Accordingly, the death and reincarnation of Tibetan spiritual exemplars became a major focus of my research, leading me to accept an invitation to reside in the college branch of the Sakya Guru Monastery in Rimbick, which housed the then 14-year-old incarnation of the Sakya Guru Monastery's former abbot. Here the topic of continuing lives increased in prominence when a renowned local Tibetan lama passed away and later 'returned' to the village as a migrating presence that reigned in the body of a young woman. Meetings with this reclusive practitioner, members of diverging religious factions and the wider lay community reflected the plural ideologies of Tibetan Buddhism that are recounted in Chapter 3.

After the death of the above-mentioned revered and charismatic lamas in the region, my research became grounded in the intersubjective lives of spiritual exemplars: the ways in which biography, relics and physical re-embodiment can

become vested with shared meaning, extending a biographical process of the lama. My other primary location for fieldwork was Yiga Chöling, a Gelug monastery in Ghoom where I accompanied monks and laypeople in *nyungne* (*smyung gnas*), an annual fasting ritual that recalls the life-story of Gelongma Palmo (*dge slong ma dpal mo*), a revered female lama. Chapter 4 explores how participants re-embody the devotional practice of Gelongma Palmo in a series of ascetic rites, reconfiguring the body's borders as they engage with and invoke the deceased's presence.

This book is a response to the questions that confronted me: How do hagiographies, relics, ritual performance and other living beings come to be seen as the very presence of the lama? And what influence does the lama's multidimensional presence bear on the religious lives of followers?

The research for this book was carried out using a range of methodologies available to the anthropologist. Fieldwork involved varying degrees of participant observation. In the *nyungne* rituals, I joined fervent Buddhist followers in 16 days of fasting and silent retreat. During other elaborate rituals which could span several days, I was often a silent observer, though once having learnt to slowly read Tibetan, I would from time to time, attempt to accompany the monks in chant. In accord with the hierarchy of the Buddhist system, I (as a woman and lay-person) would sit among young monks whose initial reactions to my presence ranged from hospitality as they made sure I had enough room to sit and a cup of butter tea to drink, to amusement at my clumsy pronunciation and prostrations. Interaction with monks between the ages of 6 and 16 extended into the classroom where I intermittently taught English in the Sakya Guru Monastery and their aligned monastic college in nearby Rimbick when the institutions were short of teachers. Despite these short periods of participating in the course of everyday monastic life as a teacher, I was more commonly identified as a student. Monastic staff, aware of my interest in everyday Buddhist life, but uncertain of the relevance of having general conversations with a lay populace organized my private tuition with 'reputable teachers' in Tibetan language and philosophy.

Most conversations and interviews were conducted in English as the majority of participants were sufficiently versed in the language. When talking to the older generation of Tibetans, who spoke variant dialects of Tibetan and Nepali in a manner that extended beyond my rudimentary comprehension, I would have somebody accompany me to translate. In some cases, the conversations were recorded and professional translators were employed for increased precision. Professional translators were involved in the translation of textual information, including hagiographical materials. When monasteries had already commissioned the translation of a hagiography from Tibetan to English, I used their English publication. Most of the interviews with incarnate lamas were conducted through the lama's own translator, who rendered their Tibetan into English. Usually, I refrained from recording these conversations and transcribed them from memory.

Though I lived in a highly ritualized environment, much of my research was undertaken informally, over cups of tea, walks in the hills, meal times and general conversations. In these day-to-day activities I used my memory in preference to

a notepad and a notepad in place of a sound recorder or camera. At times I felt uncomfortable about this seemingly more concealed form of research, at times others were more uncomfortable when I came with pen, paper and recording equipment. Nevertheless, depending on circumstance, I used these tools to take notes, drawings, photographs and sound recordings.

In the production of this text and its accompanying images, I have changed some names to protect the identities of the participants concerned. In many cases, particularly the life-stories of the lamas, I used their real names to uphold individual histories. For the ease of phonetic expression, Tibetan words are spelt how I heard them. For scholar, I have included the Wylie system of transliteration in parentheses after the first appearance of each Tibetan word. Sanskrit words are used (without diacritical marks) when they denote terms that are commonly circulated in Tibetan studies (e.g. *bodhisattva*, *bodhicitta*) and, to some extent, common usage (e.g. *dharma*, *karma*, *samsara*, etc.). The photographs included in this text are my own.

Note

1 The main Tibetan Buddhist schools are the Nyingma (*rnying ma*), Kagyu (*bka'brgyud*), Sakya (*sa skya*) and Gelug (*dge lugs*).

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1 Introduction

It is often taken for granted that our lives will come to an inevitable, irreversible end. Generally, we know not when or by what means the animating physiological processes of our bodies will become exhausted and finally cease, yet shared understandings about life tell us that the flesh and blood of our bodies will irretrievably perish away. Rancid and putrefied, the material substance contained within will leak out from defunct orifices; skin will rot and decay; all constituent parts eventually decompose; death is thus an irrevocable and grotesque termination of our lively existence.

The lifecourse appears to be organized by the biological processes of birth, aging and death. Shaped by certain (usually Euro-American) assumptions about the beginnings and ends of life, the spatio-temporal situation of the body is seldom questioned in our quotidian existence.[1] Bringing into play Tibetan Buddhist understandings of the body, its life and death and location in space and time, this book is concerned with religious figures whose manner of dying appears to challenge biological imperatives. In line with Tibetan notions of the lifecourse, it takes as its point of departure the premise that life can be extended beyond death, raising questions about the temporal and spatial dimensions of our position in the world and our interrelations with others.

This is a book about the continuing lives of Tibetan lamas who have a critical and influential social presence, yet lack a finite, separate living body. These spiritually advanced incarnate lamas are not representative of the majority of Tibetans, or even the majority of monastics. Although all beings reincarnate, it is the highly revered pre-eminent members of the Buddhist community who intentionally direct their rebirth and they are marked out from the relative 'ordinariness' of the layperson or the common monk (Mills 2003: 266). Even the category of the incarnate lama is multidimensional in character with varying levels of spiritual development. The incarnate lama does not belong to an homogenous group: some are born enlightened and others have to relearn the realizations of their previous incarnation (Ray 1986: 54). Nevertheless, Tibetan Buddhists commonly share the belief that the deceased lama can continue in new bodies, in various modes of presence: a corpse, an amalgam of relics, an appearance in the dreams of devotees, a reincarnation of the deceased, a rematerialization in the form of rainbows, a migrating presence that can reign in

the body of another or a textual representation in religious biography (hagiography). Devotees' engagement with these posterior forms enables a distinctive interexperience of and with lamas' bodies.

In both religious doctrine and to some extent common discourse, high-status lamas are believed to possess the three 'bodies', *kusum* (*sku gsum*, Skt. *trikaya*) of a buddha: the unmanifest, formless *chöku* (*chos sku*, Skt. *dharmakaya*); the subtle enjoyment bodies of *longchöku* (*longs spyod sku*, Skt. *sambhogakaya*) in which the lama is able to emanate as and appear to the celestial buddhas and *bodhisattvas*; and *tulku* (*sprul sku*, Skt. *nirmanakaya*), or emanation body, the vehicles into which spiritual exemplars consciously incarnate and reveal themselves to ordinary human beings over successive lifetimes. While the historical Buddha appeared in this form, the Tibetan term *tulku* is conventionally applied to any lama who is a recognized rebirth and therefore includes the Dalai Lamas and countless other lines of reincarnate lamas. These lineages unfold within a social universe of cosmological entities including buddhas, gods, demi-gods, hell beings, hungry ghosts and demonic others. Only a select few Buddhist lamas acquire mastery over this cosmos and their 'power' or *wang* (*dbang*) filters down to affect the common Buddhist practice of the majority. An empowerment ritual is the transfer of *wang* from a lama as they initiate the disciple into a particular deity practice. It both involves and enables intercorporeality, in the sense that it is an engagement requiring openness to the bodies of others. A technique acquired from practice, it forms a learnt repertoire of sensory experience that shapes the way Buddhist practitioners perceive their own and others' bodies. In cultivating techniques to increase the possibilities of embodied experience, the Buddhist ideally aims to make their body like the body of a buddha (Desjarlais 2003: 98), that is, to make their body receptive and entwined with the greater cosmos.

The lama's ability to affect the bodies and minds of their disciples is an important part of the *wang* ritual process, in that these 'empowerments' bestow blessings or *jinlab* (*byin rlabs*) from the lama to the recipient, but transmission is not confined to this arena. It is generally believed that any contact with a suitably qualified lama, whether personally or imagined, can be a sufficient cause to receive *jinlab*. The many lay devotees who do not have regular access to reincarnate lamas receive *jinlab* through other forms, such as contact with and service to local monasteries and the monastic community therein, a community that represents and serves as a mediating body between the higher lamas (with their tutelage of tantric deities) and lay practitioners. *Jinlab* can also be received through various visual meditative practices; uttering mantras; reciting religious texts; physical gestures of prostration and circumambulation; paying homage to relics, images and iconography, which are often held as empowered objects, along with any items personally received from or blessed by high-lamas in consecrating or initiatory ceremonies; and the reading or recall of a lama's life-story.

Within this book these various means of access to a lama's blessing are explored as methods that can induce the *presence* of deceased lamas in the lived experience of disciples. This exploration arises from the contradistinctions of life and death, presence and absence, past and present that practitioners negotiated

time and again during my period of fieldwork. Here, I should mention that Buddhism does not ascribe any inherent existence to phenomena, which are instead characterized by interdependence. The philosophical idiom states that all things are interconnected and impermanent: the reality of our minds, bodies and the external world is a mistaken assumption arising from a false belief in a truly existing self. In a chain of causation, the experience of being a singular self-existing entity derives from contact between the sense-organs and their objects. This contact leads to grasping and craving, perpetuating the drives and impulses that obscure our experience and propagate the ignorance that leads us to take rebirth. Cyclical promulgation of death and rebirth reflects the impermanence of phenomena and the inseparability of distinctions such as birth and death, self and other, mind and body, for these conceptualizations are intertwined. Importantly, the adept does not aim for a purely theoretical knowledge of these causal conditions or only a personal liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. Ideally, they endeavour to experience liberation from the illusory nature of the self and external phenomena and to cultivate *jangchub kyisem* (*byang chub kyi sems*, Skt. *bodhicitta*), an altruistic intent for this realization to arise in all sentient beings. Critical to this liberation is the transmission of blessings from a lama. Described as emanations of deities or recognized reincarnations of previous lamas, *tulku* are held to be inseparable from the historical Buddha in that their lines of descent can be traced back to him. The lama then continually returns to worldly existence to lead others toward liberation from the cycle. On the one hand, characterizing phenomena as permanent and inherently existing is the cause of worldly existence, and on the other hand, the continuing essence of the Buddha abiding in physical form is integral to the receipt of *jinlab* that can enable transcendence of death and rebirth. This system both propagates the Buddha's teaching on the inherent non-existence and impermanence of self and phenomena and maintains an embodied presence of the Buddha in the world over time (Strong 2004; Cuevas and Stone 2007).

Further, in Buddhist doctrine the body is but an illusion borne from the mind's capacity to manifest appearance and yet there is an extensive and elaborate tradition of worshipping the relics of the Buddha and other spiritual adepts. Relics can be body parts – teeth, hair, bones, blood, urine, reproductive substances, mucus, crystallized products from the body or embalming salts; other material objects associated with buddha(s) – clothing, bowls, ritual objects or other possessions; and Buddhist teachings that pervade the minds of disciples before being documented in scripture. Stupas and iconic images are other objects widely considered to derive from, emulate or represent a buddha (Bentor 1995). Across Buddhist Asia, bones, hair, nails and other apparently transmogrified corporeal material are placed in reliquaries, where they are revered and vested with spiritual, even economic capital (Tambiah 1984; Taylor 1993, 1997). Unique to Tibetan Buddhism, the continued material presence of the lama is not confined to posthumous relics but extends into human form through the tradition of recognized successive reincarnations.

Biographical process

In articulating the social presence of the deceased, I expand Strong's (2004) thesis on the biographical process of the Buddha to include the lives of spiritual masters in the Tibetan tradition. While Strong asserts that 'relics of the Buddha can best be understood as *expressions and extensions of his biography*' (2004: 229), I contend that relics, along with other posterior conditions – including reincarnation, possession, transmogrification, devotional practice and hagiography itself – are also 'spreaders and continuators' (2004: 229) of the lama's *presence*.

According to Strong, the relics of the Buddha are extensions of his life-story. Bodily relics including bone, hair, nails and teeth and secondary relics such as his footprints, bowl, robe and bodhi tree, develop a 'powerful narrative' (2004: 7), inscribing new chapters in a biographical process that ends not with the death of the Buddha but with the production and dissolution of his relics. Even after the passing of the Buddha his biography goes on: relics are seen to embody a biographical blueprint, the coming and going of the Sakyamuni Buddha in the same way that other buddhas have come and gone before.[2] Directly implicated in Strong's notion of biographical process is a common Buddhist belief that persons can reside in objects and different temporalities, beyond the confines of a singular corporal form (Empson 2007, Swearer 2004). Extending agency beyond the lifecourse, continuing posterior biographies can inhabit various forms:

> A person and a person's mind are not confined to particular spatio-temporal coordinates, but consist of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material objects, traces and leavings, which can be attributed to a person and which, in aggregate, testify to agency and patienthood during a biographical career which may, indeed, prolong itself well after biological death.
>
> (Gell 1998: 222)

In the context of Tibetan hagiography or *namtar* (*rnam thar*), the story of 'full-liberation' often documented after the passing of a spiritual master, the person is ideally *present* in posterior forms. Lamas' life trajectories become extended in and through their new modes of presence and the followers who revere them. The biographical process refers both to the dialectic between presence and absence that these post-mortem manifestations signify and the various conduits through which the lama is re-embodied and believed to be accessible to others. In becoming a continuation and extension of an exemplary life, these re-presentations of the deceased reinscribe a religious ideal into the world and, at the same time, reincorporate the lama into the lived daily experience of followers in textual, embodied and performative practice. By exploring this biographical process, rather than biographies *per se*, the posterior forms of the lama are not subjugated to the semantic, but re-embodied and grounded in intersubjectivity (cf. Jackson 1989: 122).

Navigating an amalgam of contradictions and divisions, the biographical process occurs in an intersubjective arena. Carried on through collectively agreed

upon animate and posterior forms, the creation and recreation of contrasting categories of knowledge and practice are put on display, negotiated, reconciled or unresolved in the social praxis of a lama's followers. The very objects that signify decease memorialize the lama and become an extended presence, effectively negotiating distinctions between life and death. As the biographical process is fashioned, relations between human beings and spiritual others, the personal and the collective, biography and mythology, history and imagination, the past and the present are pragmatically intertwined. The reciprocal nature of these interrelations is negotiated through social processes of memorialization in the writing and reading of hagiography, the narration of oral stories, as well as in the course of bodily and ritual interaction.

Drawing on Connerton (1989), Stoller advocates the sensory arena as an embodied and powerful carrier of memory (1997: 59). Stoller claims that the potency of collective memory does not abide in textual inscription alone (1997: 61). It stems from stories (oral accounts) and bodily practices (gestures, sounds and movements). This book recognizes the role of bodies and objects in transporting the past into the present (cf. Empson 2007; Swearer 2004). Tibetan Buddhists, as the coming chapters will demonstrate, continually re-fashion the physical presence of the lama in the present. Recalled in the minds of followers, re-embodied in relics and reincarnation and recollected in textual inscription, collective representations of the lama endure through time. I use the term 'memorialization' to ground the abstract and formalized reasoning of a social or cultural memory (Connerton 1989) in material things and social processes. In practice, the process of memorialization is simultaneously shaped by the cultural constraints of tradition and the pragmatics of interexperience. In the relations that take place between a sense of self and a community, 'personal memories become collectivized and historicized; they cease to be properties of individual minds and enter into intersubjectivity' (Jackson 1998: 140).

Intersubjectivity

Jackson links 'the intersubjective turn' in anthropology to Schutz's social phenomenology (Jackson 1998: 5). Extending phenomenology beyond the individual to encompass the social world, Schutz questioned how people, despite individual differences, hold commonality with others, a shared experience (Schutz 1980 [1932]; Schutz and Luckmann 1973). Schutz asserted that a shared meaning among people is taken-for-granted in the 'commonsense' of daily life. Differences between people are bracketed out in the practical, mundane engagements of day-to-day living (Schutz and Luckmann 1973). Intersubjectivity refers to the consensual, public and historically pre-given nature of our conceptual frameworks. It postulates that the self, others and the world in which we operate and interact are grounded in shared ideas, without which we would not have the capacity to interrelate with others.

Schutz emphasized that a shared space and shared time marked by physical accessibility corresponds to degrees of intimacy integral to our primary

relationships. His social world is divided into 'consociates', being those who share the same temporal and spatial access to each other's bodies, 'contemporaries' or those that share not in space but in living time only and 'predecessors' who being dead are like unborn 'successors' in that neither have accessible living bodies (Schutz 1980 [1932]: 142–3). While predecessors can influence and be understood by contemporaries and successors through their inscriptions on the world, in photographs, writings, film and other devices, successors, on the contrary, cannot be known in the here and now. In this temporal order, the future is not yet within reach (Schutz 1945: 547) and time is encountered as a linear and finite movement towards death. Each of us is born, experiences a continuity of events in a chronological order and some day dies; the world is experienced as having existed prior to our birth and we assume it to continue beyond our death. Schutz assumed this fundamental temporal and spatial structure to be the basis of our intersubjective life.

In the cultural patternings that characterize qualitatively different times and spaces, the Tibetan Buddhist lifecourse is not limited to this duration, for the position of bodies in 'time' and 'space' is conceived of differently in Tibetan contexts. First, Tibetan Buddhists consider the relationship they have with a lama to be of immense significance in their lives despite the lack of physical contact they may have with him or her. Intimacy is not necessarily dependent on the temporal and spatial co-presence of living bodies in the sense that Schutz supposed. Not confined to a particular form or lifespan, 'presence' in this sense refers to modes of being that are inclusive of our assumed and everyday human being but not limited to it. Second, the temporal order of the lifecourse as a singular linear sequence that moves from birth through to death is too limited to account for the successive past and future lives of reincarnated lamas and their holy relics. These posterior forms are continuing entities that extend a linear life-story of the lama and also reproduce a circular narrative. Simply put, situating stories of reincarnation and bodily transmogrifications such as relics in linear and finite models compromises the dynamics of those life histories.

In this book, the concept of intersubjectivity takes specific ethnographic form in the social relations and exchanges that transpired between deceased lamas and their devotees during fieldwork conducted in the Darjeeling Hills. My own concept of intersubjectivity thus places central importance on Tibetan assumptions about the present and continuing bodily existence of spiritually accomplished lamas and the means by which devotees' interaction with them is possible. I argue that these quintessentially Tibetan assumptions of intersubjectivity are vital to understanding the continuation of a lama's embodied presence.

This characterization of intersubjectivity is amenable to Csordas' notion of embodiment as an 'indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and the *mode of presence and engagement in the world*' (my emphasis, 1993: 135). Incorporating 'somatic modes of attention' that are 'culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others' (Csordas 1993: 138), embodiment, in this sense, can encompass a shared physicality. In this book, I take *modes of*

presence to mean the embodiments of the lama that extend a trajectory of lives in and through other bodies and objects. The body is not universally individuated from other individuals, but can be 'diffused with other persons and things' (Csordas 1994: 7) and is not merely 'some skin-encapsulated, seamless monad' (Jackson 1998).

The Buddhist believes that the life of the high-lama is not confined to any particular physical form, nor limited to a specific span of time: the lama may physically incarnate into another body, transmogrify into other forms or permeate the body of another. As we will see, this broadening of the world through new bodily spaces and temporal arrangements and ways of articulating and attending to these corporeal compositions, is made possible through Buddhists' training in becoming attuned to variations of embodiment that they may have previously been unaware of (Latour 2004).

Extending the range of embodied experiences, engagements with others can unfold within dense matter, subtle physicalities, even visualized imaginings, but these are not inert objects or inconsequential affects in the context of Tibetan Buddhism. These embodiments are the substance of spiritual tradition, a continuation of ancestral lineages that extend through time and space, operating within an expansive intersubjective arena and enabling vast opportunities for relating with the lama after his decease.

Darjeeling

The field-research for this book was carried out in the Darjeeling Hills between 2004 and 2010. After an initial seventeen-month period of fieldwork between 2004 and 2005, I undertook another two months of research in the region over several short visits in January and February 2006, January 2009 and November and December 2010. Darjeeling is a picturesque hill-town at an elevation of 2100 metres. The Darjeeling Hills nestle within the higher peaks of the snow-clad Himalayas. Mount Kanchenjunga (8591 metres), the world's third highest peak, rises above Darjeeling, a stark summit commanding the landscape when visible. North of the Darjeeling region is the Indian state of Sikkim; to the east lies Bhutan; to the west, Nepal; and to the south, the plains of West Bengal.

Tibetans living in Darjeeling do not belong to an homogeneous 'Tibetan' population. Although Buddhism, trade and a common written language provide a 'unifying effect', ethnic Tibet has never been a particularly homogenous region (Samuel 1993: 112). There was no unified Tibetan identity before the Chinese occupation of Tibet: rather there were multiple distinct groups with their own cultural practices and language. This variation extends throughout the Himalayan borderlands, including Darjeeling with its many ethnic groups of Tibetan cultural and linguistic resemblance, who migrated south from Tibet into Himalayan valleys. Among the Himalayan edges of Tibet, the various Tibetanized inhabitants demonstrate that 'Tibetan' is a constructed category. Tibetans in Darjeeling are therefore best understood as Tibetanized, rather than confined to a distinct and singular cultural identity.

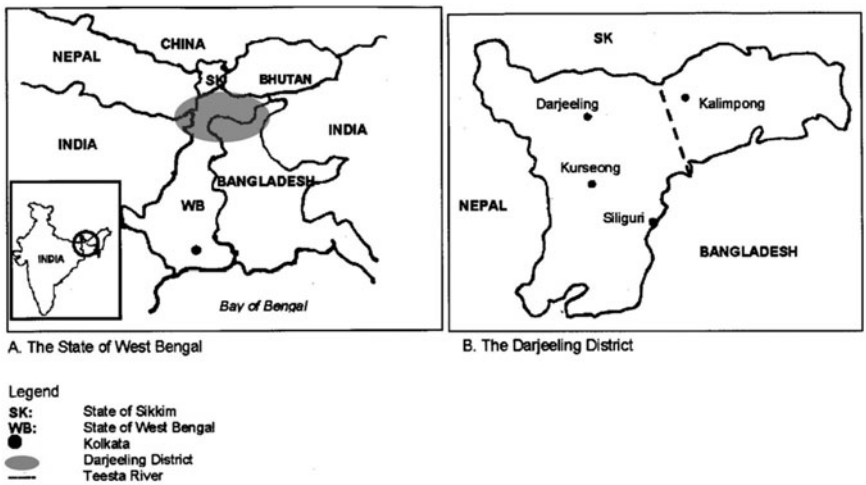

Figure 1.1 Map of the Darjeeling district
Source: adapted from Dekens 2005: 85

There are few ethnographic studies on Tibetans in Darjeeling. Among the most substantial ethnographic work carried out in the area is Miller's examination of mutual aid societies (1956), her functionalist study of lay and monastic relations (1958), Tanka Subba's (1990) research on migratory and adaptation practices of Tibetan refugees and more recently Gerke (2011) explored Tibetan long-life rituals in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. In the first ethnographic dissertation of Tibetans in Darjeeling, Miller (1958) refers to a Buddhist community comprised of many different cultural groups including the Sherpa who migrated from Nepal, but originally descended from the east of Tibet; the Yormo who migrated to Nepal from the Ngari–Khorsum region of western Tibet and then into Darjeeling; Tibetans from the northeastern province of Amdo, from Kham in eastern Tibet, from the central regions of *dBus* and *gTsang* and also from Ladakh. Other Buddhist groups include the original inhabitants of the region, the Lepcha, as well as Bhutia, Sikkimese and Bhutanese (Miller 1958: 202–3). Having conducted fieldwork in the early 1950s, Miller's study does not include the refugees who left Tibet and settled in India after the Dalai Lama fled in 1959. Their settlement in Darjeeling has further diversified Tibetanized communities in the region (Subba 1990).

Before the British occupation of the Darjeeling region, the area historically belonged to Sikkim with a populace including Lepcha, Limbu and Magar tribes. In 1835, the British acquired the territory from the monarch of Sikkim as a sanatorium for their soldiers and as 'a bridgehead for trade with Tibet' (Kennedy 1996: 23). Darjeeling's temperate climate then became utilized in the development of tea plantations and the establishment of a hill station for British residents to escape the searing heat of the plains. Dr Campbell, the first Superintendent of

Darjeeling, led the building of the district, transforming a sparse populace to more than a quarter of a million people, a labour migration exercise bolstered by recruitment from Nepali tribes of poorly paid tea-plantation workers without labour rights. Close surveillance and coercion by plantation police drove intensive labour production, disciplining the bodies of a captive 'multi-tribe, multi-caste and multi-lingual' population whose cultural variations and remote location stalled the development of political mobilization (Chettri 2013). The tea industry represented more than 5 million pounds sterling in invested capital by the late 1890s (Waddell 1899: 38–9) but led to 'underdevelopment as profits from the plantations were drained' from the land and labourers (Chettri 2013: 3). In the mid-to-late 1800s, missionaries constructed schools, churches and welfare centres for British residents. This same period saw further development with the introduction of the Darjeeling–Himalayan Railway. Within 3 years of its opening, the number of European houses in Darjeeling had doubled and the establishment of hotels and boarding houses increased the number of visitors from other districts (Kennedy 1996: 92). The ease of travel led to sojourns in the hill station by Indian residents of Calcutta, affluent maharajas and land owners.

Nepali migration to Darjeeling to join this labour force and also to enlist at the army recruiting station represented a stable population increase.[3] According to 1941 census figures, Nepalis constituted more than 86 per cent of the population of Darjeeling district; their numbers contributed to 96 per cent of the tea workers and they also worked as 'servants, bearers, syces, carpenters, blacksmiths and small-traders' (Kennedy 1996: 189–90).[4] In other areas of the labour force, Bhutia and Lepcha men operated as rickshaw riders and coolies; Tibetans generally organized trans-Himalayan trade; middle-class Indian Marwaris, Biharis and Bengalis worked as merchants and in professional occupations; and immigrant Muslims worked as butchers (Kennedy 1996: 190).

After India's Independence in 1947, Darjeeling merged with West Bengal, and the Indian upper and middle classes, writes Kennedy (1996: 119), 'filled the vacuum' that was an outcome of British emigration 'purchasing British property, occupying British cottages, enrolling their children in British schools. And in so doing they made the hill stations their own.' A diverse ethnic population gave rise to social and economic tensions as the numerically dominant Nepali and other ethno-linguistic groups became increasingly marginalized by elite Bengalis. The socio-economic exploitation from the colonial British Empire had changed hands to the elite Bengalis who through low wages, unemployment and underdevelopment reproduced ethnic prejudices from their positions in government. In response to this political disempowerment, Nepalis mobilized under the banner of a shared ethnic group – the Gorkha – through which to fight for a separate autonomous state independent of West Bengal. In 1980, the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) formed to demand the creation of Gorkhaland. After a 2-year period of aggressive violence, some political autonomy was attained through the establishment of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988. However, tensions continue to brew and there are ongoing strikes throughout the district. Revived agitation has been marked by the assassination of

moderate Gorkha politician Madan Tamang in Darjeeling town in 2010, and in August 2012 the DGHC was replaced by the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration.

Hopes for upward mobility among refugee Tibetans and other minority groups in the area are also negotiated through ethnicity. Bhutia is a commonly used cultural category for Tibetans in the Darjeeling Hills. It has been used to refer to those who migrated from Tibet from the thirteenth century onward (Shneiderman and Turin 1996) and Aziz notes (1976: 345 n. 5) that, like the Sherpas, Bhutias trace their religion, ancestry and other cultural characteristics to a Tibetan heritage. Based on fieldwork conducted in the 1980s, Tanka Subba's study of the social and economic situation of the refugee population in the Darjeeling and Sikkim region conveys that 'Bhutia' is the political title of Tibetans who are Indian citizens, generally those living in India prior to 1959, however the 'Lepchas, Nepalis and other Indians call them "Bhutias", no matter when they came and whether or not they are naturalised' (1990: 61). The term has particular legal standing as an official category in the Constitution of India. Recognized as historically disadvantaged, Scheduled Tribes including Bhutias, Lepchas, Sherpas, Tamangs and Limbus are eligible to receive governmental and educational benefits and to some extent increased employment opportunities. For refugee Tibetans, acquiring Indian nationality through Scheduled Tribe status involves a bureaucratic sleight of hand and provides the certification necessary to apply for an Indian passport. For many Tibetans, a ticket out of India is seen as a gateway to opportunities and economic freedom in an exoticized liberal West.

When I lived in Darjeeling, the town was a bustling urban hub of trade and tourism. The main roads were often congested with jeeps, people and goods, while hoards of Indian and foreign tourists congregated in the town's bazaar, streets and hotels for brief holidays to admire mountain vistas and escape the heat of the plains. Tibetans living in close proximity to Darjeeling town, in monasteries and elsewhere, are immersed in a modernized Indian culture, acculturated into English language whether through English education, other forms of tuition, television or conversation with foreign visitors.

The heterogeneity of the cultural landscape extends into religion. The main traditions of Tibetan Buddhism – Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug – have constructed monasteries in the Darjeeling region, most of which were built after 1959. Among these groups, scholars have noted general variations in emphasis: 'shamanic' and 'clerical', or 'yogic' and 'textual' are some of the analytic categories used to think through variations between religious scholarship and practice (Samuel 1993: 2005). Monastic and lay traditions have also been characterized by their distinct perceptions and contexts. Many lay Tibetans are not ordinarily educated in the tenets of Buddhist tradition, but routinely go about their Buddhist practices – uttering mantras, consuming consecrated medicines, circumambulating temples and attending *wang* rituals – in the context of day-to-day life in Darjeeling. It is also the case that many monks are untrained in the specificities of their Buddhist traditions. The presence of common or 'folk' religious praxis

among monastics (Cuevas 2008; Lopez 1998b) demonstrates that divisions between common and elite Buddhist thought and practice can be blurred.

Adding to the complexities of this cultural spectrum, growing numbers of practising Buddhists from foreign shores visit or live in the region to seek instruction from the lamas therein. The monasteries are now exposed to and often dependent on international interest and support. Social and economic relations between the monasteries and laity have undergone significant change. Patronage continues to shift from the local to foreign sponsors and political power is tied to the Indian state and not the monasteries. Ritual activities are increasingly recreated for other cultural audiences with monasteries sending groups of monks to teach or bestow empowerments in 'dharma centres' abroad in exchange for money and sponsorship. In India, many monasteries employ the services of English teachers, enabling monks to receive English language tuition similar to their contemporaries in the Indian school system and increasing their opportunities to travel overseas to teach Buddhism. Nepali is the main language spoken in Darjeeling and while monks were often encouraged by their seniors to speak Tibetan, many of those who were born in the area and who constituted the majority reverted to their mother tongue once out of earshot of their Tibet-born elders.

Prost (2008: 104) employs the Tibetan category of 'the modern monk' to explore the changing nature of social life for monks in exile. Referring to material possessions such as mobile phones, the accumulation of wealth and a display of foreign connections, her observations in Dharamsala have some relevance to the realities of monastic life in Darjeeling. The stock of money, possessions and foreign networks amassed among the more elite factions of the monastic community were seen as a sign of cultural degeneration by some older exile monks and laypeople. For younger monks, they commonly used the expression 'modern monk' to refer to their position and in so doing situated their fondness for football, Bollywood, American movies and a common desire to travel and teach overseas in terms of a progressive Tibetan monasticism.[5] Since the consumption of Indian and American culture among Tibetan monks was not without critics, monks were discouraged by their seniors from playing football or from watching popular Indian films, yet many engaged in these activities regardless. Monks in some monasteries were allowed to play volleyball for a few hours on weekends or watch DVDs of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's teachings, with the latter activities perceived by the older monks and laity as, respectively, less of a threat or beneficial to the preservation of Tibetan religious culture in exile.

The narrative

No matter how the anthropologist constructs her text, the work is always a partial representation. In the course of writing this book, I felt constrained by the limits of language: words cannot deliver the musicality and rhythms of monastic ritual, the engaged emotional presence of a devotee's prayers, the smells of burning incense, embodied gestures of prostration or the sight of vaporous cloud cascading through temple doors. Such sensorial modalities were among the textures of

life in Darjeeling. At times this work attempts to capture the embodied poetics of social life through the margins of description. In this way, my work is influenced by a sensorial field of investigation in studies in phenomenological anthropology (Csordas 1990, 1993, 1994; Desjarlais 1992, 2003; Favret-Saada 1980; Jackson 1989, 1996, 1998; Stoller 1989a, 1989b, 1997; Stoller and Olkes 1987).

Drawing on Jackson (1998), Stoller and Olkes (1987) and also Desjarlais' phenomenology as 'narrative strategy' (1992: 35; 2003), this project brings into play life-stories and lived experience in an attempt to elucidate the nuances of everyday life among Buddhist practitioners in Darjeeling. The above-mentioned anthropologists do not make a sharp distinction between analytical and descriptive writing, but in building the trajectory of the story they attempt to engage their audience with 'something more than the gathering and presentation of data' (Stoller 1987: 227). Stoller's re-presentation of the lived experience of fieldwork is an attempt to reveal the constantly fragmentary nature of the field of social relations through ethnographic memoirs, colourful description and rich dialogue. These phenomenological and sentient orientations within anthropology emphasize the interplay between personal creative experience and culturally constructed inventories or systems of classification. In attending to the tapestry of life-stories from which this book was crafted, I diverge from more conventional studies of religion in Tibetanized societies, which have a tendency to emphasize the structural aspects of Buddhist organisation over phenomenological approaches to Buddhist religion.

This book investigates the social lives of four deceased Buddhist figures to explore Tibetan Buddhist understandings of death, relics and reincarnation. It examines the interrelationship between oral, written and performed life-stories and the posterior modes of presence through which devotees continued interactions with the deceased are made possible. It does not explore death and reincarnation through the lens of Tibetan religious rituals or Buddhist philosophy. These important fields are not my specialization and they have been dealt with previously with commendable scholarship. This is not a Tibetological work. It is by way of ethnography, and in contrast to traditional liturgical text-based accounts, that I contextualize the seemingly esoteric and exotic aspects of Tibetan Buddhist culture within the everyday, embodied and sensual sphere of religious praxis.

The following chapter is concerned with the transmogrification and reincarnation of Tibetan lama Khenchen Sangay Tenzin. It explores how stories of his death articulate with certain physical signs that are recognized by devotees and woven into an official biography, published by the monastery under the auspices of his disciples. Hagiographical accounts of his death and rebirth demonstrate uniquely Tibetan continuities of the lifecourse and their relation to Tibetan body concepts. Central to this analysis is the role of oral and textual narratives in augmenting a memorialization of the lama that is characterized by devotion and enacted through ritual. This is examined through the devotional practices and daily rituals of three laywomen. I argue for an approach to viewing relics and reincarnation as aspects of the lama that are both physically inscribed in the world and incorporated into the lives of devotees through praxis.

Consistent with the focus on extended biographies, the migration of a lama's presence after his decease and his re-embodiment in another material form are events that are explored in Chapter 3. Where Chapter 2 examines the continuing lifecourse in relics and an officially recognized rebirth, Chapter 3 is concerned with an unlettered, idiosyncratic yogi's 'return' from death. Oral stories of his life and death exposed divergent opinions in the intersections of scholastic and lay tradition and the juxtapositions between different Tibetan Buddhist lineages. I argue that the tensions between different Buddhist ideologies and practices are linked to historical inter-lineage debates and reproduced in the life-worlds of contemporary adherents of the schools concerned. What I attempt to convey in this chapter is the variation of Buddhist practitioners in the field setting. I also argue for the recognition of the institution of reincarnation as a quintessentially Tibetan phenomenon, distinguished from spirit possession, although similarly indicative of the transfer of life from one body into another.

Chapter 4 explores the ritual re-enactment of the life-story of Gelongma Palmo, an exemplary nun liberated through her devotional expression to the *bodhisattva* Chenrezig (*spyan ras gzigs* Skt. Avolokitesvara). Performing ascetic acts in the *nyungne* fasting ritual, participants attempt to purify karma in the continuum of their own lives. Drawing on hagiographical and ritual literature, along with ethnographic participation in *nyungne*, I investigate how practitioners extend the biography of Gelongma Palmo in their own bodies. Encoded in set postures, utterances and visualizations, seminal aspects of Gelongma Palmo's lifestory are re-fashioned in participants' actions. This chapter demonstrates that the ritual performance of *nyungne* involves a re-embodying of the life-story of Gelongma Palmo's transformation from constraint to liberation. I argue for the centrality of a phenomenological and sentient investigation into *nyungne* participants' experience. In so doing, this chapter suggests that symbolic interpretations may overlook the phenomenology of religious experience and the social interrelations that are immediate in practitioners' lives.

The presentation of Tibetan Buddhist body concepts to European disciples during the funerary and commemorative ceremonies of Bokar Rinpoche are explored in Chapter 6. Tracing written and verbal hagiographical depictions of Bokar Rinpoche as a dynamic system of interrelating bodies and bodily life essences, the chapter then looks at the communication of these Buddhist body concepts across cultures. It explores how given social structures in the Tibetan Buddhist religious world are refashioned in another cultural context. In case studies demonstrative of the interplay between conventional and innovative religious practice, I show how foreign disciples in revering the lama in his posterior forms enact the creation and recreation of Tibetan Buddhism.

Notes

1 Much academic writing in the social sciences also tends to naturalize the temporality of the lifecourse and reproduce a dichotomy of life and death. Some exceptions to this trend in social anthropology include Desjarlais (2003), Gupta (2002), Hallam *et al.* (1999) and Lock (2002).

2 Sakyamuni (Skt.) is the historical Buddha who is one among a long line of past and future buddhas.
3 See Ortner's discussion (1989: 159–62) on the infrastructure projects of the British in Darjeeling and migration of Sherpa labour in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
4 Sherpas also supported the British in their mountaineering expeditions (Ortner 1989: 161–3). See Ortner (1999) for a detailed history of the relations between Sherpa porters and Western mountaineers in the Himalayas.
5 See also Diehl (2002), Huber (2001) and Klieger (2002) on contemporary Tibetan traditions and culture in exile.

2 Relics and reincarnation of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin

During *saka dawa* (*sa ga zla ba*), the religious festival that commemorates the birth, death and enlightenment of the Buddha, the 14-year-old reincarnation of the monastery's former abbot recited prayers in the temple. A continuous stream of local villagers and townspeople paid homage to the young boy who, perched on a high throne, sat elevated above two rows of elder lamas and before the altar with its ornate Buddhist deities. Lesser-ranking monks sat furthest from the reborn abbot on lower bench seating that lined the temple's worn, frescoed walls. Assembled atop each other the youngest of the monastery's monks became stumbling blocks for laypeople as they performed their circumambulations of the temple's interior.

Thighbone trumpets blew in unison with conch shells. Cymbals clashed alongside resonant bells and ritual drumming. Combined with this musical auxiliary, the low, guttural sound of the monk's chant ricocheted through the temple, amplified through speakers and garnished with the mantras that streamed from lips of devotees.

The procession of laity approached the young incarnation to receive his blessing with their upper body held low and their hands pressed together in a position of prayer. In a momentary exchange he touched their heads as they presented him with money and *katags* (*kha btags*), the long, white ritual scarves that are traditional offerings bequeathed to eminent religious figures. Continuing in their devotional circuit of the temple, lay devotees then paid their respects to the relics of the late Khenchen Sangay Tenzin, directing their reverence to posthumous remains enshrined in an elaborately adorned *chorten* (*mchod rten*), or reliquary.

The participants in this devotional circuit wore small pendants around their necks. One side carried the image of the young *tulku* posed with ceremonial hat and robes. The other contained a print of his former self, 70 years old with a long, grey beard as the late Khenchen Sangay Tenzin who died 14 years earlier (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2, overleaf).

In Tibetan tradition, reincarnated lamas and their holy relics contain the history of a lineage of incarnations. These posterior forms are continuing entities that extend a linear life-story of the lama and also reproduce the biographical blueprint of the Buddha, the exemplary figure whose birth, death and enlightenment represent the path toward spiritual awakening. Beginning as oral accounts of the

Figure 2.1 Pendant
(Khenchen Sangay Tenzin)

Figure 2.2 Pendant
(Tenzin Kunga Gyaltsen)

mystical feats and abilities of these religious adepts, stories are commonly propagated by the adepts' disciples. They often describe miraculous relic production purported to occur during death and cremation and culminate in narratives of reincarnation. Like the hagiographical beginnings of Thai saints (Taylor 1997: 291), these stories are circulated among disciples and devotees before being represented in a formalized biographical tradition.[1] This chapter explores the fashioning of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's biographical process, detailing the role of death and posterior lives in a life-story that ends not with the passing of the subject but which continues with his successive rebirth. It attends to tales told about this lama's death, relics and reincarnation, and their textualization in the Tibetan convention of hagiography, or *namtar*. It then elucidates the motivational impetus of these accounts on the religious lives of followers and, in doing so, extends the biographical process in and through devotional practice.

Discussing the lama's death

In 2004–6, during 18 months of fieldwork in the small crossroads village of Ghoom in India's Darjeeling Hills, I lived next door to the Sakya Guru Monastery. Locally known as Sakya *gompa* (*dgon pa*) and the only monastery in the Sakya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism in the region, it housed around 130 monks, many of whom were young novices from the Darjeeling area and Nepal. A small number of senior monks were refugees who had escaped from Tibet after 1959. Members of the local community informed me that this monastery had operated under a remarkable lama who performed the miraculous feat of producing relics at the time of his death. This lama, Khenchen Sangay Tenzin, a learned scholar, experienced meditator and esteemed monastic abbot, passed away in

1990 and his reincarnation was recognized and formally enthroned in 1997. The supranormal activities said to occur at the time of his death were central themes in the biographical narratives about him that circulated in the local vicinity before being inscribed in text.

Tibetan Buddhist bodily relics, like the relics of Theravada Buddhism (Tambiah 1984, 1985; Taylor 1993, 1997), are often viewed as signs of spiritual mastery that emerge at the time of death. Indeed, particular types of bodily relic are categorized within early tantras as indicative of a saintly death. These classifications became central in the doctrinally recognized 'signs' for the verification of saintly death, including images etched onto bones and body parts found in cremated remains; pearl-like crystalline spheres known as *ringsel* (*ring bsrel*) and *dung* (*gdung*), which again usually appear in the ashes of Buddhist spiritual masters; lights from or around the corpse; mysterious sounds surrounding the corpse; earth tremors and atmospheric phenomena (Germano 2004: 61; Martin 1994: 281–2).[2] The post-mortem marks of saintliness documented in scripture filter down from the religious hierarchy to shape the terminology and everyday discourse of monastic and lay Buddhists. In Darjeeling, the stories that circulated about Khenchen Sangay Tenzin were often flavoured by a remembrance of his miraculous production of icons etched onto bone and his manifestation of 'pearls' from bones. These latter bone relics are etymologically understood as 'held/proliferating (*bsrel*) for a long time (*ring*)' (Germano 2004: 54); '"kept for a long time", hence, "cherished"' (Martin 1994: 274).

Indicative of the agency ascribed to these relics, their multiplication, which is known as *peldung* (*'phel gdung*), refers to the proliferation of *ringsel* over time if revered by their holder (Allione 1984: 220; Germano 2004: 55; Martin 1994: 277). According to scripture, distinctions are made between types of spheres with divergent bodily origins and corresponding differences in colour, size and strength.[3] The *ringsel* discussed in this chapter are of two types: those that formed on the remains (bones) of the lama's corpse and those which, some time after the death of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin, multiplied from *tsatsa* (*tsha tsha*), the iconographic figures moulded from clay combined with physical remains and produced by disciples. When I asked a monk in the monastery about the origin of the *ringsel* that emerged from the corpse and the *peldung* that multiplied from the *tsatsa*, he informed me that both had come from the bones of the lama and both were a result of his realization. Though I never saw the *peldung* from the *tsatsa*, the *ringsel* that manifested from the body were on display in the temple. Unlike the commoditization of religious relics from Thai Saints (Tambiah 1984, 1985; Taylor 1993, 1997), I never heard any reports of these *ringsel* entering the marketplace. Rather, it is common practice for *ringsel* to be divided up and distributed to the followers of a lama, with the remainder enclosed within a *chorten*.

Typically, if *ringsel* are going to appear, they manifest from the cremated body and are found by disciples in the ashes, but *ringsel* can also develop outside cremation contexts; forming from the unburnt deceased body, the skin or hair of living persons, *tsatsa*, *chortens* and other images (Martin 1994: 285). In the particular case of another local lama, whose death process is detailed in Chapter 5,

disciples reported what they found to be an extraordinary incident of *ringsel* falling from the sky.

With the passage of time spent in one place, I began to document the many tales about Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's signs of saintly death. His purported bodily transmogrification involved the transformation of his bones into the shape of deities and *ringsel*. Other marks of mastery included his ability to remain in the post-death state of meditation of *thugdam* (*thugs dam* Skt. *samadhi*), not only without putrefaction but with his body retaining warmth and producing a floral scent; his manifestation as rainbows and the conscious, wilful incarnation into another physical form. Narrated stories of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's posterior appearances signalled his mastery over the process of death and, in turn, augmented the devotion of his followers. Further, these activities themselves created new possibilities for interacting with the lama beyond the limits of a singular life.

We will see, however, that faith in the lama is not shaped by culturally definitive 'signs of saintly death' alone. As Gupta (1992: 189) notes in relation to Indian narratives of reincarnation, 'the circulation of these stories itself depends on (and creates) an acknowledgment of both their possibility and authenticity'. Veneration of the lama was formulated through the recollection and remembrance of these signs. Narratives of his death functioned as mnemonic devices in a biographical process that transported the lama from the past and memorialized him in the present. The following *re-presentations* then are legendary tales, which, over time, became increasingly sedimented in the minds and memories of followers until they were eventually documented in *namtar*.

Revealing rainbows, resisting rigor mortis, transmogrifying bones

> A week after Khenchen Sangay Tenzin died his body was still warm and when he was cremated his bones transformed into the shape of deities. It is after death that we can truly know a lama and their ability. Chatral Rinpoche,[4] a very high lama and a good meditator, ordered that the monastery not tell the public that he had died. We were instructed to say he was sick but then after three or four days the weather changed. There were rainbows in the sky like flowers and people began to know. People were crying and they wanted to come in and see him. They wanted to see his body, to be with him. People were saying that something is happening in Darjeeling, a Rinpoche has died. He was showing himself not just to the monks here but to the whole of Darjeeling. Everyone could see it in the sky. They felt these blessings from Rinpoche.

In conveying the saintly status of the former *khenpo* (*mkhan po*) or abbot, Tashi, a monastic follower of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin, recounted memories of the Rinpoche's passing that encapsulated cultural signs of spiritual mastery. Seated behind a desk in the monastery office and drinking from a large mug of heavy butter tea, he emphasized that the spiritual realization of the lama is synonymous

with a display of their accomplishments at the time of their death. These accomplishments were narrated as an ability to impede the physical flaccidity ordinarily preceding rigor mortis, retain a meditative state, suspend the processes of decomposition, retain warmth in the body, produce a pleasant scent, transmogrify bones into images of Buddhist deities and manifest rainbows. Lamas reveal their power when they are in-between bodies; at these junctures their mind-stream is particularly amenable to affecting and directing the processes of the body and the world at large. As Khenchen Sangay Tenzin was no longer confined to a singular bodily form, he could manifest through other appearances or markers of saintly death and his followers embraced these as both an indication and outcome of an elevated spiritual status. Monitoring the post-death meditation state, another leading Buddhist teacher directed the monks not to tell the public that Khenchen Sangay Tenzin had died because they, eager to pay their last respects, might interfere with the meditation or bring about its premature cessation. According to Tibetan convention, disrupting the body after death through noisy sounds or emotional laments can prove detrimental to the mind-stream of the deceased (Childs 2004: 146; Desjarlais 2003: 278–9). Nonetheless, communication persisted between the lama and his followers: when the weather began to change and rainbows appeared in the sky 'like flowers', the local community in Darjeeling knew that a lama was dying.

Rainbows and other atmospheric phenomena are culturally understood as signs of religious importance in Tibetan cosmology. In Darjeeling, their appearance sometimes related to signs of saintly death, while at other times they accompanied the worldly travels of a rinpoche: his arrival or departure from one region or another. Rainbows were also interpreted as confirmations of effective religious ritual or auspicious symbols that could affirm various decisions or questions for the observer. In Tashi's story, when followers saw the rainbows in the sky, they 'felt blessings' from Khenchen Sangay Tenzin. Blessings or *jinlab* were palpable manifestations of the lama's presence. 'Received by way of giving' is, according to Martin (1994: 274), a philologically correct meaning of the Tibetan term *jinlab*, a reciprocal relatedness where venerated beings bestow gifts 'intended to assist in the development of those same qualities in the receiving individual', and reception is dependent upon the faith of the follower and the extent of the lama's spiritual mastery. In this context, objects can be imbued with the qualities of people, and people, being interdependent with the world, can reasonably, even inevitably, make anthropomorphic correspondences with atmospheric phenomena and intersubjectively entwine with one another (cf. Jackson 1998: 6–7).

Ringsel

> Khenchen Sangay Tenzin was a great master who stayed in *thugdam* for nine days with his body erect in meditation posture, producing warmth and a sweet scent like flowers. And there were many coloured lights in the sky appearing as flowers. Then when he was cremated there was a lot of *ringsel* found in the ashes and some bones remained in the shape of Guru Rinpoche

> (*gu ru rin po che* Skt. Padmasambhava).[5] From other bones in the funeral pyre we made small chorten shape statues called *tsatsa* and we distributed them to the monks. Afterwards more *ringsel* manifested from the top of one of these *tsatsa*. This can happen in the case of great masters.

The supranormal phenomena associated with the lama's death are again recounted, however this narrator was a monk who did not reside in the monastery at the occasion of the lama's passing. The ability to die and incarnate consciously, retain warmth in the body, delay decomposition, produce rainbows or effect notable atmospheric phenomenon and transmogrify bones into the form of deities, which reiterate the sentiments of Tashi, are also a conviction expressed in an entire body of religious literature. However, in this account the manifestation of *ringsel* becomes the significant feature of the lama's spiritual mastery.

The production of *ringsel* commonly featured in narratives about Khenchen Sangay Tenzin. Woven into the fabric of monastic discourse, these stories constituted a shared, collective representation, often reproduced by those who were not present to witness the activities themselves. Monks who did not observe the events reported tales of his *ringsel* formation as if they were present at the time. Where Taylor encountered seemingly first-hand knowledge that turned out to be recitations of authoritative accounts remembered from a saint's biography (1997: 296), I found that Tibetan monks who had not read biographical material on Khenchen Sangay Tenzin recalled oral versions of his life-story as though they were direct witnesses. Thus, it was commonly narrated that 1 week after the cremation monks from the monastery rummaged through the funeral pyre in a successful search for *ringsel*.

The transmogrification of aspects of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's corpse into *ringsel* and some of his bones into iconic deities acquired great significance. As objects of worship, they elevated the status of the lama, not only as a result of their manifestation but also through the circulation of narratives about them. Memory of the event was not confined to those who directly experienced it; memorialization was shaped over time through the proliferation of stories among others.

Devotees in paying homage to the relics reconfigured interpersonal relationships that endure through time. Anthropomorphism of these objects became apparent through their ability to do the same things the lived lama could do: transmitting blessings to followers and replicating themselves over time. These material forms, with their ability to multiply, represent and substitute the lama, continued his life-story beyond his physical demise.

Contemporary theorists have attempted to mediate the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity in their discussions of relics. As Strong (2004: 5) points out, from Tambiah's (1984) 'indexical symbols', to Martin's (1994) 'transmitters' of blessings, Trainor's (1997) 'functional equivalence', Germano's (2004) 'indices of absence' and Strong's own 'continuation of biographical process', bodily relics are interpreted as more than remnants of the deceased. In the context of Tibetan Buddhism, the relics of incarnated lamas, 'inscribed with their spiritual practice'

(Mills 2003: 267), are continuing entities or manifestations of *nirmanakaya*, the physical body of a Buddha (Bentor 1996) and not inert substances left over from a former body. Relics become a *mode of presence*, which along with other posthumous materializations, are inextricably allied with the biographical process of Tibetan masters. Celebrated and represented in oral and textual form, the venerated relics themselves become a continuation of the lama's life-story (Strong 2004) in much the same way as the incarnation embodies another temporal stage of a larger life history (Gupta 2002).

Minds beyond death

Dorje, another monk in the Sakya *gompa*, shared the following description of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's passing as we walked toward the residence of an adept practitioner who was nearing his own death, an event we will look upon in the following chapter. His narration shares many features with the two aforementioned accounts. Recounting the proliferation of *ringsel* and the successive physical incarnation of the lama, he further accentuates the dialectic of presence and absence by introducing Buddhist notions of minds beyond death.[6]

> When he died I was very small, it was more than 14 years ago. I remember on the day when we burnt his body many people came. The body was burnt right out the front of the temple. I remember it was incredible that day. We all thought it was very amazing. The weather was really something special and in the sky the clouds were like flowers. Falling they were, like flowers falling in the sky. And there were rainbows, rainbows all over the sky in circles. You would see them there, then they would move there, then there. We saw this and that's why we felt, we believe and we know that our Khenpo was really powerful. After he was cremated we searched in the ashes and there was so much *ringsel*. Some of it is with the *chorten* in the temple. You can see it in there. When we found it, it was white and shiny, like pearls, like little pearls. They are very strong; you cannot break them. This *ringsel* is very precious. When we found the *ringsel* we knew our abbot to be a master…
>
> A lama shows their power when they die. When Khenchen Sangay Tenzin died his mind did not leave. A little tiny part of his mind stayed in his body. We call it *sheba* (*shes pa*).[7] His sheba stayed in him. It stayed in his body for nine days. Usually when a person dies their mind leaves the body but he kept his mind in his body. Because he kept his mind in his body there was some warmth on his skin. For days his body was like this, warm. This is a sign of him being a master. This is actually meditation, very deep meditation. When he was in this meditation Chatral Rinpoche would come to see him. Chatral Rinpoche and him would speak together, they would talk.

Wanting further clarification on their method of communication, I asked if they talked with words.

> No, no words, not words. Without speaking they talk through meditation. There are many people who have stayed in this state after their death. They have kept some of their mind in their body for 3 days, 1 week, 1 month, even years. I have heard of the body of a man, one monk being found somewhere around the border of Tibet and Nepal. The man had been dead for 100 years but his body hadn't decayed. He kept some part of this *sheba* inside.

When I asked what was happening during his meditation Dorje reiterated the words of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama:

> When His Holiness the Dalai Lama taught in Darjeeling I remember him saying that there are many minds. We actually have many, many minds. He said we know this to be true because we can see that when an animal is slaughtered but before it is completely dead it moves around. The body shakes a bit. It is not dead straight away. Humans too – we do not die straight away. One mind leaves, then another mind leaves. It is like this. But the masters of tantra keep some of their mind inside their body. They can do this.

We walk for a while in silence before he recalled:

> In the monastery we did not notice it. But some of the lay-people in Darjeeling saw the sky become rainbows like flowers again. They say the sky was the same as when we cremated Khenchen Sangay Tenzin. It was the same time that he was coming back. They saw the sky, the flowers, the rainbows and thought he was being reborn.

In the process of physical death, according to Dorje's narrative, Khenchen Sangay Tenzin maintained a state of *thugdam* over 9 days, keeping a mind or part of his mind (*sheba*) in his body in a conscious state. According to the Buddhist worldview, all sentient beings possess the quality of awareness, but unless the being abandons habitual cognitive and sensory modes of being in the world their awareness is unrecognized when alive, at the time of death and through the journey of successive rebirths. Mind is not presented as monadic in character. Rather it is manifold, a dynamic process of which *sheba* or consciousness is part. In Tibetan medical and religious discourse there are eight *sheba*: the five sensory consciousnesses, mental consciousness, afflictive consciousness and ground consciousness (Tai Situpa 2005: 229–30).[8] At the time of death, the *sheba* dissolve in stages, expressing the loss of each sense faculty in the gradual termination of human life that Dorje referred to in the teaching of the Dalai Lama. In this manner, the dying body is something out of our control. The ability to consciously manage the process of death is considered unlikely for the novice Buddhist; however, it is in direct contrast to the ordinary dissolution of the human body that the spiritual master is able to mentally exert power over the process of death and choose the circumstances of his next birth. In Dorje's account, the rainbows that dominated the sky at the time of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's passing re-appeared and were

witnessed by some of his faithful devotees as a sign of his rebirth. These visual displays of altered atmospheric phenomena were interpreted as concurrent with the lama and they signified his reincarnation, further extending a presence beyond death.

In the above accounts, the transmogrifications of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin were evocative of the *signs of saintly death* represented in scripture. 'Signs' included the appearance of images produced in bones remaining in the funeral pyre, the formation of crystalline spheres, as well as the production of altered atmospheric conditions in the form of rainbows, three of the major classifications Martin (1994: 281–2) described in his citation of the *Blazing Remains* tantra. These signs of saintliness, to some extent, enter everyday discourse alongside other indicators of spiritual mastery, including the abbot's ability to remain in a state of meditation with no bodily decomposition and the appearance and scent of flowers around the body at the time of death and rebirth. The hagiography of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin also documents that coloured conch shells and his unburnt skull were discovered in the funeral pyre. The search for signs in and around the bodies of eminent lamas, which is common practice among Tibetans, reflects a shared, collective representation of saintly death. These understandings of a lama's body extend biographies into the future by the stories of saintly death that continue to be told and the posterior embodiments that inspire them.

Buddhist scholars have observed that the more saintly religious adepts appear to be, the more powers followers attribute to them (Tambiah 1984), and that this ability extends beyond death through the celebration of relics. As objects, they personify and are shaped by the life from where they came, active materials that exemplify a cultural belief where 'seemingly inert, "dead" substances can take on life, especially in response to devotion directed their way' (Martin 1994: 277). Thus, relics are not only residual vestiges of a deceased saint. For his devotees, Khenchen Sangay Tenzin is not seen as a cohesive separate entity confined to one singular body and lifespan. Relics of his previous body are an extension of his being, the incarnated form is a continuation of his human lineage and the atmospheric conditions of the phenomenal world are also interpreted as his reflection. Khenchen Sangay Tenzin is not conceived as wholly separate from objects that symbolize him: his image bears more than pictorial representation, his relics are more than symbolic and his reincarnation is more than substitutionally or functionally equivalent. These forms are embodiments of the lama and are not to be distinguished from the sanctified form from which they came. Phenomenologically speaking, remnants of physical form continually embody the deceased's presence.

The reincarnated lama

Reincarnation is arguably the most lively extension of the lama's lifecourse. Faith in the new incarnated form is affirmed in devotees' remembrance of his retrospective life and sustained by the circulation of narratives that emphasize powers revealed at the time of death and of being reborn. It is these stories of supranormal

events (Bärlocher 1982; Ray 1986: 42) that are reported to religious authorities and followed by search parties who set out to find the lama's reappearance (Mills 2003: 268). The recognition or recruitment of an incarnate lama often follows the appearance of signs that suggest the place and conditions of the new birth to his devotees. These might include a dream occurring to a lama's follower, a relation to the deceased or a parent of the new incarnate; the child's ability to recite religious texts; an affinity for religious practice or objects; or recognition of previously owned ritual items used in their former life or people known in previous lives (Aziz 1976: 349). I was told that Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's followers, after witnessing the rainbows that surrounded the monastery, made fervent requests to Sakya Trizin, the head of the Sakya lineage, to find the reincarnation of their spiritual leader. Then, together with the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Sakya Trizin confirmed his rebirth in a 2-year-old boy, who was later enthroned at the monastery in Darjeeling and given the name Tenzin Kunga Gyaltsen Rinpoche. The method for the verification of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin entailed the designation of names of likely candidates, children with particular religious attributes, onto pieces of paper contained in a vessel and placed before a shrine over a week of prayer.[9] The ritual, which took place in the room of the late abbot, was presided over by monks from his monastery. Upon notification of the name that was drawn from the vessel both the Dalai Lama and Sakya Trizin confirmed the selection through their own divinatory insight and the official recognition and enthronement ceremonies were able to proceed.

Devotees' faith in the incarnation of a lama is affirmed in the narratives that emphasize their ability as they proceed from one body to the next. The memory of the incarnate lama is assumed to extend back to their previous lives; the abilities or predispositions from one life recur in the next. In a conversation with one of Tenzin Kunga Gyaltsen Rinpoche's teachers I was informed that the young incarnation, who at the time was 14 years old, was exceptionally intelligent because of the extent of his progress in *chö* (*chos* Skt. *dharma*), the Buddhist teachings, during his former life. His teacher explained that we all have *bachag* (*bag chags*), imprints from our previous lives, but the majority of us do not understand. The situation is different for an incarnate lama, whose present physical existence is a conscious continuation of prior lives. He explained:

> Rinpoche is very intelligent. In his former life he was a great lama, very scholarly and powerful; he was in meditation for nine days after passing away. Because he was an exceptional practitioner, scholar and philosopher it is not difficult for Rinpoche to learn. When he is taught something new he understands very quickly and I don't mean just superficial knowledge but real sophisticated understanding. Khenchen Sangay Tenzin taught the Dalai Lama many times; his wisdom was extraordinary. When Rinpoche finishes his philosophy studies here he will return to [his] Sakya monastery in the role of abbot. He is an incarnation of a very high-lama, very special.

In this testimony to an intelligence that is attributed simultaneously to former and current incarnations, the young Rinpoche is seen as an ongoing manifestation of his former life. In the case of Tenzin Kunga Gyalten, his karmic imprints included a propensity toward the religious teachings, however it is not uncommon for physical imprints, such as marks on the body, moles or birthmarks, to be taken as a form of evidence that links the current incarnation to their former body (Mills 2003: 286). In the early stages of my fieldwork I was introduced to a young man who had a large birthmark on his forearm. He informed me that this mark was evidence of his former life in Tibet. Having consulted a local lama during his childhood, his family discovered that it was an imprint of an injury the boy had received in a previous existence. The scars of another body were inscribed onto the young man's current physical form.

Within the confines of the young *tulku*'s gruelling daily schedule, a conversation I had with him about his studies revealed some biographical information. When he said, 'I have always studied philosophy. I studied it way back in the past. I study it in the present and will continue to study philosophy into the future', I perceived his use of tense as incorporating a duration limited to his apparent 14-year-old lifespan and progressing into a 'future' defined by the years lived in a single body. However, I am aware that a faithful follower of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin would in all likelihood perceive the words of the young reincarnation differently. The life of the spiritually realized lama does not flow in a singular and limited direction. The continuity of the lama across physical forms challenges perceptions of a singular body and linear lifespan; childhood can follow the lifecourse of a predecessor and the transformative process of rebirth can shape a social reality where intellectual growth is conceived in terms of enduring tendencies from previous lives.

Clearly, however, the situational nature of the cultural setting, with its strict training regimes, cannot be overlooked. The ordinary monk in the Tibetan system will undergo a process of extensive educational training (Miller 1958), but for the incarnate lama these training practices are considerably more demanding (Logan 2004; Ray 1986: 51). In the monastery I noticed that Rinpoche's fluency in the English language far exceeded that of his peers. Other monks affirmed that his knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and Tibetan language was better than their own and this was attributed to the trainings undertaken in his former life. This common portrait of young incarnations with exceptional intelligence, embodied and carried over from the history of previous lives, exists alongside extensive instruction, instilling in them the knowledge of their predecessors. In a rigorous routine of educational discipline and corporal punishment, scholarly pursuits begin before sunrise and end late at night. Scriptures are memorized both before and after formal classes that run through the day. Rinpoche's hours were longer than those of the other monks. He was subjected to more examinations, had the added influence of private tuition and he had fewer opportunities to engage in recreational activities like walking through the village, visiting a family house to watch television or converse about non-Buddhist things. Regulated by the monastic institution, the young incarnate's life is shaped into a religious pedagogical form.

Religious biography

Biographical extensions of the lama through life-story are not limited to the oral accounts of followers or the materializations that form the content of their narrative. The stories of Tibetan Buddhist exemplars take textual hold in *namtar*, a tradition that links spiritual masters 'in the chain of enlightened beings going back to the Buddha himself' and 'legitimate(s) lineages of spiritual masters living in times closer to our own' (Robinson 1996: 67). In a noted paradox of the Buddhist hagiographical genre, these stories construct the life-stories of accomplished practitioners, who, according to their disciples, overcame the very limitations of singular temporal existence associated with the ordinary usage of the term 'life' (Gyatso 1998; cf. Roesler 2010: 4–5).

For the monastic community, the *namtar* is a testament of the lama's power, of his capacity to transcend limitations, even death. It is a re-presentation that follows conventional semantic guidelines, mapping the Buddhist path of spiritual accomplishments and liberation (Williams and Tribe 2000: 21–30), on the one hand, and on the other, it reveals the pragmatic objectives of its composers (Tambiah 1984: 132; Taylor 1997). In the interpersonal context of a biography's production, everyday human traits, the idiosyncrasies of personality, the effects of aging and the natural, uncontrollable process of dying are airbrushed and erased so that the final product communicates only those aspects of the lama's life which mark him out as an exemplary being (Reynolds and Capps 1976: 4–5).

The hagiography of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin traces his years of Buddhist training: it lists the various texts studied, exams performed, ritual initiations received and bestowed, retreats undertaken, his monastic positions including abbot and teacher, his publications and teachings, commissioned iconography and scriptures and exalted disciples. But according to the text, it was the final deed of his life that 'transcended' all others. So I turn here to the final chapter of this life-story to present the hagiographical account of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's death and reincarnation and to then elaborate on the Tibetan body concepts that characterize the death of lamas, which, in their narration, are intended to affect the religious lives of followers.

At the age of 87, according to the biography, Khenchen Sangay Tenzin became indifferent to mundane activities and focused only on his own religious practice. The end of his life is portrayed as a purposeful event:

> He passed away for his disciples to witness the impermanent nature of worldly existence and as an inspiration to them to practice the dharma. For a period of nine days which lasted until November 19 (the 2nd day of the 10th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar), he remained in a state of profound meditation. Though his pulse had stopped, his body did not decompose and his mind remained concentrated . . .
>
> . . . After the 9-day period, at nine o'clock in the morning, Venerable Khenchen Sangay Tenzin freed himself from his meditative state, passing the fluids of Bodhichitta with a heavier quantity of white than red.

> During this event, rainbows were seen above the monastery and both the outside and inside of his room was filled with the perfume of flowers.
>
> (Jampa Tenzin *et al*. 2005: 33)

Since the body is critical to the tantric Buddhist practices undertaken at the time of death, it is appropriate here to provide something of an emic understanding of Tibetan Buddhist embodiment. In so doing, it is necessary to first point out that Tibetan understandings of mind, body and their interconnections are multifarious. Different lineages and their corresponding scriptural bases posit different views and practices that are geared towards an understanding the role of mind and body in the process of death and these ideas do not often filter down to the practising laity in any coherent, organized way. Nonetheless, in a general sense it can be said that the Tibetan Buddhist tantras communicate a course, subtle and very subtle body and mind (Lati Rinbochay and Hopkins 1979: 31). Though mind and body are at some level separate, connections between mind and body are expressed, articulated and authenticated in scholarly textual tantric tradition, with elaborate physiological understandings forming the basis of an extensive Tibetan medical system. The anatomy of the body in Vajrayana Buddhism has its origins in the cultured body of the Hindu tantras. It is composed of 72,000 'subtle channels' or *tsa* (*rtsa*, Skt. *nadi*), a series of 'centres' or *korlo* (*'khor lo*, Skt. *chakra*) and pervasive bodily 'winds' or *lung* (*rlung,* Skt. *prana*). While most Tibetans do not have sophisticated understandings of Vajrayana Buddhist body concepts, they have a general understanding that their mind or *sem* (*sems*) rides on the currents of energy or winds (*lung*). The *sem* is often associated with the heart. It is characterized as having emotive and motivational qualities as well as cognitive ones (Samuel 1989: 202) and people will often signal towards their chest when discussing it (Desjarlais 2003: 56). The *sem* is believed to leave the body at the time of death, dreaming, and to some extent, daydreaming; when one reminisces about another person or place, the *sem* will travel there (Desjarlais 2003: 56). Thus, the mind can be scattered and this characteristic, in death as in life, can bring suffering as the person travels in a dreamlike state, caught in the cycle of rebirths, inhabiting body after body without memory of the past, cognition of the future or consciousness in the moment.

Within this physiology, however, alterations in states of consciousness can be experienced. As the practitioner manipulates the subtle body or bodies through tantric practice, they can purify and transform the *sem*. By meditating on one's lama or a chosen deity, the meditator can evoke their qualities, awaken the *sem* and '"make" their body like the buddha's' (Desjarlais 2003: 98). At this juncture, the awakened *sem* materializes as *bodhicitta*. *Bodhicitta* is commonly referred to as an altruistic intent, the cause that propels the adept to return to worldly existence and forsake their own liberation in order to help others. In its physical appearance it takes the form of red and white generative fluids, semen or *tigle* (*thig le*) and menstrual blood or *krag* (*khrag*). These substances are situated within an extensive series of interlaying channels, a multiplicity of physical strata ranging in degrees of subtlety, which can move between this and other spatio-temporal dimensions

(Tucci 1980: 98).[10] The fluids can be consciously willed by the practitioner to move along the two major channels on either side of a central channel located along the spinal column. 'Thus', as Samuel writes, '"male" and "female" here are two modalities that are present in all individuals, whether biologically male or female' (1989: 206) and, citing Bharati (1965), this male–female symbolism can have associations with compassion and wisdom (Samuel 1989: 206). In advanced meditation practice, the practitioner becomes aware of the body's function in relation to these channels and the seminal fluids that they contain:

> one manifests the components of conception itself, the white and red indestructible quintessential essences at the heart having been inherited from one's parents at conception. This experience is also referred to as an attainment of the 'basic' Reality Body, which may then be transformed into a Buddha's Reality Body (*chos sku*, Skt. *dharmakaya*). It is this process of death that advanced contemplatives attempt to recreate in meditation.
>
> (Garrett 2008: 113–14)

It is the ability to manipulate these subtle essences through meditation that enables the practitioner to practise for and gain control over the process of death (Thurman 1994: 38). A monk in the monastery explained the process:

> The body contains hundreds of thousands of veins. In tantra we say that everything outside the body is inside the body. Like this, for example if I hold this mug here there is a shadow. Outside we have sun, moon. Sun is red and moon is white and these are inside. There are two large veins through the whole body. They are red and white because they are the sun and moon. They are also female and male. It is like this with everything – what is outside is also inside. There are practices in tantric Buddhism that use these veins in the body and the winds that pass through them and the essences they hold. From five points in the body – the head, throat, heart, navel and reproductive centres there are five mandalas. Then from these mandalas there are hundreds of thousands of veins inside the body. We say there is *lung* and *namshe* or *sem*, this is wind and mind. We say that *lung* is like a horse and *sem* is like a blind rider because our minds move everywhere, all over the place without any control. If at the time of death the wind and the *sem* move together, there is no control. But if a person is a good practitioner they learn to control the wind, they direct it. This requires a lot of practice, maybe lifetimes. Khenchen Sangay Tenzin was not a blind rider. Having purified the veins that run through the body he was able to bring his mind into the central channel. The evidence of this can be seen through the bodhicitta that left his body through his nose.

The practitioner, through tantric techniques applied over the course of lifetimes, asserts an existential mastery over corresponding aspects of the mind and body. Realized beings do not die in the ordinary, terminal sense; their mind-stream, a

mental continuum or flow of consciousness, continues through the process of death, in between bodies and rebirth.

> When a practitioner has completed the stages of contemplative practice where death and the intermediate state are 'purified', the practitioner begins the stage of purifying birth, imagining him- or herself undergoing the process of conception and gestation as a deity. The copulating parents-to-be are imagined as a deity couple in union, the deity couple understood to represent compassion and wisdom. The practitioner then imagines entering the parents' reproductive substances and traveling with them into the womb.
>
> (Garrett 2008: 114)

Though all composite phenomena are impermanent and beings die and are reborn, it is only the preeminent spiritual adept who is able to *consciously* pass from one body into another. As we have seen, this achievement is often accompanied by the external signs displayed by Khenchen Sangay Tenzin: the delayed deterioration of the body, the discharge of red and white fluids, the appearance of rainbows and the transmogrification of the body into relics.

The marker of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's moving from one state of existence into another is not the moment when his pulse stops; rather it is the point at which, by conscious choice, he ends his *thugdam*. This occurrence, which is marked by the exit of *bodhicitta* from the body, confirms the lama's status as a spiritually advanced practitioner. The flow of *bodhicitta* transpires in a physiology of various densities, a corporeal landscape of centres and channels where subtle bodies can become transformed.

Although Buddhist hagiographies do not customarily provide practical instruction or exegesis on the subtleties of the religious body, they are constructed so that they may educe a particular manner of recollection: the focus on the lama's supranormal attainments are intended to inspire religious interest in the reader and provide an impetus for spiritual practice in their own lives (Taylor 1997: 292–3). As stated in its foreword, the objective of the text is to:

> gain merit and blessings as well as to propagate the divine deeds of H. E. the late Khenchen Sangay Tenzin Rinpoche . . . it is our aspiration that this book will enhance spiritual enthusiasm among the readers.[11]
>
> (Jampa Tenzin *et al*. 2005)

It is anticipated that the power of the lama be transmitted through a textual medium. It is not only Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's physical remains that are marked with his divinity; the hagiographical record is also permeated with his religious practice. The spiritual mastery that he displayed during life is not confined to actions of the past, their documentation contributes to a selective yet enduring portrait of the lama.

The hagiographical representations of the lama, like his relics and reincarnation, transmit *jinlab* to a recipient audience and present the pedagogy of spiritual

awakening encapsulated in the Buddhist biographical process. The lama's life and his 'divine deeds' are re-presented as a model to be emulated, revered and incorporated through praxis. Although encouraged in text and Buddhist teachings, emulating the lives of spiritual masters is not common practice for the majority of Buddhists. Emulation is an ideal, one upon which devotion does not depend. Although most practitioners, monks and laity alike, are content enough to revere the miraculous achievements of a high-lama without following the blueprint of his biography, it is common practice for devotees to involve themselves bodily with the posterior lama through inter-engagements that generate *jinlab* and enable them (lama and devotee) to become intersubjectively aligned.

Bodies of devotional practice

Everyday practice can also educe the presence of the lama in the lived experience of his followers. Adding to the spectrum of memoirs already presented, devotional performance is an enacted form of remembrance, at once a mnemonic vehicle that evokes the lama in the present and an embodied extension of his biographical process. Presence of the lama, I argue, is not only embalmed in relics, reincarnation and biographical narrative; the follower herself, through devotional service to the monastery, becomes a receptacle in which the presence of the lama is infelt. Through ethnographic case studies, this section will first illustrate the daily rituals of three lay followers of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin, before exploring the lama's posthumous forms as physical inscriptions that become incorporated into the lived ritual experience of devotees. Specific locales of the lama's presence become fluid vehicles that travel along pathways imparting messages to the devoted.

The daily practice of two women

Upon arriving in the Sakya *gompa*, arrangements were made for me to live next door, in the side wing of a small home of two Tibetan widows (see Figure 2.3). The two women played an active role in the monastery, offering their services at any and every available opportunity. Not having borne children of their own, they happily accommodated me as their surrogate granddaughter for the duration of my stay. Most of my time was spent in the monastery but everyday subsistence activities took place in the home of these two women, to whom I referred as 'momo.la', the affectionate kinship term for 'grandmother'.[12]

With them I was witness to another side of Buddhist life – the everyday life and practice of non-literate female laity. Their daily rituals shared similarities with many other lay Tibetan practitioners in the area. Unable to read liturgies or engage in advanced practice, they often recited the mantras transmitted to them by Khenchen Sangay Tenzin. It was from him that they received *jinlab* during the ritual process of initiation (*wang*). In this series of rites Buddhist practitioners become 'empowered' as words pass from the mouth of the lama to the ears of the disciple in an exchange, a directed veneration and receipt of blessings. The

Figure 2.3 The two momo.las wearing *katags* and standing outside of the home they kindly shared with me. The photograph was taken after they received a *wang* from a visiting lama

qualities of divine beings are transmitted via the lama, who is conceived as inseparable from the deities themselves. By initially receiving the blessings of an intermediary lama and then continuing in the prescribed practice, the devotee

believes that she too can attain the qualities of the deity. Relationships with divine beings had thus been activated by Khenchen Sangay Tenzin in rituals that sanctioned the utterance of mantra and accompanying visualizations for the deity practices into which they had been initiated.

Although almost a decade and a half had passed since the lama's death, thoughts of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin infused their daily lives: when they recited mantras, circumambulated the monastery, made offerings of food, money or service, they thought of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin. Remembering the lama was the *sine qua non* of their practice, enabling a connection to the lama that they felt would be maintained not only in this life but in future lives as well. Each day, both the momo.la's prayed that the connection to the lama would continue from the present moment, during their death, through to their future lives.

In the mornings they would rise early and begin with prayers affirming their refuge in the Buddha, the teachings of the Buddha and the community of Buddhists. These prayers were followed by praises to different Buddhist deities. Each day they purified their shrine room, the largest room in the house, by lighting incense and circulating its smoke over the altars. Juniper and pine were then cast alight on the front porch under a banner of prayer flags.[13] As the sun cast its morning rays, grains and seeds were thrown out to the wild pigeons who sat atop the monastery roof awaiting their daily meal. Mantras continually poured from the lips of the women as they engaged in these activities; undulating sacred sounds descended the stairs linking their home to the monastery where they would each circumambulate the temple individually and on a twice-daily basis. As each woman turned the many prayer wheels that lined its exterior with her right hand, the left hand was free to circulate the well-worn beads of a their *trenga* (*'phreng ba*).[14] Standing at the temple doors after each circumambulation, with hands in a position of prayer, they surveyed the monks' daily rituals and the large statues of deities which loomed tall within.

In the afternoon, when the monks were not engaged in ritual, the women would enter the temple. Making three bodily prostrations towards the main altar they rose to circumambulate its interior, stopping periodically to bow their heads to images of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin and the golden memorial *chorten* adorned with sparkling jewels, enshrining relics of the previous abbot: his bones from the funeral pyre and the *ringsel* that manifested after his decease. With their heads pressed firm on its glass encasement they paused for a length of time before departing. Continuing in their devotional circuit, they circumambulated large prayer wheels in the monastery grounds, following pathways to the reception office before re-ascending the stairs, the passage between monastery and home.

Ritual performance was not confined to actions carried out inside the monastery. For the two momo.las, everyday subsistence activities such as cleaning the home, removing moss growth from the balcony, collecting water from monsoon rains, watering a colourful array of potted flowers on their terrace, cooking rice, making tea and boiling meat were performed with simultaneous mantra recitation. All was permeated with a sense of religious devotion.

Chanting, circumambulation, the preparation of food and other activities were offerings to the sources of refuge – the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – and their accumulated merit was distributed to other beings through prayers of dedication.[15] With the completion of a household task, they would sit to recite mantras using their *trenga* or handheld prayer wheels. A constant song echoed through the home infusing its rooms with the mantra of deities, initiated, sanctioned and sanctified by the lama, Khenchen Sangay Tenzin.

In addition to these daily rituals, the momo.las would offer their time to the monastery, assisting in matters as various as washing the robes of older lamas, cooking, serving food or pouring tea during public rituals. Both women were physically rewarded for their efforts with many bags of *tsog* (*tshogs*), blessed food that had been distributed by the monks after days of ritual activity, along with blessed threads to be worn around their wrists for protection from obstacles and malevolent forces. But their practices, which they offered through verbal praise to the sources of refuge and dedicated to the well-being and happiness of others, were meritorious actions valuable in themselves: acts of devotion conferred blessings on them from multidimensional realms. Realities of the Buddhas were brought nearer to them through a personal relationship with Khenchen Sangay Tenzin whose 'empowerments' pervaded their hearts and minds. This permeation, as I attempt to illustrate below, was experienced as a feeling of contentedness and happiness, a joy for having the experience of *chö* present in their lives.

One afternoon I was greeted by the oldest momo.la. 'Where are you going?' she would commonly ask. When I responded that I was on my way to the temple, she smiled broadly, telling me, 'Good, very good'. Taking her hand to the centre of her forehead she pressed hard, then pointed to the same region on my forehead, before extending both arms outwards, encompassing as much space as possible between them. She looked at me with penetrating eyes and smiled again. Moments passed before she caught sight of a barely clad young man. Suffering with psychological problems, he periodically broke into a fit of rage on the cobbled pavement below her home. Looking at him, her smile turned to a frown. She shook her head and spoke sadly:

> He has no *chö* so he is not well. If you have *chö* your mind is healthy and good will come but if you do not there will be problems. We have *chö* here so our mind is good; we do not fight or have problems. We are happy.

Momo.la stood back and placed her hands on her hips, surveying the village-scape with a humble grin, she repeated, 'Yes, we lucky, we are happy.'

Memories of the lama are not always construed through verbal or textual narrative. Memory can take the form of pathways, circumambulations, channels through monastery and home and the ways that people move and are recalled within them (cf. Empson 2007). These ritual practices are activities of remembering, through which the memory of the lama is held within the hearts and minds of devotees. As channels that facilitate interrelations with the lama, they transport

the blessings of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin, extending his biographical process into the present. His relics, images and current incarnation are integrated into the immediate sphere of bodily practice in habitual, repetitive ways. Khenchen Sangay Tenzin is not cast into history, non-responsive or inaccessible. In a practice that allows the coalescence of what we might consider to be quantitatively different times, the past and the present merge, enabling engagements that transcend specific locales in time and space.

Relationship across lives

Mo Sukey was another devoted practitioner of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin.[16] Famous in the Darjeeling area for her ability to foresee the future, she cast divinations with her *trenga* for the many people who regularly visited her, seeking advice on all manner of issues: with questions about their fertility, the probability of prosperity or the fate of their family and friends. Now deceased, at the time of my fieldwork she was in her early eighties, though she acquired her gift of foresight as a young girl. This ability turned into a profitable enterprise as Mo Sukey made more money than many other villagers, especially those in her age group. Not interested in the responsibilities of family life, she never bore children or married. Much like a monastic, her primary relationship was with *chö* and she had experienced a longstanding rapport with Khenchen Sangay Tenzin, a relationship that spanned two of his lives and that continued to provide her with the necessities needed for her own subsistence and religious practice. Mo Sukey's everyday activities of remembering the lama and reciting prayers and mantra enabled her, like the two women mentioned above, to evoke his presence through the passage of time.

Mo Sukey's residence was in view of my porch. Through the thick blanket of mist that sleeps all too comfortably in Ghoom, I would walk along the paths and open sewers that led to her home. Upon entering the dark and begrimed one-roomed residence, her patrons would carefully manoeuvre their way around missing floorboards, so as not to slip through the colossal cavities, where Mo Sukey urinated and where rodents ran rampant below. They would find the old woman perched on a small bed, wearing a tattered cardigan and an unkempt *chuba* (*phyu pa*), a Tibetan-style dress in which she could store her assortment of objects, including money, a handkerchief and numerous *trenga* (see Figure 2.4). There she coughed and spluttered into her surroundings, a tiny room amassed with recycled items – blackened newspapers, thermal flasks, plastic bags, tins and cardboard boxes – all damp with mould and darkened by the permeating fumes of the paraffin oil cooker, which also stained her walls, ceiling and rattling tuberculosis-affected lungs. Textured with a lacquered crust of rancid milk, the metal pan atop the cooker made the tea she drank and hospitably offered to guests. A tiny open window allowed light to strain its way through the dark interior of her home, bringing in a moist, grey, vaporous fog. Her radiant face and bright eyes shone against black holes protruding from her gums in place of teeth and old hands deeply creviced with grime.

Figure 2.4 Mo Sukey holding her *trenga*

My first visit to Mo Sukey was met by poor timing. She opened her door to clients each day but closed it at three in the afternoon so she could eat and then rest. It being near three o'clock I'd hardly arrived before it was time to leave. In an attempt to secure a second visit, and since her ailing legs made it difficult to shop for supplies, I asked if she needed anything from the bazaar in town. My offer of assistance was met with a stern rebuff as Mo Sukey condemned my outing, snapping: 'It's not enough to sleep near the monastery and spend the days wandering around (*cham cham*) if you want to learn about Buddhism!' I was told that the key to understanding Buddhism is to stay in one place and then compared to Mo Sukey herself, who recommended that I learn something from her, a woman who had spent nearly 40 years in one place, practising Buddhism and not 'talking to everyone and fluttering around everywhere'. Accompanying her words with large arm-movements, a gesture of flippantness, dismissive head shaking and a discourteous laugh, she followed up by telling me about a nun who stayed nearby, and was, unlike myself, a 'good practitioner who could read scriptures and speak fluent Tibetan', who 'never went *cham cham*, but stayed in her room'. I had been reprimanded, left stunned without anything else to say, silenced as she shook her head and rumbled: 'Now it is past three o' clock. I have no time to eat.' I had encroached on her mealtime and now I had to leave.

A few days later, I stopped in at Mo Sukey's to give her some cough medicine I had bought when I went '*cham cham*' to the bazaar with friends. The sky was uncharacteristically bright, so light guided me across the decrepit wooden floor leading to her room. Gazing out a tiny window to the monastery, she was sitting opposite her bed on the area that usually seated her visitors. It was just after eight o' clock in the morning, the same time that Dhungsay Rinpoche, a high-lama visiting the area, was set to depart for the Tibetan Refugee Centre in Darjeeling. Watching the Rinpoche and his entourage leave the monastery, she asked me if I knew where they were going. I explained what I had been told by the monastery's staff and informed her that he was going to the Refugee Centre. 'If I could walk I would go too', exclaimed Mo Sukey as she pointed at her ailing legs. Reminiscing, she continued: 'There was a day when I would visit all the lamas. I would go to all of the monasteries to make offerings in person. Now I am old and those days have passed.' I gave her the medicine and explained the methods of taking the syrup, chest cream and lozenges. She listened to what I said, then thanked me for the medicine, but not before again telling me that it is better to stay in one place and practise if I want to learn about Buddhism. 'You have a room up there next to the monastery, so stay there! That's how you learn about Buddhism.'

Mo Sukey had lived in her room for 38 years reciting prayers to Drolma (*sgrol ma* Skt. Tara), the female deity of compassion. One day when I asked her about this prayer, it rolled off her tongue as she recited it from heart. At that time, a monk from Sakya Monastery accompanied me to her home. He whispered the chant in unison, his voice an echo beside hers. Once they completed the prayer, the *Twenty-one Praises to Drolma*, Mo Sukey verbalized the mantra that is intended to invoke the deity's protection along with qualities of health, prosperity and long life. Afterwards she revealed the centrality of the lama in religious practice:

> It is very important to go to the monasteries and to receive *jinlab* from the lamas. The lamas give you refuge. Then by making offerings and receiving their *jinlab* you can practise.

Bright eyes illuminated a face creviced by its many years, as she looked up at a series of old framed images of deities. Among them there was a small photo; dampness had caused it to fade but I made it out as Khenchen Sangay Tenzin. She explained that he was her lama before telling me more about him:

> Before dying he said he would return; he would incarnate as soon as possible. I used to pray a lot for his incarnation. When I prayed I would say to Rinpoche, 'Please come, please come.' Then an old lama told me that Rinpoche had come. At that time I already knew because I had a dream that he had come. I had many dreams of his coming so I knew before the old lama. Rinpoche came to me and said he would come back quickly. This is how I knew.
>
> Now he is 14 years old and living in the monastic college in Rimbick. Before [in his previous life] he would tell me to never break my devotion to

> him. After he passed I made offerings to the *chorten* in the monastery containing his relics and made circumambulations on new and full moons. He used to tell me if you face any troubles or undergo any suffering pray to me and you will get well. Now I am sometimes ill but it is never very serious. I am looked after. I receive money and food from people in the area. One day someone gives me some food, another day someone else provides. It is enough for me. This is happening because of the *jinlab* from Rinpoche. The *jinlab* continues. Sometimes I get angry and will say some harsh words. Though the words are not nice they come only from the mouth and not my heart; my heart is clean. Many people go to see him [the present incarnation] and they want something from him. I don't want anything. I will die with only the clothes on my back. All money I offer to the monasteries. All time I offer in prayers and these prayers I dedicate to all sentient beings. I have no wish for anything because everything I need is provided and if I died Rinpoche would make prayers for me.

When I asked Mo Sukey whether she believed that Rinpoche remembered her from his previous life, she responded:

> Yes, he is a great lama. He returned quickly, only 2 or 3 years after his death. The incarnation is very nice, handsome and pure. Before when he lived here [in Ghoom] he would, if no one was around, he would say hello and I would take him biscuits. If his teacher was there he would not accept them saying 'oh, no, no', but if his teacher wasn't there he would take them and put them in his pockets. I used to go and see him every month but now he is away studying. Before I would send biscuits and milk to his room. Once he came here to meet me in my home. Then another time he was on his way here but his teacher suddenly called out for him from the monastery and so he returned. He says that I am his grandmother and his sponsor. He has sent presents to me from the monastery and he has brought food here before. Even when I told him not to come into my room because it is dirty he said it did not matter, that it was not important because it is the heart that should be clean.

Some moments passed before she added, 'I never ask for anything from him. I get everything I need.' I looked at the pile of fresh receipts that stood pinned to the wall, revealing the relatively large donations that she had recently made to various local monasteries. They were the only clean surfaces in the room. Cleanliness was a matter of religious purification and not something measured by bacteriological hygiene. With her clothing a-tatter, her minimal selection of food, mouldy crockery, even an altar void of colourful adornment and decoration, what mattered to Mo Sukey was her relationship to the dharma:

> I don't need money. When I receive it I never hold on to it. I offer it to the monasteries. I don't need new clothes. I don't need anything. Other people ask who is helping me and I tell them that I don't have any people helping

> me; everything comes from *chö*. I don't wear good clothes. I don't have any desire for good food, a big house or a car. Everything I have is for offering. We need to have a good heart; this is what is needed. We need just enough clothes to be warm and just enough food to not be hungry. We don't need rich foods or a lot of food, just enough to be content.

As we were leaving the monk from the monastery bowed down to take Mo Sukey's black hands within his own and on wishing her farewell placed 500 rupees at her side. When Mo Sukey began to lament the gesture he told her that they are the same. 'I receive money I don't need for myself. You receive money you don't spend on yourself. What is there to do other than offer to others?'

Devotional acts, animated objects and the living incarnation are mediums that enable continuing relations between the deceased lama and the faithful practitioner. Mo Sukey entrusted her life and the means of her subsistence to the lama, towards whom she directed all meritorious activities. This veneration was reciprocated in a mutual exchange effecting states of confidence, happiness or health. For each of the women, value was retained and gains were ensured through the dedication of accumulated merit to others in a local community service to the monastery that reflected and also recalled the presence of the lama in their everyday lives. Invoking the lama in the present, these women continued to enter into the ever-wider social networks of Tibetan Buddhist cosmology, linking them in and through new spatio-temporal localities to the various embodiments of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin. The *presence* of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin extended from his re-materializations, becoming memorialized in the minds and bodies of those who recalled him.

Western-centred understandings of time and memory are challenged by Tibetan social realities. Divisions between predecessors, contemporaries and successors (Schutz 1980 [1932]) become blurred as living devotees continually engage with predecessors made present in successive forms of relics and reincarnations and can possess knowledge of successors through dreams and intuitions. Relics and material inscriptions from the past (biographies, photos) trigger mnemonic processes and influence the present (Connerton 1989); in Tibetan contexts, these materials are also active agents in and of themselves.

In construing the nature of a 'social memory', Connerton (1989: 72–3) distinguishes between two forms of social practice: incorporation and inscription. Inscribing practices refer to the physical creation of devices (texts, video recordings, photographs, etc.) for storing information that can be retrieved and accessed long after the message has been communicated. In contrast, incorporating practices refer to those bodily activities such as gesture, expression, posture and movement that impart messages only during engagement in that particular physical task. For Tibetans, a collective memory of the lama is sustained through forms of remembrance such as reading hagiography, engagement with his posterior forms, or performed devotional praxis. Through each of these modalities, the devotee reaffirms their belief in and experience of the lama's extended presence. Material re-presentations of the lama are both inscribed onto the world in material

substance and are involved in intersubjective embodied praxis, where messages from the lama can be continually communicated to devotees via his re-embodied presence in media deemed to allow an interexperience of and with him.

Tibetan social realities pose a challenge to Connerton's (1989) concepts of incorporation and inscription. If an incorporating practice refers to a transmission that occurs only during the time that bodies are present to sustain that particular activity, and if inscription is limited to the spatial parameters of a fixed object in the world, what is the rationale for other spatio-temporal modalities? What happens when the vital energy of the lama (now deceased) can permeate things in the physical world or in the imaginations of his followers? Reminiscent of the Dreaming for the Warlpiri, time is spatialized insofar as events of the past are embodied in the terrain of the world and time is synchronous insofar as the past abides in the present (Jackson 1998: 139). The idea that the subject may no longer be present to engage in activity cannot adequately reflect Tibetan perspectives on the body and its position in time and space. The physical body of the lama is not seen as a cohesive and separate entity confined to one singular lifespan or bodily form. Moving beyond Western paradigms to incorporate other spatio-temporal modalities, Empson's (2007) work among the Buryat on the northeast Mongolian-Russian border explores how the deceased is kept '"alive" via a living person's body' (2007: 69) in intra-kin lay rebirth, which allows people to remember and maintain relationships with deceased family members. The previous life returns to the present, reborn in new bodies and existing in new spaces. Successive forms extend the biographies of individuals, negotiating boundaries of past and present, time and space, inscription and incorporation, reflecting 'the perennial possibility that human beings can move beyond their local or particular identifications through broadened horizons of intersubjective engagement' (Jackson 1998: 205).

Extended biography

The lama continues beyond death in new materializations, narratives about him migrate from local legend to textual inscription and he is memorialized in and through the lived ritual practice of lay devotees. Tibetan conceptions of death, relics and reincarnation articulate the expression and extension of a person and their social relationships in ways that traverse human, celestial and material worlds. In the course of this chapter, I have attempted to reflect a sense of Tibetan cosmology and praxis without reducing the distinctions of social life to materialist orientations. For Tibetans, being is not a finite experience. There is a belief in reincarnation, a series of lifetimes one after the other, which impact on other possibilities regarding cultural trajectories of the person and affect the way that histories are mapped along the course of lives. In the case of spiritual leaders, death is not an end as such; the stream of being is a conscious continuum linking different temporal and spatial modes of existence. The relationship between Khenchen Sangay Tenzin and his devotees is not subject to the historical limits of one lifespan; it endures through time and space through posthumous modes of presence.

Notes

1 It should be indicated here that there is a strong autobiographical tradition in Tibetan Buddhism and many religious figures have written their own *namtar*, or 'liberation story' (cf. Gyatso: 1998).
2 The Tibetan textual sources of Martin's discussions on the signs of saintly death, including the phenomenon of relics, are drawn from the Nyingma tantra, the *Sku-gdung 'Bar-ba* (*Blazing Remains*). Germano (2004: 61) cites Longchenpa's systemization of earlier tantras in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*.
3 Citing *Blazing Remains* Martin distinguishes between *dung* (*gdung*) crystalline spheres of different origins – white spheres the size of a pea develop from fat, blue-green and dark the size of a mustard seed or pea forms from bodily heat and appears from the interstices of the ribs, yellow and the size of a mustard seed forms in the blood and emerges on the top of the liver, red the size of mustard seeds forms from a combination of elements and comes from the kidneys, while blue spheres the size of a mustard seed form on the lungs from the essence of knowledge and occurs on the lungs (1994: 281–2). Martin notes that there are other classificatory systems of *gdung* that cite other origins and corresponding colours (1994: 282 n. 26). *Ringsel*, by contrast, are said to be similar to *dung* 'only smaller, the size of sesame seeds or dust and they may be destroyed by the elements' and their bodily origins can be 'the head, backbone or other joints, or from the skin and flesh' (Martin 1994: 282). In a later part of this chapter the crystalline spheres referred to as *ringsel* are said to be non-destructible too. This presents a contradiction to these textual descriptions.
4 Rinpoche, meaning 'precious one', is commonly used to refer to incarnate lamas.
5 Also known as Padmasambhava and often venerated as a 'Second Buddha' the yogi famous for 'taming' the local forces in Tibet, converting malevolent spirits into protectors of the Buddhist teachings.
6 It is important to note that personal accounts present individual views, which may well deviate from the many scriptural authorities regarding death.
7 As Tokarska-Bakir (2000: 73 n. 8) states, the 'Tibetan terminology for the mind/intellect/consciousness is a complicated one. "Mind" may be called *bLa*, *Yid*, *Sems* [sem], *rNam par shes pa* [sheba] etc.' In my field research participants frequently glossed the terms *sem*, *namshey* and *sheba* as 'mind'.
8 According to Tai Situpa (2005: 229–30), a regent of the Karma Kagyu lineage, the seventh consciousness or the afflicted consciousness refers to the deluded affliction of the 'I'. The eighth consciousness or ground consciousness is the basis of all the other consciousnesses.
9 The ritual appears reminiscent of the historical Golden Urn method for selecting lamas. Instated in the eighteenth century by the Qianlong emperor of China, the aim was to eliminate aristocratic candidates in the succession of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas (cf. Shakabpa 1967: 172).
10 On subtle body practices see: Beyer (1973: 127–43), Dzogchen Ponlop (2006: 134–9), Lati Rinbochay and Hopkins (1979), Samuel (1989: 197–210; 1993: 239–43), Tucci (1980: 106–9). In the context of Tibetan embryology and religious praxis see Garrett (2008).
11 No page number indicated in text.
12 'La' is the honorific suffix used at the end of a name, title or kinship term like grandmother (as in momo.la).
13 *Sang* (*bsang*) a smoke offering of scented herbs and woods is a common practice among monks and laity, ensuring protection and auspiciousness. See Samuel (1993: 183–6, 192); Tucci (1980: 199–201).
14 Prayer wheels are metal cylinder-shaped structures engraved with sacred syllables and used as devotional objects, often turned clockwise while the practitioner recites mantras. *Trengas* are rosaries of 108 beads.

15 Refuge in the Buddha, the fully enlightened teacher or perfect expression of enlightenment; the Dharma, the teachings or the path; and the Sangha, the spiritual community.
16 For a discussion on Mo Sukey's position as a *delog* (*'das log*) or somebody who has returned from the dead see Zivkovic (forthcoming).

3 The spiritual mastery (or spirit possession) of Gupha Rinpoche

This chapter is concerned with contested ideologies and practices played out between local laity and scholarly monks during the death of an idiosyncratic though widely recognized lama. Situated in the village of Rimbick in the Darjeeling Hills, the arena of contest incorporated a scholarly educational facility for monks with its resident rinpoche – the incarnation of the late Khenchen Sangay Tenzin – and the nearby hermitage of a reclusive and somewhat non-conventional yogi. Everyone in Rimbick and many in the wider Darjeeling region knew the old ascetic by the name of a geographic site that served as his dwelling; Gupha means 'cave' in Nepali. Having retreated into his rocky cavern for nearly 40 years, laypeople in the community considered him adept in mantra and often referred to him with the esteemed title of Rinpoche. My attempts to document his life-story initially seemed compromised not only by his sudden death or the seemingly inchoate tenor of his communication, but by the inconsistent narratives about him and his manner of dying that circulated through the village. On the one hand, he was admired as a rinpoche and renunciate by lay patrons who idolized him for having relinquished attachment to possessions and for his continuous efforts in religious practice. On the other, he was often condemned on account of his penchant for alcohol and frequent intoxication. He was also criticized as unqualified and self-indulgent by scholarly monks who questioned his knowledge about Buddhism and the authenticity of his ascetic lifestyle.

Where the previous chapter focused on the death of an elite monastic and his continuing life-story through biographical tradition, relics and an officially recognized reincarnation, this chapter attends to the decease of an unlettered lama whose return from the dead was not documented in text or collectively agreed upon by the local community. It explores how his death exposed divergent opinions in scholastic and lay tradition and between different Tibetan Buddhist lineages. The signs of a saintly death that circulated in the tales of his patrons served as the derisive claims to his purported realization among critics, who ascribed vitality of the corpse to malevolent forces.

This chapter is thus a reflection of the tensions and ambiguities that surrounded an anomalous character both in life and in the liminal period of being in-between bodies. The purported transmigration of Gupha from one body to another operates as a productive focus in an investigation into culturally embedded hierarchies

dividing textual and non-textual traditions. Socio-historic dispositions of inter-lineage debate (Jackson 1994; Martin 1994; Tokarska-Bakir 2000) are explored as a structural basis that has shaped the diversity of Tibetan Buddhism and functioned to reproduce and refashion an eclecticism of religious ideology and praxis in a contemporary milieu. The cleavages between the monastic community and the laity and between the various Buddhist schools themselves, have a contentious history in Tibetan Buddhism and its scholarly representations. This diversity of Buddhist traditions reflects a nuanced and complex situation that cannot be reduced to simple polemics of lay/monastic, philosophical/practical, or textual/non-textual (Cuevas 2008). In view of this multidimensional arena, this chapter is concerned with the interplay of distinct ideologies and multifaceted fields of praxis and how they are constructed, reproduced and contested within Tibetan Buddhist traditions.

It is important to mention from the outset that the teachings of the Buddha are generally classified into three systems: Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. The Tibetan Canon is comprised of the Kangyur (*bka''gyur*), which is considered to be the teachings of the Buddha and the Tengyur (*bstan 'gyur*), consisting of commentaries on these teachings by authoritative scholars. They contain sutras corresponding to those of the Pali Canon of the Theravada, sutras of the Mahayana and later the Vajrayana tantras. The earliest tantras were translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan between the seventh and eleventh centuries and these later bodies of knowledge were transmitted first to non-human audiences then revealed to humans at a time appropriate for their reception. Thus, as Samuel writes:

> For the Tibetans, the term 'Buddha' or *sanggyé* referred less to a historical personage who lived in north India at a specific time than to a universal principle or possibility of human existence, the Dharmakāya or *ch'öku*, which could manifest appropriately anywhere in time and space.
>
> (Samuel 1993: 372)

The tantric texts are usually a liturgical means of invoking deities. It is not the texts that are of primary significance, but rather the experience 'ideally brought about when the invocation succeeds' (Samuel 1993: 19). These deities are not conceived as being wholly separate from the meditator, they correspond to particular qualities that exist (though often in latent form) in all human beings. Similarly, the lama, as a mediator between the realms of the deities and the everyday life of ordinary human beings, is also to be seen as abiding within the disciple. The purpose of practice is to realize the qualities of these beings (lamas and deities) as potentialities that can be realized within the individual. But this is not to say that the deities are not entirely real. In Tibetan cosmology, the ordinary reality of human experience is but an illusion. In comparison, visions of the Tantric deities are considered a more pure vision than that which we experience in everyday life (Samuel 1993: 164). It is the lama who mediates between these worlds, transmitting *wang* from the tantric deities to the monastic and many lay

devotees who practise tantra. There are higher and lower classes of practice; through these gradations lay tantric practice tends to diverge from the tantric practice of monks and lamas. Hierarchies abound in Tibetan Buddhism. The system of relations across and between monastic and lay communities strengthens and reproduces the political divide that separates them. The very exchanges and connections that form spiritual bonds recreate the social world with its hierarchal complexities.

Ethnographic scholarship: revisiting the polemic

The variation of Tibetan religious practitioners is often traced to the origins of Buddhism in the Himalayas and its entailing process of incorporating local indigenous forms into a largely monastic tradition. Before the arrival of Buddhism, religious life in the Tibetan regions consisted of heterogeneous indigenous forms of mountain worship and other earth cults. This variety of pre-Buddhist and non-Buddhist religious forms in Tibet, often glossed under the term Bön (*bon*), helped to shape the contours of what would become a simultaneously varied and culturally distinct order of Buddhism in Tibet. Legendary accounts of Tibetan history portray the Bön tradition as a force that became 'domesticated' by the staggered advent of Buddhism (Mills 2003: 14). While the initial arrival of Buddhism in Tibet occurred under the reign of King Songtsen Gampo in the seventh century, the teachings of the Buddha did not begin to flourish until the eighth century, when King Trisong Detsen founded the first monastery at Samye near Lhasa. This project met with obstacles, as each night malevolent local spirits destroyed the work that the king's builders erected by day. Aware that the spirits were averse to the teachings of the Buddha, the great tantric master Padmasambhava was invited to the region to subjugate and tame these hostile forces. Accepting the mission, Padmasambhava subdued the spirits through his tantric powers and not only pacified their destructive tendencies toward Buddhism but converted them into the protectors of the new religion, enabling the monastery to be built without further impediment. After the domestication of powerful local spirits, Padmasambhava is renowned for having inspired translations of the Buddhist canon by Indian scholars and Tibetan translators. He also taught the whole corpus of Buddhist teachings and, for the sake of future generations, he concealed teachings in the landscape and mind-streams of various beings, which would later be revealed enabling the continuity of tradition.

It is the Nyingma school or 'Old Order' that is most closely related to the traditions from this early spread of Buddhism. Informants in Darjeeling linked the lineage to the exalted figure of Padmasambhava and his followers, the tantric, non-celibate practitioners who become adept in mantras, or in Tibetan *ngag* (*sngags* Skt. *mantra*). Although *ngagpa* (*sngags pa*) might refer to a genealogical lineage of Buddhist practitioner (Samuel 1993: 120–1), in common parlance it refers more generally to tantric householders who tend to wear white robes, wear their hair long and practise mantras. The *ngagpa* differs from the ordinary layperson and also the broad category of monks, a term used to translate a spectrum of

Buddhist practitioners from the novice *getsul* (*dge tshul*), to the fully ordained *gelong* (*dge slong*). Each of these types of practitioner is marked by different commitments, vows or *dam tsig* (*dam tshig*), literally binding words. Suffice it to say, *ngagpas* (or for that matter, their female counterparts *ngagmo* [*sngags mo*]) as tantric practitioners are committed to the *bodhisattva* vow and other tantric vows but they are not bound to the same monastic vinaya vows that include the observance of celibacy and abstaining from alcohol and meat.

The difference between a monk and a *ngagpa* is quite obvious, with their different modes of dress and the latter wearing long hair. Less distinctive, however, are the variations of practitioner that fall under the more generic term 'lama'.

> [L]amas may be monks, unmarried lay yogis, or married householders; they may be heads of *gompa* or solitary hermits; they may be great scholars or unlettered practitioners. They may also be either male or female, although the vast majority are men. There are as many ways of being a lama as there are lamas.
>
> (Samuel 1993: 271)

Thus, while there are textually inclined practitioners who are often, but not always, part of the Buddhist clergy, there are also more experientially oriented Buddhists who may or may not be monastic, but might engage more in solitary practice than they would scholarly or philosophical pursuits. Both types of practitioner, however, may be referred to as 'lama' and they might live celibate and monastic lives or they may live alone or with their families.[1]

Research into the variation of Buddhist traditions and people in the Himalayas has been marked by attempts to find a non-generalized language to categorize local religious practices and practitioners. Researchers' classifications of Tibetan Buddhist social spheres have been criticized for lapsing into classic divisions, evident in such binaries as low/high culture, little/great, popular/elite and also shamanic/clerical traditions.[2] These divisions in anthropology and religion, which represent researchers' attempts to communicate the difference in emphasis between different categories of Buddhist practice, have been criticized for contributing to a hegemonic narrative in which the written is elevated to a superior position to the experiential (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 72), and in which non-textual elements are presented as 'remnants' of an earlier time (Aziz 1976: 343) and as abstracted from Tibetan social realities (Ortner 1995: 381).

Recognizing that non-literary, ritual practice and scholarly, textual approaches often exist in a symbiotic relationship, some scholars (Cuevas 2008; Lopez 1998b; Ortner 1995) have attempted to present a nuanced analysis of Buddhist ideology and practice. These works tend to highlight that 'popular' religion and scholarly approaches pervade the contemporary socio-religious worlds of Tibetans in complex and often complementary ways. Ortner (1995) acknowledged that the construction of binary oppositions as presented in her earlier work (1978) failed to reflect Tibetan social contexts. In the later paper she inverts previously held religious positions of lamaist and shamanic to highlight the presence

of 'lamaist' elements among other practitioners and the characteristics of greed and frivolity attributed to certain monks by an otherwise devout laity (1995: 380–1). Reversing the commonly held perception that monks are rigorously disciplined, while married lamas or shamans are more likely to be distracted from religious practice through preoccupations with socializing, family life or intoxication, she challenges her previous approach. A further and more innovative attempt to overcome the dichotomy, and also to deconstruct the decline in Sherpa shamans, is presented in the claim that shamanism exists in new institutionalized forms (Ortner 1995: 382). This suggestion follows Aziz's (1976) earlier reconsiderations of the reincarnate lama as a shaman or person possessed, an idea that has been criticized (Fürer-Haimendorf 1977–8: 728) and which will be interrogated later in this chapter.

Samuel, taking a different approach, maintains the distinctive emphasis between types of practitioners, using the terms 'yogic' and 'textual' (2005: 326–7) in place of the 'shamanic' and 'clerical' division that predominated in his earlier work (1993). Samuel points out that these distinctions are often a matter of emphasis and not always a clear-cut division (2005: 326). In another attempt to problematize the categories, Tokarska-Bakir (2000) challenges the distinction between textual and non-textual, or intellectual and non-intellectual, upon which many polemical discussions, such as the lamaist and shaman divide, are hinged. Claiming that the employment of these categories is more revealing of Western academic prejudice to different types of intellect – our correlation between consciousness, writing and cognition and unconsciousness with ignorance – she argues that the soteriological practices of Tibetan Buddhists, particularly those concerned with *liberation through the senses*, do not necessarily associate cognition with consciousness: there are entirely different means toward liberation that include:

> [A]ll those religious behaviours (as well as related sacred objects) – such as listening to and repeating *mantras*, circumambulation of *stūpas*, looking at sacred images, tasting relics, smelling and touching sacred substances – which are accompanied by a belief that sensual contact with a sacred object (sculptured figure, painting, *maṇdala*, *stūpa*, holy man, tree, mount, book, substance, etc.) can give one hope and even certainty of achieving liberation.
> (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 69)

Seeking liberation through the senses involves contact with textual inscription without any necessary examination or discursive understanding of content (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 73). This non-reflective engagement with sacred words is common in the everyday life of all categories of Buddhist practitioner. Monks, *ngagpas* and laity alike make exoteric contact with the 'infinitely duplicated' form of the text; sacred syllables are etched onto stupas, prayer flags and woodblock texts (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 74; Clark 1990: 171) and they are even believed to be the visual and auditory origin of the many deities whose images adorn the monastery and home. These practices and the things they relate to are

'not outside the stream of an orthodox religion' (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 74). Even the great yogi Padmasambhava is acclaimed for having emphasized that his blessings can be received simply by viewing his image through exoteric sight, without 'inner senses' (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 70).

Tokarska-Bakir uses interpretive strategies not dissimilar to Ortner (1995). Highlighting the predominance of sensual, non-scholastic practices among the clergy and the importance of words and letters in the soteriological paths of the laity, she challenges polemical thinking by deconstructing the oppositions. Her challenge however tends to eclipse the extensive and elaborate scholarly traditions in the shadow of a more sensual soteriology.

In situating Gupha in a normative, albeit pluralized Tibetan Buddhist discourse, I have chosen not to reproduce the divisions reiterated in earlier anthropological works on Buddhism in the Himalayas. Approaching the local tensions that exist between different forms of Buddhist practitioner, this chapter contextualizes the historical legacy that has shaped contemporary lineage disputes. I turn first to some of these historical representations, then, through ethnographic narrative, I demonstrate that polarities do have a place in Tibetan social realities. I argue that these polemical disputes have helped to shape the religious classifications referred to not only by religious and ethnographic specialists but also by lineage proponents themselves. Importantly, it is not my intention to re-polarize the ethnography of Tibetan Buddhist societies. I acknowledge a complementarity between lay and monastic varieties of practice. A dynamic of interconnectedness between different approaches is pivotal to much of this book, this chapter included, but it is important to depict the different views as they correspond to Tibetan social realities. As this chapter demonstrates, distinct traditions do co-exist in Tibetan societies; but their co-existence is not seamless. They reveal the differently textured aspects of a cultural tapestry through which cultural variation can be forged, maintained and reproduced over time.

Tibetan scholarship: historical influences

The Sino-Indian Buddhist controversy in the eighth century AD involved a schism between two factions as a result of their opposing approaches to enlightenment. Chinese master Hva-shang Mahayana and his followers asserted a 'simultaneous' (*cig car ba*) approach, whereby the cessation of dualistic conception was understood to be the cause for enlightenment at once. In contrast, the Indian Buddhist tradition established by Santaraksita and defended by Kamalasila insisted on a path of progression, a 'gradual' (*rim gyis pa*) course to enlightenment. In Tibetan historical accounts, the conflict between the two factions was settled in a formal debate and Hva-shang and his method were defeated (Karmay 1988). However, this dispute between 'mediacy' and 'immediacy' runs throughout the history of Tibetan Buddhism (Tillemans 1998). An example of its recurrence is the twelfth- and thirteenth-century polemical discussions arising from the criticism of one of the forefathers of the Sakya tradition, Sakya Pandita (1182–1251), and the proponents of his scholastic method, based on scriptural authority and reason,

towards the 'Self-sufficient White Remedy' (*dkar po chig thub*) doctrine of Gampopa (1079–1153) and his disciple Zhanga Tshalpa (1123–1193), who advocated for 'singly caused' enlightenment, which Sakya Pandita asserted was a revival of Hva-shang's 'simultaneist' approach.

The notion of a soteriological self-sufficient remedy capable of bringing about enlightenment articulates a path of liberation through the senses, such as that also expounded in the text *Bardo Thötröl*, which means 'liberation through hearing', but is more commonly known as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Coleman *et al.* 2006; Evans-Wentz 1960; Freemantle and Trungpa 1975). Liberation, according to this approach, can be brought about through seeing, hearing, wearing, tasting, touching and remembering (Freemantle and Trungpa 1975: xi), practices that emphasize coming into contact with sacred objects, a cognition not through discursive consciousness.

Gampopa's presentation of what is termed a 'simultaneist' (*cig car ba*) tradition asserted a 'non-conceptual and direct cognition of reality' that was 'anti-intellectual', 'anti-verbal' and relied on faith and devotion (Jackson 1994: 39). Discouraging intellectual investigation or reflection, this approach sought to utilize non-conceptual experience directly by short circuiting or circumventing the mind's rational and verbalizing processes (Jackson 1994: 39). The enlightenment of the individual, for the proponents of this view, is ever-present but marred by semantic rationalization or, for that matter, by any thought at all. The approach deviated from the conceptually framed Tibetan scholastic method founded by Sakya Pandita. Critical of the non-discursive orientations of the simultaneists, Sakya Pandita's writings associated their beliefs and practices with a 'popular religion' that mistakenly correlated soteriology with exoteric practices such as circumambulating a temple, offering a flower, reciting a mantra, or making an act of devotion:

> It is not taught in any Sūtra, Tantra or greater treatise that one can awaken to Buddhahood by a Self-sufficient White [simple method], as distinct from [through] the perfectly replete possession of means and discriminate knowledge.
>
> (Jackson 1994: 76, citing Sakya Pandita's *sKyes bu dam pa*)

Although all traditions speak of the wisdom of hearing, thinking and meditating, Sakya Pandita's 'gradualist' approach to enlightenment emphasized the study of scripture through learning and reflection as a necessary precursor to meditation. It did not advocate formulating new ideas or 'mixing' religious traditions. The mixing of different schools of practice was a criticism toward Gampopa, who had innovated his Kagyu tradition through his alliance with traditionally distinct lineages and practices.[3]

The differences in orientation between the schools were not total, however. Even Sakya Pandita agreed with Gampopa and Lama Zhang Tshalpa that the final stages of the path to liberation could not be realized through conceptuality (Jackson 1994: 77). The distinctive meditative system of the Sakya is the *Lamdre*

(*lam'bras*), literally meaning 'path and result'. *Lamdre* instructions outline the entire corpus of theory and practice as presented in the Sakya tradition and, in this system, 'dichotomies vanish. The result subsumes the path, since the latter leads to the former; and the path subsumes the result, since it is the means by which the result is actualized' (Powers 2007: 447). Liberation is thus commonly perceived as a non-conceptual experience and the different traditions agree that it can be attained only by the practitioner's own efforts to relinquish the concepts that inform their cognition and experience. The unlettered and sensuous soteriological persuasions of particular Buddhist practitioners exist therefore in a normative, albeit eclectic, socio-historic sphere. It is not a solely dichotomous relationship; rather, for these traditions there is a difference in emphasis (Samuel 1993: 18).

Marked by inter-lineage debate this historical dialogue helped to shape and reproduce the plurality of Tibetan Buddhist traditions into the present. It is to that aspect I now turn. Focusing on the interrelations between Gupha's non-textual, experiential approach and the contrasting tendencies of a scholarly clergy, I provide contemporary examples of this eclecticism in Tibetanized communities.

Introducing Gupha

Widowed and in his seventies, Gupha had lived in Rimbick for nearly 40 years. Born in Tibet, he spent the earlier years of his life as a nomadic pilgrim visiting the holy sites of the Buddha and Padmasambhava. Locally renowned for his solitary lifestyle he lived his days reciting mantras from a hilltop cave. Villagers built a makeshift hut around the mouth of the cavern to accommodate Gupha and his stock of religious iconography and they also took turns to provide his midday meal and other subsistence necessities. Particularly fond of wine, offerings of a local brew were clearly favoured above the many discarded items that built up in his dwelling. I had been staying in the monastic college for less than a week when I first accompanied a monk named Palden, along with Wangdu, a lay employee of the monastery, on one of their regular visits to Gupha.

Passing fields of vegetables, farmhouses, domestic animals and young children at play, we stopped only briefly for Wangdu to purchase some locally made wine for the lama. Sheathed in mildewed fallen leaves of various texture and hue, the slippery cobblestone path inclined vertically as we ascended toward the cave. Prayer flags emerged from the distance soon to be dwarfed by a mammoth boulder that stood stark, appearing surreal between the blue sky and lush forest vegetation. Nestled against the rock face was Gupha's wooden abode: a towering grey precipice harnessed by the local workmanship which had crafted a shelter around the cave Gupha had settled in almost four decades ago.

An old ladder led us to the dark interior of Gupha's cavern. Shadows danced on the rock face as the flame of butter lamps glimmered in a cool breeze. Fragrant incense and the perfume of fresh flowers circulated around us in a delicious combination of aromas. A central chamber semi-petitioned the lama's main seat of meditation from a disorderly ensemble of things: piles of out-of-date stock ranging from barley flour and biscuits to milk and cereal. Bins and containers

were pushed to one side, their contents overflowing. Paraffin oil cookers, kettles, thermos flasks, tins, paper and seemingly spent items lined the walls, interspersed with images and statues of divine exemplars. Illuminated by the light of butter lamps, Gupha watched us enter. Elf-like, his triangular face and white beard enhanced a pointed chin. Wisps of silvery hair parted down the centre of his crown, angling high-set cheekbones, framing deeply set eyes (see Figure 3.1).

Presented with offerings of wine, barley flour and incense, Gupha received the items from Wangdu's outstretched arms. He removed the top from the bottle without hesitation and proceeded to pour its contents into a round, bowl-like porcelain cup, muttering some prayers before tossing the contents down the back of his throat. Pausing momentarily, he issued his thanks before proceeding to pour another. Accustomed to visitors and their offerings, he took long sips of wine before pausing for a moment, refraining from conversation and gently swaying from side to side. Initially we sat in silence. When there was dialogue it was circular, a constant repetition of word and phrase, 'The wine is good' or 'The weather is good today'. In the course of this small-talk Gupha's speech began to slur, making it increasingly difficult to comprehend the words that patterned an intermittent conversation.

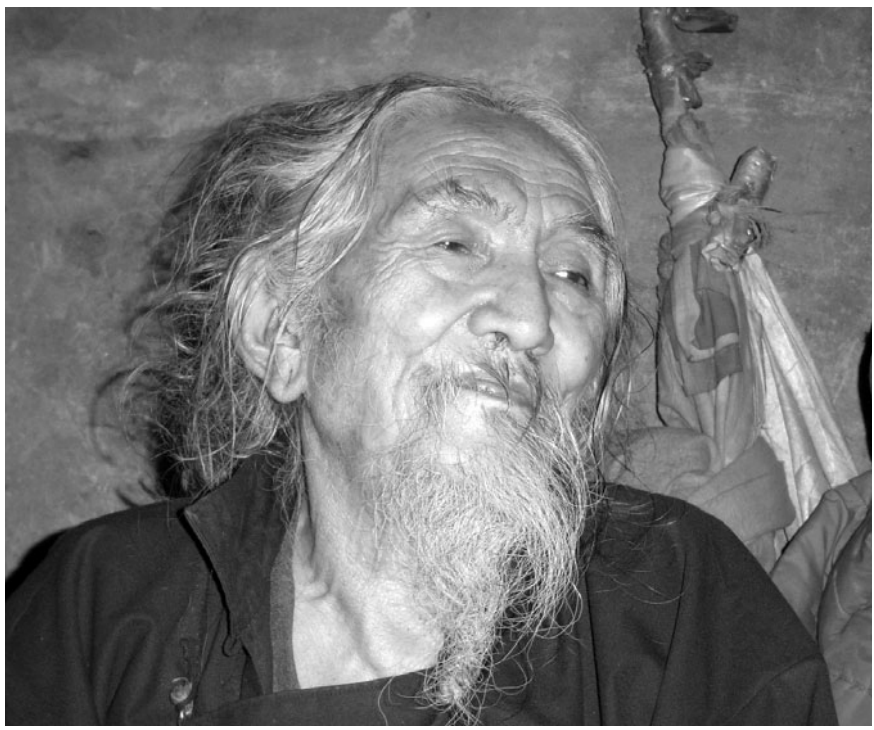

Figure 3.1 Gupha Rinpoche

Then, breaking the pervading silence, a cough, a splutter and Gupha invited our questions. Seizing this moment of apparent lucidity and curious about details of his life I asked how many years he had lived in Rimbick and where he had lived before. In response he told us that he had lived in the cave for 'many years, many, many years'. Again he paused as though deep in thought, another cough and splutter ensued before he continued, 'many, many years'. I supposed numerical accuracy held little relevance for one who had retreated in a cave for 40 years. Moments later, he told us that he had travelled around on pilgrimage before settling in Rimbick. He and his family were from Tibet and they had lived near Mount Kailash before he left his home country to travel to Nepal and then to India, spending years at a time in holy places. Commenting on the presence of the Sakya college in the region, he remarked on his adherence to all four schools of Buddhism, telling us that he was Gelug, Sakya, Kagyu and Nyingma, but had a special connection with the older school of the Nyingma because he worshipped Padmasambhava. As he spoke, words gurgled in his throat, gulped down with wine.

Seemingly ill at ease in the situation, Palden repetitively grasped at his knees demonstrating an eagerness to leave. His growing discontent became apparent in one last gesture of discomfort, sighing as he rocked back toward me, spurring me on: 'Let's go', he whispered while rising from his seat. Gupha broke into an incoherent spiel as Wangdu and I followed Palden. The lama's ramblings continued through our bidding farewell and exiting his residence. Descending the stairs that led us to his cave we stood amongst the dense green foliage of forest landscape as Gupha popped his head through a space in the planks of wood, motioning with his hands for us to circumambulate his prayer flags. In a clockwise direction, we passed under the long, white flags inscribed with Tibetan mantras. With the completion of our circumambulations, Gupha smiled, his face partly visible behind tresses of hair and a thinning beard as he stood before the awesome backdrop of sheer rock face.

On our return to the monastery I told Palden that I would like to go back to interview Gupha. With a look of bewilderment, Palden said that there was no reason to record the old lama because he had 'no story' and would not be able to tell me anything about Buddhism. Palden distinguished between practitioners who are monks and those who are *ngagpas*. Unlike monks who study and become well versed in the philosophical tenets of Buddhism, *ngagpas* drink too much and engage in common practices such as mantra recitation without really knowing anything about Buddhism:

> His talk goes around in circles because he is an old man who likes his wine. You will ask how long he has stayed there and he will say 'a long time.' Then he will ask you how long you have stayed here, you will say such and such length of time. Like this, there is no story. He might tell you about his family. He will say he had two parents and a sister back in Tibet and now they are dead. He might say he had a wife and son and now they too are dead. This is all. This is all he will say.

The suggestion that I include Gupha in my research met with a similar response from Khenpo.la, the monastery's abbot, whose title denotes the extensive scholastic training that he now shared with a new generation of young scholars.[4]

> People call Gupha 'Rinpoche' and 'Lama' but he is not a recognized incarnation. The locals have respect for him because he lives in a cave and says mantras all day but he is not a Rinpoche like our Rinpoche. He is not a *tulku*. He says mantras but he has not studied Buddhist philosophy.

Gupha was accommodated, supported and nourished by the patronage and provisions of Rimbick's community. Local men laboured to build a sheltered residence around the cave. Local women provided daily meals and monks and other villagers visited him supplying the items and substances that he benefited from. This lifestyle of retreat is not uncommon among Buddhist practitioners; all traditions uphold the importance of direct insight gained through the experience and methods of tantric practice (Samuel 1993: 21). That Gupha lived alone in the forest in a small rock crevice and spent his days and nights in meditation, reciting the mantra of Padmasambhava for nearly 40 years was the demonstration of his realization necessary for the benefaction of his patrons. But while the laity unquestioningly saw Gupha as a renunciate and skilled meditator and honoured him with the title of Lama and Rinpoche, the Sakya monks thought he was self-indulgent in his drinking and unqualified as a Buddhist lama. Unlike an incarnate lama, he did not have the advantage of successive notable rebirths or the support of a textual tradition. In this he differed from Tenzin Kunga Gyaltsen, the formally recognized incarnation of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin, who, according to his monastic brethren, embodied a wisdom extending beyond the 70 or so years of Gupha. *Their* rinpoche displayed the philosophical expertise and spiritual mastery accomplished and carried over from his previous life, now made manifest in studies undertaken in his present form. The quality of scholarship that they valued and which marked expertise in understanding Buddhism was not exhibited by the one life of Gupha. With his intoxicated manner and lack of philosophical rigour, he was deemed to have 'no story', at least not of the type worthy of recording. His story was one without chronological and linear sequence. Incongruous with serial lifetimes of spiritual mastery embodied in the incarnate lama, or even the gradual acquisition of knowledge undertaken by the lettered and educated scholarly monk, Gupha's biography was deemed inconsequential. Thus, the thought that I would seek to include him in my research could, for Khenpo.la and Palden, only signal an inadequate representation of the dharma *proper*.

These variations in cultural milieu are reminiscent of the historical inter-sectarian controversies that arose in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. The polarity between theory and practice fundamental to the doctrinal discussions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are, to some extent, reproduced in the everyday discourse of contemporary practitioners. The graded path to realization epitomized through the efforts of the religious scholar contrasts with the non-scholastic approach of Gupha which is *out of time* with the monks' linear

progression in Buddhist Studies. Maintaining ethnographic elucidation, the following section describes the structures of daily life for monks within the college before moving on to the rationale of Sakya monastic education as depicted by the college abbot.[5] His rationale is comparative: it relies on his perceived relations between Sakya and other lineages, culminating in an appeal to hierarchy with a particular assertion of Sakya primacy, revealing the ways in which his doctrinal affiliations emphasize selected aspects of Buddhist tradition.

Textures and grammars of a monastic college

Morning in the monastic college would begin at five-thirty. The mantra of Jambeyang (*'jam dpal dbyangs* Skt. Manjushri), the deity of wisdom, reverberated through the monastery carried aloft from rooftops where monks walked back and forth in chant. Their echo resounded through the corridors, passing through the windows of individual rooms. With the repetition of '*om a ra pa tsa na dhih dhih dhih dhih dhih dhih dhih dhih*…', tongues manoeuvred at rapid speed, summoning wisdom and preparing for the new day as they pursued such activities as bringing in their washing, bathing and making their beds.

At six o'clock, the thirty resident monks formed two groups, chanting a text to invoke the wisdom deity Jambeyang in the shrine room and a text to summon the qualities of Drolma, the female deity of compassion, in the classroom. Resounding guttural chants ricocheted through the grounds as the monks recited mostly from memory, calling the deities to mind, invoking their power and protection. Each morning at six-thirty, the monastery cook would stand on the balcony of the dining room with a small gong in hand, waiting for the conclusion of prayers before sounding the instrument that called everybody to breakfast. Most of the monks ate breakfast in this dining room at the lowest floor of the building: a tidy room aside for the monastery's ill-groomed dog. It contained more than ten tables, each with bench seats and an array of windows which looked out beyond the compound and across to the terraced valley. Khenpo.la, Rinpoche's teacher and Rinpoche himself ate in a spacious dining room, equipped with modern kitchen facilities, situated upstairs next to Rinpoche's apartment. The attendant of Rinpoche, a short and stout monk, served them mugs of thick butter tea, rice, vegetables and bread with a variety of condiments before returning to the dining area to partake of the regular breakfast staples of butter tea, doughy rounds of white bread with dollops of spicy chilli and helpings of vegetables or large bowls of buttered rice.

Following breakfast, the youngest monks, aged in their early to mid-teens, carefully attended to plants in the garden. Then with the sounding of the bell at seven-thirty there was a period of self-study or quiet revision. Another bell signalled the call to class (see Figure 3.2). There were three classes: a senior class, a junior class and a class of new monks who engaged in Tibetan language lessons only. For the senior and junior class their morning lesson was repeated in the afternoon: each morning from eight until nine-thirty the abbot of the college taught Buddhist philosophy and at one-thirty in the afternoon Rinpoche's tutor

Figure 3.2 Monks in class

repeated the lesson, teaching from the same root text and commentaries as the abbot. These classes were held in a shrine room containing pictures of the Dalai Lama and Sakya Trizin alongside statues of Sakya lineage masters that stood upon an altar at the head of the room. Rugs and cushions marked orderly lines, forming the seating that trailed horizontally from the altar.

In this designated hierarchy, there was a throne for Rinpoche, a higher cushion for Khenpo.la, another high raised cushion for Rinpoche's teacher and increasingly lower cushions for the remaining monks. Seniors sat at the front of the room, juniors behind them. A half-hour tea break marked the end of the first lesson as the youngest monks served sweet milk tea to all residents, trailing the corridors to reach their rooms. At ten o'clock classes resumed with instruction on Tibetan language until lunch was served at eleven-thirty. Large portions of rice, dal and vegetables were consumed at the commencement of the 2-hour break. After taking the opportunity to clean their rooms or wash their robes the majority of the monks would rest before the bell rang, calling them to the repeat class in philosophy. An hour of English language training preceded another half-hour tea break. This class was conducted in a small room containing a blackboard, teacher's desk and chair and a carpeted low set platform for all monks, with the exception of Rinpoche who sat on an elevated, faux-silk-embroidered cushion. From four-thirty until dinnertime at six o'clock, the juniors and seniors debated

the teachings of the day. Junior monks sprawled out on the rooftop above the kitchen. The five senior monks sat atop cushions on the field where they played volleyball on the weekend.

For new monks, lessons in grammar continued through the day and until six o'clock when the bell rang for dinner. They worked towards becoming well versed in the complex grammars of literary Tibetan, a prerequisite for commencing studies in Buddhist scripture. After a dinner of noodle soup or thick rounds of bread with large helpings of spicy potato, cleaning duties began in the kitchen and dining area. A half-hour of recitation and the memorization of texts took place from seven o'clock. Lemon tea was served at eight o'clock and a bell at nine-thirty sounded the end of their day. Each Saturday, the monks enjoyed a half-holiday with no classes in the afternoon. There were no formal daytime classes on Sunday. Weather permitting, Saturdays were a time for them to do their washing, air out bed linen, chop wood for the kitchen, tend to the garden and clean their rooms. Recreational pursuits such as games of volleyball were played on the weekends and if the monsoon prevailed they gathered around the television watching Indian movies, cricket or soccer – unquestionably the favoured sports and the games the abbot would not allow them to play. Weekends were also a time to memorize scriptures through endless recitations that Khenpo.la examined each Sunday evening, signalling the end of the break.

During the evenings, I would sit on the kitchen rooftop with Khenpo.la watching daylight fade to dusk until we were enveloped in a starry night sky. On many of these occasions, he explained that monks in the college study for 7 years and then receive the title of *Kachupa* (*dka' bcu pa*) after a memorization exam, which then qualified them to commence studies in the higher tantric texts. In the monastic college, tantric studies continue for 2 years and once he has completed his studies, a monk is honoured with the title of *Lobpon* (*slob dpon*). To progress to the status of *Rabjampa* (*rab'byams pa*), another 2 years of study are necessary, 11 years in total inclusive of an examination in ritual cycle and involving the composition of an original thesis. Khenpo.la explained that a *Rabjampa* is a 'professor of Buddhist philosophy' and that it is only upon reaching this stage of education that monks are given the opportunity to go into retreat for 3 years or longer. He explained:

> In our Sakya sect we have eighteen different subjects and a monk studies two subjects each year for 9 years to become a *Lobpon*. After the 9 years they should have an understanding of the eighteen different subjects but this is very difficult because some subjects are so vast. Here this year I am teaching Abhidharma or metaphysics. This is a very difficult subject. We will probably study this one text for the whole of this year. So sometimes 9 years is not sufficient and we need to add more years to finish the eighteen subjects. Actually each subject is so vast that you need many years to really understand it, but what to do? Life is short and there is so much to learn, so we move through quickly, quickly, studying the essence . . .

He stopped mid-sentence and I could tell his concentration was elsewhere. Returning with his characteristically jovial grin, he asked:

> Can you hear them? I can hear in the kitchen, they are talking about Abhidharma. There is interest. Interest! Very good.

Khenpo.la would often listen out for intellectual dialogue among his students. Each afternoon, the monks debated metaphysical positions relating to the scriptures that he had explained to them during the day. Each evening, Khenpo.la hoped for a continuation of the discussion beyond their debate. Debate was the salient feature of Sakya education. When the monks left the kitchen, Khenpo.la informed me:

> Debate is very important because it destroys ignorance. All people and animals, all sentient beings, have a lot of ignorance. It is through debate that our ignorance shifts and disappears . . . Debate is the most important. Philosophy is very important. To know the dharma there has to be philosophy and to understand philosophy there must be debate. To get liberated there must be philosophy; there must be debate. This is how it is for us Sakya. We study and debate philosophy for years before commencing meditation retreats. For the Kagyu and Nyingma it is different. They do long retreats, 3 years, even more, without the same grounding in debate and philosophy. They have philosophy too but there is more emphasis on meditation. Similarly us Sakya and Gelugpa monks do retreats but the emphasis for us is philosophy. Study first, meditation later. Nevertheless all lineages come from the same root. They all come from the Buddha and they all lead to the same place. The path is different but the result is same. But we say best practitioners are those who have both. A bird needs two wings to be able to fly. There has to be philosophy and practice and you study philosophy first in order to know how to practice. Without philosophy there isn't the understanding of practice. So the best practitioners have a perfect understanding of philosophy.

In her exploration of the '*expressibility* of the ultimate' (1998: 14) through words and concepts, Anne Klein reveals how Gelug scholars and meditation masters 'harness the intellect in direct service of non-dualistic experience' (1998: 15). Her work shows how this renowned scholarly Tibetan Buddhist tradition provides a particular cultural system for understanding the complementarity of religious doctrine and mystical experience in ways that bridge human intellect and experience, two domains that are traditionally set apart in Western philosophical and religious discourse. Her discussion on the role of the intellect in Gelug practice is relevant also to the Sakya system, whereby:

> concepts are a primary method by which one gains access to the ultimate. The stages of practice begin with the building up of a mental image, through words and inferential reasoning, of for example the subtle disintegration that

> takes place in produced phenomena from one moment to the next. In this way one comes to ascertain subtle impermanence. Similarly, to gain a non-conceptual understanding of emptiness, one first builds up a mental image of the lack of substantial or inherent existence. Such mental training is considered effective in large part because the words describing momentary impermanence or the lack of inherent existence and the thought apprehending mental images of these do relate to the actual phenomena of impermanence or emptiness. Direct cognition of these is considered essential to the process of liberation.
>
> (Klein 1998: 15)[6]

Scholasticism and saintly madmen

The Sakya tradition upholds a traditionalist form of philosophical training as espoused by lineage forefather Sakya Pandita. In this system, logic or reason is the *modus operandi*, which through debate 'established tenets of a valid and recognized tradition' (Jackson 1994: 97). The practitioner ideally proceeds from a reason-based understanding of the Buddhist teachings to a more practical approach, affirming Khenpo.la's idea that the 'best practitioners have a perfect understanding of philosophy'. Accumulated knowledge unfolds over progressive years of education in a linear advance of exegesis emphasized in the very name of the college: *Chöpheling* means a place where Buddhist teachings progress. The logistics of this progress as a means towards enlightenment is presented as methodologically divergent from the paths of the Kagyu and Nyingma, who may accentuate practice without a scholastic foundation. However, to divide the lineages according to any fixed division, whether it be philosophy and practice or sutra and tantra, would be a misrepresentation of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Importantly, in the above discussions, the orientations of lineage proponents could not be fitted into the framework of a precise definition. The classifications and categories of contemporary Sakya religious life reproduce the ideas expressed by Sakya Pandita in the thirteenth century, namely that even if a practitioner excelled in the scholastic method, he could not attain liberation through conceptual knowledge alone (Jackson 1994: 77).

The search for reason without experiential insight is an impediment to progress and similarly detrimental is practice without prior conceptual understanding. The difference in orientation between monks with access to the higher studies of Buddhist philosophy and lay practitioners without recourse to scholastic education serves to reproduce the divide that separates them. Yet an ambiguity abides in the above narratives, where apparently irreconcilable differences in technique lead to equivalent levels of realization. This can be seen as parallel to the two traditions of Bön training in Dzogchen and the yogic kusuli system, and the learned pandita tradition, whereby both categories of practitioner can realize the ultimate nature, even if the former do not conceptually understand its basis (Klein and Wangyal Rinpoche 2006: 11). In the words of Khenpo.la, all lineages 'come from the Buddha and they all lead to the same place. The path is different but the

result is the same.' Because the final stage of enlightenment is liberation from all the dualisms of conceptuality, notions of theory and practice lapse; the division between 'simultaneist' and 'gradualist' approaches are merely a conceptual framework to be transcended in favour of direct experience. Buddhism thus accommodates different types of practitioners. Different schools appear to value and emphasize different vehicles to arrive at the same place; however once arrived at it is non-referential, beyond time and space, beyond path and result.

Practice is not incongruent with Buddhism in the Sakya or any other lineage tradition. On the contrary, it is the practical orientation that is necessary to attain realization, but according to Khenpo.la, the foundation for an awareness of that realization is prior conceptual understanding. There is a progression from studies in debate and philosophy. In these latter traditions, there is a heightened tendency among the practitioner to abandon appeal to reason or convention. The well-established genre of practitioner, classified by Ardussi and Epstein (1978) and later by Samuel (1993: 302–8) as the 'saintly madman' has, however, appeared in all lineages. Their main characteristics have been abridged to include the following attributes, the first six of which have been summarized by Ardussi and Epstein (1978: 332–3) and the last two by Samuel (1993: 303):

a A generalized rejection of customary behaviour which society-at-large and the monastic establishment in particular, regard as appropriate for the religious man . . .
b An inclination towards bizarre modes of dress . . .
c A disregard for the niceties of interpersonal behaviour, particularly with regard to social status, modes of address, deferential behaviour and so forth . . .
d A professed disdain for scholasticism, the study of religion through books alone . . .
e The use of popular poetical forms, mimes, songs, epic tales and so forth, during the course of their preaching . . .
f The use of obscenity and vulgar parlance . . .[7]
g A great insight and capacity to see through other people's behaviour and motivations . . .
h A great attainment demonstrated by their [supranormal] power.

There is among these so-called saintly madmen an inclination to spontaneous and impulsive ways of being in the world, reflecting liberation from habitual patterns of thought and action. Again, this is not to say that only the Nyingma and Kagyu schools have a tradition of the 'wild' practitioner, there are others in the Sakya and Gelug sects also, the Sixth Dalai Lama among them. It is not solely a dichotomous relationship between scholastic method and spontaneous practice; rather, as aforementioned, in these traditions there is a difference in emphasis (Samuel 1993: 18).

Complementing the above descriptions of monasticism, its daily textures and scholastic rigours, the following vignette elucidates a sense of the non-conventional

social standards of Gupha, the rhythms of his life-world and the mantras that formed his practice. The spiritual journey is not always rendered in terms of progress and gradation because the goal or aim can be synonymous with the path, method not distinguished from outcome, textual learning not aligned with soteriology.

Rhythms of a saintly madman

The mantra of Padmasambhava rang from the lips of Gupha, descending from the mountaintop and passing through the winding tracks along which I made my ascent, '*om ah hung vajra guru pema siddhi hung*'. As the gradient intensified his assembly of prayer flags stood out against the precipitous rock, gaining visibility and increasing in magnitude. I walked up the wooden steps and onto the rickety porch that surrounded his dwelling, turning the corner to meet Gupha himself. Shuffling toward the balcony, he moved me aside with a stern arm while clutching at a jug of pungent urine. Unwashed and dishevelled, a mane of matted hair piled onto the tattered remnants of a black dress jacket and an otherwise naked frame. The threads of his attire revealing the dust that settled upon him over years of meditation. Carrying his old and feeble form to the boundaries of this platform, he hung his body over the dilapidated railing. Endless mantra recitation became increasingly audible as he threw his urine overboard, scattering it on to the ground below with broad sweeping gestures of his arms. Abrupt and hoarse, his voice reverberated in unison with the splatter of urine cast onto rock and earth.

Shuffling slowly back indoors, he returned to the seat of meditation, a small, raised area covered with an assortment of old cloth and nestled beside the cliff-face. He spent his hours there, surrounded by icons of gods and masters. Some of the images were clearly detectable lamas or deities, others were too old, too faded or too grimy to discern. Like other retreatants, he both slept and meditated in seated position. Once his legs were firmly beneath his frail torso, I offered him a *katag*. Nodding favourably, he placed it to his right side amongst a collection of images and books. The most prominent image was a large reproduced photograph of the Karmapa, the current head of the Kagyu lineage and aged nineteen at the time. The books, I was told, came from Nyingma prayer ceremonies. The people of Rimbick gave them to him though he was not able to read. 'The religious books are very important; the words carry blessings so I keep them here.' Moments later he added, 'I don't have to read them to receive their *jinlab*.'

On this particular day I hoped to elicit something of Gupha's life-story. I aspired to share moments of articulacy or at least be able to siphon through rambling repetitions, the slur of words, to establish some details about his life. Over a period extending more than an hour I sat listening and documenting our conversation. Looking back, what is absent from my fieldnotes are the long moments of silence which dominated our exchange. A recording of this dialogue verified a scarcity of verbal communication. When I initially prompted Gupha to talk about his life, asking where he lived before Rimbick, he told me, 'I come from Tibet and my parents are from Tibet.' He stopped short of continuing, swaying back and forth in his familiar cross-legged position as minutes passed in

a silence interrupted with conjunctions. 'Then . . . ' signalled a continuation of conversation until silence again ensued, more minutes passed, more conjunctions, interaction lapsing into long stretches of quietude that I felt inclined to fill with words. When I asked about his practice, the answer was delayed. Silence intensified until he finally replied, 'I am *ngagpa*.' In a while and seemingly cryptically: 'Some monks have hair but I have long hair.' Later still, he returned to the previous question, answering:

> I have been in India for many years, many years. I have made many, many pilgrimages. There is no place that has not been walked on by me. Before coming to Rimbick I visited the holy sites of Padmasambhava in Sikkim, India and Tibet. Many places . . . Many places . . . Everywhere . . .

He stopped and paused, before repeating what he had said, still swaying back and forth, every time beginning with the conjunction 'then' before finally returning to the aforementioned details of his travel. After a number of repetitions, he ceased talking. Silence. I let some time pass, then asked him about lamas or teachers he met in his travels. Looking at the photographs around him, he motioned with an upward gesture of his right palm towards the large image of the Seventeenth Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje beside him. 'In Tibet I saw the previous Karmapa. Here I have seen the new incarnation.' Perhaps he was referring to seeing him in the photo, or maybe he engaged with some other of this lama's modes of presence, for the present Karmapa, a young man at the time of my fieldwork, had never been to Rimbick and Gupha had not left the region during the Karmapa's lifetime.[8] Continuing, Gupha added: 'Here there are many photos of Dudjum Rinpoche, the Nyingma master and my principal lama (*tsawe lama* [*rtsa ba'i bla ma*]).' When I asked for the particular details of his meeting these lamas, he made no comment. Again we were enveloped in silence. More time lapsed. But as this absence of dialogue increased, I become more comfortable with the silence, letting go of wanting the space between us filled with words.

Premeditated thoughts about what to say next quietened in familiarity. Looking at Gupha, I observed an expression of content. His eyes shone as they met my own. His face poised, his jaw holding an ever-present grin that heightened his cheekbones and seemed somehow to illuminate his awareness, his being-there. In these moments of silence, Gupha was not vacant, absent or elsewhere; on the contrary, his comportment emphasized his presence, his attendance, the company we shared. Becoming sensitive to the nuances of our interaction, I noticed that we were not in silence at all. The song of wild birds accompanied the swish of leaves that swayed in gentle wind, moistened by light rain. Listening as the forest called out from all around us, Gupha spoke. Unquestioned, unprompted, he said, 'It is a pleasant day. A very pleasant day.' I agreed that it was as we continued to listen together, each receptive to the other's presence and the world outside. I asked no more questions and passed no more comments and nor did Gupha until I felt it was time to leave. As I bade Gupha farewell, he told me to visit again and I assured him I would. Upon my leaving he burst into a succession of

Padmasambhava mantra recitations, his vocalization of '*om ah hung vajra guru pema siddhi hung*' accompanying me as I began the return journey to the college.

If we take on board the principal attributes of the saintly madman described by Ardussi and Epstein (1978) and later by Samuel (1993), we could quite easily situate Gupha within their classification. A rejection of appropriate religious behaviour was demonstrated by his frequent intoxication; a tendency towards odd styles of dress verified not so much by his tattered black coat but by his lack of any other attire to accompany it; apathy for civility or good manners revealed in his discourteous greeting and indifference to the conventions of dialogue and communication; alleged disregard for textual methods of religious understanding; and the use of paradoxical parables as a means of discourse. Crude language is one of Ardussi and Epstein's attributes of the saintly madman that I never encountered from Gupha; however, locals informed me that he would sometimes run naked through the forest making strange animal sounds. The two additional characteristics provided by Samuel are harder to confirm. First, Gupha may or may not have been able to penetrate the veneer of others' intentions. The experience of sustained eye-contact, however, could be likened to what Desjarlais (2003: 60) describes as a 'mutual visual rapport', a non-verbal communication conveying 'moments of intimacy, affection and concern' characteristic of visual engagements in Tibetanized societies and, in a sense, embodying the 'seeing through' of a person's conduct and motive. Second, the question of 'great attainment' revealed through supranormal powers, as the next section will demonstrate, became the subject of contention within the village as actions in his present life shaped others' perception of his manner of dying and the vehicle of his return. But before turning to this contested posthumous arena, it is important to further elucidate the rhythms of Gupha's life, to try to suspend one's notions about the workings of time and space, language and communication, even life and death in order to get a sense of his broader social existence.

An irregular tempo

Months later, I shared the details of the above conversation with Karma, a Nyingma lama, whose opinion about Gupha contrasted with that held by Sakya monks in the monastic college. It would be possible, according to Karma, for Gupha to have attained high levels of realization through the recitation of mantra without ever having studied Buddhist philosophy. Moreover, Karma thought the lama would have a propensity toward spiritual mastery by virtue of having received empowerments from his *tsawe lama* Dudjom Rinpoche and having devoted his life to retreat. A practitioner's principal or *tsawe* lama is critically important to their religious practice. Having appropriately received teachings and *wang* from a qualified teacher a practitioner may use the lama as an aid in their practice, eventually coming to realize that the dharma or *chö* 'is beyond the dichotomy of teacher and student, Buddha and ordinary human being' (Samuel 1993: 280). Tantric empowerments vary and from Gupha's narrative it is not clear as to what class of tantra he received instruction and initiation. However, public

initiation rituals into the lower classes of tantra are common throughout the Buddhist Himalaya and he would have probably received countless empowerments of this kind in his years of pilgrimage.

Dudjom Rinpoche (1904–1987) and his previous incarnation Dudjom Lingpa (1835–1904) were *tertön* (*gter ston*) or finders of concealed teachings known as *terma* (*gter ma*). As such, they are considered to be rebirths of Padmasambhava's disciples, who received the teachings from him in their former lives (Samuel 1993: 461). It is generally believed that these teachings of Padmasambhava were hidden by him in the mind-stream of various disciples 'to await discovery at an appropriate time' (Samuel 1993: 461).[9] Karma explained that, through devotion to Dudjom Rinpoche and Padmasambhava, the disciple can 'become realized, "*bang*" like that', quickly slapping his hands together in a loud clap, 'by the blessings of Padmasambhava alone and without studying philosophy. If one has the merit they could become liberated just by saying the mantra of Padmasambhava.' In the soteriological path of liberation through the senses, the devout practitioner can become liberated by reciting mantas, as no 'inner senses' are required (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 70).

Words and letters are pivotal to the religious practice of Tibetan Buddhists. Quintessential to Gupha's daily existence, their inscription lined the pages of texts, adorned prayer flags, prayer wheels, mani-stones and the iconography displayed in his home. These texts and grapholatry, even for the unlettered practitioner, can be seen to assume a life of their own (Ekvall 1964: 114). Viewed as sacred objects capable of transferring value, they are believed to contain the qualities of deities and buddhas and are revered as such.

Words and letters were not only looked upon or felt by Gupha, but also uttered. Year upon year, Gupha lived without the company of people, alone in his cave, reciting mantras till his voice became hoarse. These mantras are a medium of communication through which the practitioner forges and sustains relations with the lama and his tutelage of deities and as such, these utterances, in their Tibetan context, cannot be separated from a field of intersubjective relations with a variety of modes of being-in-the-world (cf. Jackson 1998: 9). The social universe of Tibetan Buddhists is dynamic: intersubjective engagements extend beyond communications between lamas and monks and the laity, taking place within a wider social universe that incorporates cosmological entities such as gods, goddesses, elemental nature spirits, hell beings, ghosts, enlightened beings and tantric deities. The Tibetan religious practitioner can ideally cross between human and divine worlds: 'subjectivity does not universally entail a notion of the subject or of selfhood as some skin-encapsulated, seamless monad possessed of conceptual unity and continuity' (Jackson 1998: 6). Sound is a medium that can permeate bodies, reverberations of sacred utterances extend delineations of space and time, making interconnections possible between human and divine beings.

The visual and auditory modes of language enable communication and exchange between beings through a production of affects rather than a search for meaning (cf. Wikan 1993: 193). These affects are considered to be particularly palpable in the transmission of *wang* from divine beings to human recipients in a

religious process described by some devotees as a general feeling of contentment or even blissfulness, sometimes accompanied by sensations of lightness or subtle vibrations felt both inside the body and on its surface. Individual practitioners also experienced gradients of these affects in their daily mantra recitation practice. Such affects could challenge one's sense of separation from others; the experiences generated by mantra recitation enabled people to have an interexperience of and with other divine persons and beings.

The instant bestowal of blessings from Padmasambhava and his treasure finders by gazing at their image or reciting their mantra cannot be understood through discursive measures (Tokarska-Bakir 2000). The foundation for divergent methods of practice, that is, the different approach between the linear and forward advance of scholarly monastics (gradualist) and the direct experience (simultaneist) of the saintly madman, have an impact on contrasting notions of time that are inextricably allied with the different schools of Buddhism. Gupha's identity did not appear bound by codes of moral conduct found in the vows and pledges of (*vinaya*) doctrine, nor was it ascribed to the causal progression from ignorance to enlightenment inherent in (*sutra*) scriptures. Rather, 'tantra' was the term loosely applied to denote his practice. The term 'tantra' or *gyud* (*rgyüd*) in Tibetan refers to a 'continuum' or 'thread' through time (Samuel 1993: 204). Practices are transmitted from the teacher to disciple and the aim is self-identification of the practitioner with various divine forms, which are inextricably linked to the historical Buddha. There is thus an historical precedence of tantric practitioners who reject 'commonly accepted norms of co-existence' (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 98) challenging any conventional understandings of spatio-temporality though their apparently nonsensical and disorderly experiences. As Samuel writes:

> Guru Rinpoch'e[10] and his constantly reincarnating disciples do not fit comfortably into a linear historical sequence, but there is no reason why they should. They are not part of a world based on such sequences.
>
> (1993: 299)

This sentiment echoes the depiction of spatio-temporality in Gupha's broken narrative. Spatially 'there is no place that has not been walked on by me' and temporality appears to be challenged in Gupha's contact with the present incarnation of the Karmapa. Gupha's reality is shaped by ways of perceiving time and space that cannot be mapped onto defined localities or chronological sequence. Chronology as a particular representation of time relates to notions of progress and development and holds sway in the more scholastic lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. For the Sakya, it is the ability to progress through one's philosophical education that enables the reasoning of reality needed before an experiential knowledge can effect realization. Where the monks enact dialogue and debate as methods in their gradual approach toward enlightenment, Gupha embodies a simultaneist style more akin to the sensual soteriology brought about by endless mantra or prayer chanting, looking upon images of deities and receiving *jinlab* from iconography and inscriptions rather than through a scriptural knowledge of their discursive content.

So distinct were the ways of thinking and being for Gupha and for the monastic brethren who lived in close proximity to the solitary practitioner's abode. Yet I do not want to overstate their differences. The disparate temporalities that interpattern the Tibetan lifecourse move through 'diverse currents' (Desjarlais 2003: 51). By no means are the gradualist and simultaneist notions of time mutually exclusive. The linearity of progress and development as monastics proceed through the stages of their accumulative degrees exist within a lineage of teachings arising from a non-designated 'primal time' or 'Great Time' of myth (Samuel 1993: 19). Such teachings come to fruition in the lives and life-stories of religious exemplars whose cyclic recurrence in Tibetan Buddhist history follows the blue-print of the Buddha in a chain of lives where different temporalities meet and coalesce. Whether it be the monastic scholar who reads the words and letters contained in philosophical treatise, or the saintly madman who shouts mantras from his forest cavern in the dark of night, both are 'temporal beings' (cf. Desjarlais 2003: 49), both believe in a continuum of lives and both experience the intermediate period when they are between death and rebirth, when they are in-between bodies.

Divided opinions

The irregular tempo of Gupha's biographical narrative, with its lack of sequential themes, appeared to some as an inconclusive story, a rambling, or inchoate spiel by an idiosyncratic and intoxicated recluse. The tenors and qualities of his unconventional modes of behaviour and discourse, which operated outside of the scholastic reasoning upheld by monks from Chöpheling, laid the foundations for his varied reputation. Until this point, the chapter has focused on the distinctions in ideology and praxis that were put on display in the everydayness of the monastery and the hermitage. I return now to the notion of biographical process for its analytic utility in examining how these differences became even more evident in the course of Gupha's death than in his preceding life. Tracing the extension and continuation of Gupha's life not through the usual material embodiments of relics and reincarnation that mark the signs of a saintly death as detailed in the previous chapter but through other posthumous activities, this section explores the variant meanings and values that shaped opinion, leading to different interpretations and experiences of the same events.

First, the explanations attributed to his decline varied. On the one hand, he was perceived as 'old', his body was 'tired' and his liver was 'weakening' from an overconsumption of alcohol; on the other, he was thought to be 'deciding' to die, 'choosing' not to eat or drink in a 'powerful' act of renunciation. These variations in opinion shaped two very different discussions that took place with monks from the Sakya lineage, highlighting the divergent persuasions between monks who had achieved degrees of philosophical knowledge and recognition and those who had not. Second, narratives of Gupha's actual death varied between participants. According to the local lay community and some village lamas, Gupha not only defied natural processes of deterioration associated with age, but also exerted extraordinary power by delaying decomposition after death, a characteristic

attributed to an ability to retain heat inside the body made possible through years of religious retreat. By contrast, the philosophically educated and qualified monastics claimed that Gupha died an ordinary death, denied his presence after demise and ascribed the quality of heat to external forces beyond Gupha's control. Gupha's unskilled years of retreat left him ill-equipped to demonstrate a power over death and, more dangerously, left his body unguarded and therefore open to manipulation from outside forces. Third, differences of opinion prevailed regarding Gupha's transmigration after death. When it looked as if Gupha had reappeared in a new body, the laity saw further evidence of his supranatural abilities. Some monks, however, remained circumspect, advancing claims of his attachment to worldly existence and thereby directly refuting the traits of renunciation and meditative ability, which were, for his followers, the foundations of an enlightened status.

Dying

When word spread through the village that Gupha was ill, a group of five monks embarked on a trek to visit him. Among this group, four were senior teachers in the college. The other was a younger monk visiting from the Sakya *gompa*, where he had been instructed in the execution of ritual but had not received the extensive philosophical training taught in the college. With perspiration pouring from our bodies and saturating our clothes, we climbed the mountainous terrain toward Gupha's abode. Inside his cave, a local married lama from the Nyingma tradition sat by his side.

Motionless and with eyes closed, Gupha was unresponsive to our arrival. Gen Panden, the teacher of the young Rinpoche, walked in first. 'Rinpoche, Rinpoche', he called out respectfully to Gupha as he stepped in nearer. Yeshe, a senior teacher, entered, followed by the monk from Sakya *gompa*. As there was little room inside, I remained outdoors with the others, watching as Yeshe drew upon his knowledge of Tibetan medicine to examine Gupha. Inching ever closer, he lowered his head over Gupha's tiny frame, listening to the workings of his respiration and heart. Gupha's unfastened coat revealed his bare chest. Struggling for air, his body made loud rumbling noises. When the sounds reached a crescendo, his passive demeanour abruptly changed, the sensation of pain directing his arm to his side as he rubbed the area with force. Afterwards, Yeshe delivered his diagnosis in a solemn tone. 'He is finding it very hard to breathe. It is like this', he demonstrated with long sounds of troubled inhalation, 'and then at the same time his stomach makes a noise like this', again demonstrating, shooting air out of his mouth to replicate the gurgle from within Gupha's body. Pointing to the area just above his own hipbone, he said, 'The noise is here.' Watching the gestures in the forlorn ambience of Gupha's bedside, a recovery seemed improbable. Yeshe continued, 'Gupha is old and tired. He has drunk a lot and eaten little. His liver has weakened. Too much alcohol is not good for the body.'

Later, we walked in a single file along the path returning toward the village. On the way, Yeshe told me that his mind was troubled after seeing Gupha and realizing he was sick and soon to die. Looking out over the valley, he continued:

> But this is life. It is suffering. We all die, everyone dies. Life is change. Impermanence. And there is in reality no 'I' to die. We think there is an 'I' but if we search we cannot find it. It is not our thoughts or our head, our arm, or our leg. No matter how hard we look we cannot find this 'I', nevertheless we believe in its existence and cherish it. Gupha will return. The three poisons of anger, attachment and ignorance will draw him back into another body and he will be reborn.

Yeshe made no mention of Gupha wilfully directing the process of his death. Gupha was subject to the ordinary laws of death and rebirth because he was an ordinary person who was 'old', whose body had become 'tired' and his liver 'weakened.' Unlike a reincarnate lama, who has power to direct his death and rebirth, Gupha, as an ordinary person, would die against his will. Just as a candle burns down to its wick, his present life would cease and he would not return through a conscious choice; in his next life, he would have no awareness or memory of his previous existence.

Reflecting on the ideas of Yeshe, my pace slowed until I was walking beside the monk from Sakya *gompa*. He initiated conversation about Gupha with ideas about his dying process that starkly contrasted those reflected by Yeshe moments before.

> Gupha is a practitioner and he has been in retreat for many years. I think he may have chosen to die and therefore not to eat and not to speak. I think he knows what is going on around him. A man there today told me that he ate two mouthfuls of noodles and then he moved around. So I think he could eat more if he wanted. He also said that the only words he says are Guru Rinpoche's mantra. If he can repeat this mantra he can say other things but he doesn't. He chooses not to speak like he chooses not to eat. This is renunciation. It means, 'Enough, I am going to go now.'

In contrast to Yeshe's description above, this account of Gupha's physical demise interpreted his tapered use of food, drink and speech in terms of an abstinence motivated by a quality of renunciation. In line with the great masters of Buddhist tradition, Gupha was equipped through years of meditation retreat to exert his power to influence and manipulate the processes of physical decline.

Death and memorialization

Unfortunately, I was in Darjeeling when Gupha died. I returned to Rimbick 2 weeks later and 1 week after his cremation, entering into an atmosphere of divided opinion, where conflicting reports about his actual death and the revelation of his power circulated through the village. 'Power', the seventh category attributed to the saintly madman by Samuel (1993), was up for negotiation. Local lamas and laypersons believed he could retain heat in the body after death, demonstrating signs of a saintly mastery not dissimilar to that recounted in

the oral and written biographical accounts of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin. Monks from the Sakya college responded apprehensively to these claims. Asserting a contrary opinion, they believed the presence in his body was a malevolent manipulation described as 'rising corpse' or *rolang* (*ro langs*). The death of Gupha was a symbolic display of the variety of Tibetan Buddhist posthumous praxis. It is to this phase of Gupha's life-story that I now turn, exposing the divergent opinions and conflicting experiences ascribed to Gupha's death and return by the local community.

The remains of the funeral pyre were visible through lush, green foliage. Pine logs jutted out in a small clearing under an assemblage of vertical prayer flags. The mammoth precipice towered over the setting as if surveying the scene: local villagers were deconstructing Gupha's abode, the entirety of the veranda had been displaced, its wooden planks broken up and cast into growing mounds of waste. I walked up a few treacherous stairs, improvisations used from waste materials, and entered the remnants of Gupha's home.

In preparation for ritual proceedings two local Nyingma lamas assisted laymen in the arrangement of butter lamps, carefully rolling the cotton wicks and placing them inside the oily contents, before aligning them with ceremonial offerings of fruit, rice, water, flower petals and incense. These lamas had executed the cremation, constructing the bell-shaped funeral oven in which the body was enclosed, and had since returned to perform rituals on the grounds of Gupha's home and adjacent funeral pyre. That such an edifice was made to contain the body designated Gupha's respected and honoured status as an adept practitioner. In Darjeeling, an ordinary person is cremated in the open, but a person attributed with supranormal qualities is cremated inside more elaborate funerary structures.[11] The demonstration of Gupha's spiritually advanced status was reflected among the monks and the laypeople I met in a common and established narrative: that after Gupha Rinpoche breathed his last breath his body did not begin to decompose. It retained warmth and on the third day began to perspire. 'He became increasingly hot and on his forehead there were beads of sweat. This shows that he was still in meditation', said the youngest lama, who paused from making candlewicks to share his own observations of Gupha's spiritual mastery:

> Because Rinpoche had been in retreat for so many years he achieved high levels of realization and for this the local people have a lot of respect and devotion to him. This is why they are working to make a memorial here. All of Rinpoche's things will be placed inside this memorial and sealed inside. His followers will be able to come here to remember him and to make offerings.

As he spoke, an old man entered the room to pay his respects to Gupha. Walking into the centre of the room, he faced the altar and prostrated three times towards a photograph of the deceased lama set amongst other iconography and religious ornaments. The man then sat beside a large prayer wheel hidden in the dim light, turning it regularly. Its chime entwined with the intermittent mantra of '*om mani padme hung*', sung by a younger local male who continued to assemble and

attend to the altar of butter lamps. Listening to the lama's favourable comments about Gupha, the old man nodded before adding to his narrative:

> Yes, he was a great tantric practitioner, a renunciant, having given up worldly affairs and pleasures. He liked to drink. Some *ngagpas* are like this. They might consume alcohol but it does not mean that they are not realized. They might have a wife and sons, like Gupha Rinpoche before he was widowed. But without knowing the mind of another person we cannot assume they are not realized. He spent many years in this cave meditating day and night, reciting mantras.

Affirmations of Gupha's mastery were indicated in the opinions and behaviour of these local lamas from family homes and the laypeople in Rimbick who attended to the ritual services traditionally carried out after the death of a lama. That Gupha retained a heat inside the body, displayed through perspiration, 3 days after his apparent physical death was a sign of his enduring meditation. This appearance of heat was attributed to conscious presence, a power of the mind over the body defying the 'natural' process of death. Gupha had revealed himself as a great practitioner through the powers he displayed at the time of his decease. These narratives that circulated among his followers shaped the story of a religious being worthy of memorialization.

Gupha's position as widower and father did not compromise his status as Rinpoche among these married lamas and lay followers: nor did his fondness for locally brewed wine, a common offering presented by local villagers. What finds expression in the above narrative is an often accepted position ascribed to non-doctrinal religious practitioners, presenting 'a clear indication of the tolerance of the Tibetan religious environment towards unconventional modes of Buddhist practice' (Samuel 1993: 291).

The rising corpse

Assertions of Gupha's spiritual achievements, of course, were not uniform. The divergent narrative of Sakya monks underscored that Gupha was unsuited to extensive retreat. Returning to the college I met Sangay, one of the resident monks. Sangay informed me that a ritual was being performed for Gupha within the monastic college at the request of the local community. These rituals, which were to ease the transition of Gupha's rebirth, were to continue for 7 weeks, and today marked the second of those weeks. We walked onto the highest rooftop as the chant of monks and their accompanying musical auxiliary filled the air, dancing through rooms, corridors and the local village. Sangay had accompanied some monks from the college, joining local villagers who wandered up the steep hill to pay their respects to the deceased lama:

> They kept the body for 1 week. The locals are saying that he was in *thugdam* for 3 days after death. Actually only great masters are able to perform this but the local people have a lot of faith in Gupha. When I went to see the body

there were many other people there. All the villagers went to see his body and offer a *katag* to him. At that time there was little smell and his body had swollen up and to a very large size. His face was so big, all swollen. There were beads of sweat on his face and he looked like he was about to get up.

Afterwards when I thought of him I could still see the image of his face in my mind. He looked scary, dangerous even. I have been back up there once since the body was burnt and even at that time I was a little frightened because I remembered his large swollen face. But we cannot talk like this to the people here. Because of their great belief in Gupha many people think he is a master with a lot of power and they will become very upset if they hear people talk about how scary he looked after he died, that he looked as though he was about to get up. I cannot say definitely whether or not he was in meditation or whether or not he became liberated. But there has not been any report of *ringsel* in the funeral pyre. When we find *ringsel* it means the lama had attained enlightenment. But there was no *ringsel* in Gupha's ashes. I doubt he was realized . . .

Still the locals have a lot of faith in Gupha, they are saying he was in *thugdam*. But really for this to have occurred he would have had to be left alone, untouched.[12] It was not like this though. So many people came, so many people wanted to see him. He was pulled up so that people could see his face but he had actually died lying down. The local people lifted him into an upright seated position so that they could see him and they left the body like this for one week. I was there on the third day and on that day his body was big and hot, there was some sweat and it was trailing down his swollen face . . . So, his *body* got very, *very* hot on the third day . . .

Pronouncing his words slowly, Sangay wore a fearful expression, communicating alarm, the scene with the dead body, swollen face and beads of sweat. I remained confused about the whole scenario. Previous narratives attributed post-mortem activity to a lama's power, to his ability to manipulate the vital energy of the body and transcend normal process of death and rebirth. Reading my perplexed expression, Sangay attempted to clarify the situation, adding, 'They perform rituals there during the day but not at night. I don't think anyone is there at night. They are all too scared.' When I asked what people might be scared of he replied, 'Scared of Gupha, of course!' before walking away bemused by my misunderstanding.

Sangay had previously told me that Gupha 'had no real knowledge on how to meditate' because he had not been trained in meditation:

He had not received teachings about how to meditate properly. I've visited Gupha many times. On occasion I'd stayed with him for more than two hours, speaking to him about Buddhism and meditation. So I've asked him what he does, how he meditates and he told me he does some common mantras, like Guru Rinpoche and Chenrezig mantra, that is it. I was surprised; I thought he was great lama, but he is an ordinary layman. After

> this conversation I knew he had not received any complete teachings would not be able to meditate seriously. You have to receive teachings from your guru and study, study a whole religious text, a *pecha* (*dpe cha*). You do not have to learn every *pecha* but you need to know one. In each pecha there is everything you need to know to be a good practitioner but you must choose one, study it and know it completely. Then when you sit down to meditate you know what to do.

In the evening, I sat with Khenpo.la and Yeshe over dinner. Particularly interested in their interpretation of the bodily heat emitted by Gupha, I asked if they had seen the body before its cremation. 'Ah, Gupha!' the abbot exclaimed in his characteristically jovial tone, 'I did not see. Many saw him but I don't know. It's very difficult to tell. Cannot know about this.' He rattled on as he continued to eat the meal placed before him, 'I hear that his body was warm 3 days after he died.' I pushed forward, hoping to hear more about the situation. 'Yes, this is true', replied Yeshe, before continuing, 'I heard about it but others saw it. It is true that his body was sweating and very hot 3 days after he died.' Yeshe's comments were quickly followed by an excited interrogation by Khenpo.la: 'Some problem, scared? Maybe you won't go walking in the forest now. Three days after and then he comes back. Gupha returns from the dead! Scared?' He laughed as he swung his arms about making strange disjointed motions of the walking dead. When I asked for an explanation, Khenpo.la continued, 'Gupha's mind is gone, gone. All confused, he doesn't know what is going on but he is out of the body.' He threw his arms into the air again, this time to demonstrate the departed consciousness of Gupha. Continuing with his explanation, Khenpo.la said, 'No mind in the body but then 3 days later another mind, new mind, not Gupha's mind inside. Very dangerous. This is why we should practise for our death. It is very important to have a clear mind when we die, otherwise there are problems.' As if sensing my confusion, Yeshe attempted to clarify the Khenpo's comments: 'It's like this – one person dies, then when they are gone another person comes inside the body and they get up move around like this.' He demonstrated with actions that mimicked those of Khenpo.la moments before.

The lamas' ideas regarding the elevated position of scriptural understanding were forged and legitimated in the historic doctrine of their Sakya tradition. Their assertions can be viewed as the heritage of Sakya Pandita's conviction that the practitioner should have a scholastic basis derived from a pure and unmixed lineage. That Gupha had a lack of authorization to practice was, according to this rationale, further confirmed by the behaviours he exhibited after death. For Yeshe, these were the signs of an unsaintly death, representing the dangers that can meet the untrained practitioner. Disembodied, the mind of Gupha had been propelled by the forces of karma, unable to return to the physical body. The appearance of life in the corpse of Gupha was not therefore considered to be the continuation of his mind-stream but the malevolent spiritual forces of another. Such spiritual attacks can animate the cadaver in the phenomenon of the 'rising corpse'.

In Tibetan language, '*ro*' is the common word for corpse and '*langs*' is the verb meaning 'to rise'. The Tibetan *rolang* (*ro langs*) then signifies a cadaver's return from the dead.[13] Divided into two types, the corpse that is animated by a necromancer (Berglie 1982: 37–8; Loseries-Leick 2008: 39) is distinct from its activation by an evil spirit (Wylie 1964) or the *namshe* (*rnam shes*) of the deceased, which is the consciousness that can return to the body on account of not having acknowledged that death has taken place (Gouin 2010: 15). In the latter situation, which is relevant to the case of Gupha, the Tibetan sources do not indicate a clear agreement as to who or what exactly animates the corpse (Cuevas 2008: 98); the *rolang* can result from the *gek* (*bgegs)* and *dön* (*gdon*), categories of malevolent spirits (Wylie 1964: 73) that enter and activate corpses in the same manner as Berglie's *dre* (*'dre*), that 'enter corpses of men who in the hour of death had not been able to divert their thoughts from family and friends' (Berglie 1982: 41).[14] As Childs pointed out:

> [T]he interlude between death and the disposal of bodily remains is an especially perilous stretch of time. When ritual protocol is not adhered to, corpses have been known to rise from the dead. These rolangs are a source of dread throughout Tibet and the Himalayas.
>
> (2004: 159)

In the case of Gupha the ritual protocol that was not adhered to was the retreat he undertook during life; a uninformed practice that left him ill-equipped to display mastery at the precarious time of death. The opinion that Gupha's years of untrained retreat left his body vulnerable to a malevolent possession from outside forces was substantiated in each of the narrations of Khenpo.la, Yeshe and Sangay. Sangay had been overtly sceptical of local opinions regarding Gupha's level of realization. The heat displayed by his body was taken to be a cause of concern that he might rise up like the dangerous animated corpses. In these accounts, the physical phenomena associated with his death are not seen as saintly; on the contrary, they are conceived as a source of terror. There was none of the *ringsel* that accompanies the death of realized beings, and the indicators of *rolang* prevented his death from being seen as anything near ordinary. As Ramble notes (1982: 346), it is commonly believed that the body of a very high-status or incarnate lama will not become a *rolang*. In contrast, the body of Gupha was not deemed holy and the area in which he inhabited was now declared dangerous and susceptible to the attack of unknown forces. In a transgression of bodily boundaries, Gupha's previously inert body had been seized by a potentially threatening force, causing the monastics to treat the hermitage with caution.

Return from the dead

Divergent opinions regarding Gupha's spiritual attainment resurfaced when he purportedly transmigrated into another body. Two months after the *ngagpa's*

death word reached the college that he had returned to Rimbick in the body of a woman from a nearby town. Monastics and laity agreed that he had arrived by car and walked uphill from the main road toward his hermitage telling everyone he passed that he was Gupha and had returned to retrieve his possessions. What varied in the accounts was the meaning ascribed to the event. His return served as the signifying feature of a power over death, shaping patrons' conviction of his spiritual mastery. However, his assuming of the body of another person undermined his already dubious religious status in the accounts of monastics.

In the monastery, Gupha's return was attributed to a general misunderstanding of the dharma, evident through an attachment to worldly possessions. I heard stories of how his high regard for alcohol and money led him to accumulate the wealth of offerings that he received from his patrons. Lay reports affirmed that Gupha amassed a substantial sum of money; piles of rupee notes, the donations he had received over the years, were neatly organized underneath the area where he sat in practice. His local patrons had used the money to pay for the lama's mortuary rituals so it never made it into the hands of the woman. This money, which eventually circulated into the monasteries, was a cause of concern. Some monks frowned upon Gupha's accumulated wealth, believing that he should have spent this money on subsistence items or offered it to those who provided for him. As Gupha had used his own money to support his day-to-day living, Yeshe and Sangay agreed that his accumulation of wealth was a sign of his attachment to worldly existence and the cause that impelled him to return and make a claim on his belongings. Gupha thus lived and died with tremendous attachment to worldly things. In a state of attachment to the world, it would be impossible to attain liberation, no matter how many years of retreat one accomplished.

Curious as to other local perspectives on the event of Gupha's return, I met with Pemba, a Rimbick resident who lived in a wooden cabin on the uphill path that led toward Gupha's cave. Inside, Pemba, Yeshe and I sipped from cups of warm tea, protected from a cascading downpour of monsoonal rain. Initiating conversation with Pemba, Yeshe asked about the return of Gupha. With a contented expression, the man replied that he had witnessed the arrival of Gupha in the body of this fortunate young woman. He told Yeshe that he and others were very fortunate to meet with Gupha. It was a blessing that their Rinpoche had returned in another body, and a sign of the powers yielded by a great master. The arrival of Gupha in the body of a woman was not problematized in the account of Pemba. 'It is very good for all of us here in the village. We are fortunate to receive this great blessing of Rinpoche's return. It is a clear sign that he is a great master.' The material interests of the woman did not dissuade Pemba from his belief, nor did he appear sceptical of the woman's claims. On the contrary, the event affirmed his devotion and shaped his belief in Gupha's mastery over death. That Gupha was able to return, albeit in the body of another, marked him out as an exemplary being. The woman represented the deceased lama and his return through her transferred value to his patrons. However, the 'return' was perceived differently depending on the social and 'interpersonal context of the activity in question, the lineup of the participants and the processes by which they establish[ed] meaning,

and create[d], affirm[ed], or legitimate[d] their position and privileges' (Tambiah 1984: 132).

Shaped by culturally determined perceptions that relate discipline and textual scholarship with the graduated path of realization, the monks considered Gupha's return to the village to collect his money and possessions to be yet another demonstration of his untamed, uncontrolled and self-interested manner. Just as another entity had seized his body after death, Gupha's mind had returned in order to temporarily reign in the body of another. Motivations of self-indulgence were, however, airbrushed out of the narratives of his followers, who felt blessed to have witnessed the return of the widely recognized village recluse.

Although Buddhist doctrine alerts monks to the moral dangers that can accompany the acceptance of offerings, it is common for monasteries to graciously accept the donations bestowed upon them from a devout laity. With increasing patronage from abroad, the incarnate lamas and the monastic institutions that they often head can accumulate vast sums of wealth, becoming, in some cases, multi-million-dollar estates. The monks were not calling into question the practice of a religious adept receiving the offerings of followers; rather they were, or so it seemed, expressing circumspection against the behaviour of a charlatan. Monks were sanctioned to accept the offerings bestowed upon them by virtue of their lineage connections and the vows of their monastic tradition, but, the non-conventional behaviour and mixed religious persuasions of Gupha made his religious status questionable and his acceptance of offerings untenable. In order to accrue merit, the *ngagpa* or lay practitioner should make offerings to those of higher spiritual stature and should not accumulate the wealth of others through self-interest. So, although the accumulation of donations from the charity of patrons is not unusual in Buddhist traditions and the monasteries survive on it, that Gupha had not used his own money to support his day to day living signalled to the Sakya monks the very attachment of Gupha to worldly existence, which impelled him to return and make a claim on his belongings. The lay and monastic community thus aligned and organized the hierarchy of their social worlds in different ways. However, for the laity the amassed wealth of Gupha did not deride his status; their faith assured that all posthumous activity was yet another display of Gupha's power.

The different meanings and values ascribed to the event were generated and sustained by varying culturally determined classifications or soteriological categories. However, there was one feature that monks and laypersons unanimously agreed upon: the fact that Gupha had returned. The continuation and extension of a person's life history beyond a singular bodily form and lifespan represents a shared understanding of 'life' and its possibilities in Tibetan Buddhist culture. The collective belief in rebirth meant that monks from all lineages and the local lay population held in common a belief that their current lives were one among a continuum of lives that extended back into the past and would continue to course through the future. When the mind or consciousness (*sem*) leaves the body at the time of death, it experiences a liminal period or *bardo* (*bar do*) meaning 'between' (Desjarlais 2003: 182). In this intermediary phase that occurs

in-between death and rebirth, the deceased is generally understood to wander around in an incorporeal state for up to a period of 49 days, during which time the person, unless he or she has obtained liberation from the cycle of *samsara* (Skt.), finds a new rebirth. In this period of betweenness there is no 'stable body' to secure the *sem* (Desjarlais 2003: 213) and the person stuck between lives can cling to other people or objects causing trouble to the living due to their detrimental states of attachment, much like a ghost (Desjarlais 2003: 303). Longing and attachment were, for some, considered to be the cause propelling Gupha's reappearance in Rimbick. His disembodied *sem* had remained in the *bardo* eventually 'possessing' the body of a local woman in order to return to the village and reclaim his things. Others told a different story, recounting how the return of Gupha brought fortune to the woman, who, rather than being seized, assumed or possessed, was considered to be blessed by the liberated presence of a rinpoche.

Possession and reincarnation

In *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas* (1976), one of the first edited compilations on the subject of possession in the region, the term is defined 'as an altered state of consciousness on the part of an individual as a result of what is perceived or believed to be the incorporation of an alien form with vital and spiritual attributes' (Jones 1976: 1). As the editors state, there is no clear-cut definition for the term; however this broad approximation could include the transmigration of Gupha's *sem* into the body of a local woman who temporarily experienced an 'altered state of consciousness' through the incorporation of an 'alien form'. Indeed, within the Tibetan doctrine, there are examples of the transference of consciousness from one body to another in the practices known as *phowa* (*'pho ba*). *Phowa* often refers to the 'transference' that can occur at the time of death, enabling consciousness to move up through the chakras and out of an opening at the crown of the head (developed at the time of the initiation, or through subsequent religious training) and often into the realm of the Buddha Amitabha (Kapstein 1998; Mumford 1989: 198). In the *phowa* traditions of the Six Yogas of Naropa, there is a practice of 'Foreceful Projection into another Residence' (*rten can du 'pho ba*), in which the transferred consciousness takes hold in another physical body. The purpose here is to obtain a more suitable body for bringing about benefit to other living beings. Once such a form is acquired through control of the subtle energies and consciousness, the previous physical body can be discarded (Mullin 1996: 215–9) while the re-embodied *phowa* practitioner lives on. The question of whether the particular transference of Gupha's consciousness into another physical body was a result of a form of *phowa* was not raised to me by any of the monks in the monastery or surrounding vicinity. Nor was it something that I ever heard posited by lay followers of Gupha Rinpoche, though given the nature of the tantric roots of this particular *phowa* practice and its prerequisite initiations, its details would generally be unknown to the local lay population.

Describing what happens when a living person is taken over by a disembodied force, Sangay informed me that the mind or consciousness of the woman would

become sedate as if unconscious when the mind of Gupha entered her and afterward she would be incognizant of the event. Even when he departed and she regained consciousness, she would not remember what had happened. Forms of spirit possession such as this are not uncommon in the Darjeeling region. Occurring more often among women than men and particularly among women of lower castes, the unmarried and the widowed, the seemingly spontaneous possession of the person occurs initially in an uncontrolled environment but can over time become a manipulated, controlled and ritualized occurrence (Jones 1976: 9). This account of possession could be correlated with the 'peripheral spirit possession' or 'uncontrolled spirit possession' classified first by Lewis (1971) and later by Jones (1976). Functionally apposite to the powerless, downtrodden and outcaste, spirit possession provides an approved means for social protest among peripheral classes of people in the Himalayan region (Jones 1976: 8–9). But the 'non-controlled' and 'spontaneous' character of the local woman's possession is not only functionally aligned. Locals perceived this as a phenomenological reality, her body had become seized and her mind disengaged as she become 'possessed' by a re-embodiment of a temporarily disembodied force, Gupha's *sem*, remade in flesh.

Narrowing the divide between various and distinct forms of Buddhist practitioner, anthropologists have aligned spirit possession with the tradition of reincarnate lamas (Aziz 1976; Paul 1976; Ortner 1995). The reincarnate lama, according to this interpretation, is possessed throughout a lifetime or serial lifetimes by a tutelary deity or the spiritually elevated deceased, whereas the shaman is occasionally possessed by the spirit that assumes the body (Aziz 1976: 347, see also Jones 1976: 3). Distinguishing 'between the person and the incarnate deity who are both manifest in the same body', possession, according to Aziz (1976: 357), takes hold when a reincarnating lama enters into the body of a child. Despite strong criticisms of this interpretation (Fürer-Haimendorf 1977–1978), Ortner (1995) used the claim to deconstruct the decline in Sherpa shamanism and its entailing practice of spirit possession, which she had previously attributed to the political and economic growth of monastic institutions (Ortner 1989). Aligning spirit possession with reincarnate lamas, she argued that, 'it may not be going too far to say that shamanism is, after all, alive and well among the Sherpas' (1995: 382).

Ironically, the argument that the reincarnate lama is 'possessed' created further binary divisions despite its analytic utility to deconstruct the divide between different categories of practitioner. Aziz's argument has been strongly criticized for supposing that 'a reincarnate lama is not even ideally identical with the personage as whose reincarnation he is commonly accepted, but is only the vehicle for a deity previously attached to his predecessor' (Fürer-Haimendorf 1977–1978: 729). Aligning spirit possession and the phenomenon of reincarnation belies Tibetan understandings that the incarnation of a deceased lama is the continuation and extension of the personage of former lives and thus essentially unlike the figure 'possessed by a spirit alien to his own self' (Fürer-Haimendorf 1977–1978: 728). Fürer-Haimendorf (1977–1978: 728) thus concludes his critique by stating that the *tulku* tradition is 'a phenomenon *sui generis*' and qualitatively distinct from spirit possession.

While cultural traditions in Tibetanized societies share some underlying features, the distinctive elements of different traditions should not be overlooked or the characteristics of a particular cultural phenomenon appropriated to align with the conceptual or practical features of another. We can better understand any parallels between the return of Gupha and the rebirth of the incarnate lama not in terms of equivalence, but rather as distinctive extensions of the biographical process. What is shared in the varied accounts and expressions of each of these phenomena is the evolution of the continued presence of the deceased in varied forms. The life-story of Gupha does not end with his death. Whether conceived in terms of 'spiritual mastery' or 'spiritual possession', his demise was characterized as a transmigration, a movement in-between bodies, an extension through time and through space qualitatively different from the return of incarnate lamas or *tulkus*, but nonetheless a continuation of his presence.

Maintaining plurality

The diversity of Buddhist practitioners in the frontier regions of the Himalayas embrace multiple and sometimes conflicting cultural categories through which they come to conceptualize and experience their own bodies and minds and the bodies and minds of others, affecting categories of time and space and of life and death. The various opinions held by Gupha's patrons and an elite monastic faction reveals this variation of knowledge systems in Tibetanized societies. The contrasting emphasis on theory and practice carries its own long lineage of contest in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. Inter-lineage debates continue to be expressed through the discourse and practice of present generations, effectively shaping local perceptions of a lama's life, death and return. The systems of taxonomy that carve up the Tibetan Buddhist social world are multiple and complex. Different lineages posit their own criteria for what is appropriate or virtuous behaviour, creating different types of social organization, patterns of thought and traditions of religious practice. This chapter, in describing the disparate cultural settings of Gupha and the scholastic institution of ordained monks, has demonstrated how categories of Buddhist perception and praxis are maintained over time, patterned in a contemporary milieu and reproduced through the continuation and extension of a lama's life course.

Notes

1 On occasion, monks in the college criticized local non-celibate lamas, telling me that they did house rituals only to make some money before returning to their families to drink alcohol. In my experience, there was a certain ambivalence regarding the title and status of robed Nyingma practitioners who were married and living family lives. In some cases, their identification as 'lama' was affirmed, but at other times this position was denied. In Darjeeling, it was common for laypeople to refer to all robed persons no matter the age or gradation as 'lama'. See Roger Jackson (1997: 273) on the lay status of monks in the Nyingma tradition. See Desjarlais (2003: 70), Paul (1976: 149), Ortner (1995: 380–1) for ethnographic accounts of the tensions and contradictions between different types of Tibetan Buddhist practitioner.

2 Samuel's *Civilized Shamans* (1993) was criticized for his use of the term 'shamanic' to characterize tantra and tantric practitioners (Gibson 1995: 285); however, it should be noted that Samuel himself (1993: 7–8) was not tied to the terms 'shamanic' or 'clerical' and saw them as 'no more than conceptual tools' and not as definitive classifications.
3 Sakya Pandita and his followers criticized Gampopa on account of his conflating the different systems of Dzogchen and Mahamudra (Jackson 1994: 29–30) and his articulation of a third system of the Great Seal outside of sutra and tantra (Jackson 1994: 25–8).
4 Khenpo is the Tibetan title to denote an abbot. The 'la' is the honorific suffix used at the end of the title.
5 On monastic regulations, see Cabezón (1997: 335–51).
6 Emptiness or *tong pa nyi* (*stong pa nyid*) refers to the condition in which all phenomena, including self, are empty of inherent existence, whereby nothing exists in its own right, objectively, independent of any other phenomenon.
7 These attributes of saintly madmen are cited in Samuel (1993: 303). See Ardussi and Epstein (1978: 332–3) for their elaboration on these qualities with reference to particular Tibetan tantric practitioners.
8 The present Seventeenth Karmapa Orgyen Trinley Dorje is a refugee in India with limited autonomy to travel. In his current incarnation, he has never been to Rumtek monastery in Sikkim, which is his seat in exile, nor has he travelled to Rimbick. See Brown (2004) for a sympathetic account of his situation.
9 Hidden teachings have been discovered by *tertön* in all lineages, but they are a particular speciality in the Nyingma tradition. On the controversies and allegations of fraud against these figures, see Samuel (1993: 297–9) and Martin (1994: 279–81).
10 Guru Rinpoch'e is a Tibetan name for Padmasambhava.
11 It is important to note that Tibetan funeral practices are varied and that they change over time. Ramble (1982) discusses the variation of mortuary rituals according to age, sex, wealth and spiritual achievement in the ethnically Tibetan village of Lubra in South Mustang, Nepal. Asboe (1932) explores the disposal of the dead in Tibet and Gouin (2010) investigates 'Tibetan rituals of death' in a book of that title.
12 This corresponds with comments on the handling of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin's body in the previous chapter. See also Childs (2004: 146).
13 Noting the differences and similarities between the *rolang* and the *vetāla*, Walter (2004: 27) argues that the 'rising corpse' is not a 'native' Tibetan concept (2004: 18). He writes that the term *rolang* and the 'presumably original model for a "risen corpse" is explained from the Indic yogic traditions which go back (probably) at least to the early seventh century'. See also Cuevas (2008: 95–7) on this point. On comparative insights on corpse resurrection, entering or 'yoking' other beings and the permeability of consciousness in Indian yogic traditions, see White (2009).
14 See Cuevas (2008: 99–103) for a detailed discussion on the physiology of possession and the categories of spirit that possess corpses.

4 Embodying the past in the present

Gelongma Palmo

In a Tibetan Buddhist ritual known as *nyungne,* participants use their bodies to re-enact the devotional fasting practice of Gelongma Palmo. This historical nun purportedly transformed her leprous figure into the cause for her liberation. Embodying her exemplary deeds by performing actions encoded in a biography and ritual text, practitioners' engage with other participants and the spiritual others who are venerated in the course of the ritual. Exploring *nyungne* as a form of embodied remembrance through which practitioners evoke the presence of a deceased figure, I argue for the centrality of a sentient understanding, rather than a symbolic analysis, of the ritual. In this chapter, I draw attention to how *nyungne* practitioners identify with this historical figure as they re-perform the ritual aspects of her life-story in and through their own bodies.

Although the existence of Gelongma Palmo has not been verified, she is often depicted as an eleventh-century Kashmiri nun who later became Tibetanized through the promulgation of her fasting practice among Tibetan Buddhist lineage descendants. Today, Gelongma Palmo is an exemplary being among Tibetan Buddhists, who claim she cured herself of leprosy through vows of fasting and silence, effectively transforming her suffering into the cause for liberation. Following a prescribed series of rites as inscribed in her hagiography and ritual manual, the *chöga* (*cho ga*), *nyungne* practitioners memorialize her transformation through their own bodies. Previous scholarship (Dargyay 1982; Gutschow 1999, 2004; Fürer-Haimendorf 1964; Mumford 1989; Ortner 1978) has tended to focus on the *nyungne* ritual and its significance amongst participants as 'disembodied from the story of its founder in the texts' (Vargas 2003: 25).[1] Further, these presentations are also disembodied from the nuanced ways that Gelongma Palmo, as an emanation of the popular Tibetan deity Chenrezig, permeates the bodily boundaries of *nyungne* practitioners.

This chapter will first review previous scholarship before turning to an account of my arrival at the *nyungne* setting. Ethnography is then combined with textual representation in hagiographical depictions of Chenrezig and Gelongma Palmo, the figures who assume prominence in the devotional practice. Finally, commemorative acts of body, speech and mind are explored as vehicles that ritually empower the bodies of *nyungne* participants and carry Gelongma Palmo from the past into the present. In investigating the practice, attention is paid to the ways in

which ritual prescriptives articulate with creative experience as participants modify ritual structure (cf. Jackson 1989: 37).

Previous scholarship: locating Gelongma Palmo

Neglected in earlier anthropological scholarship on the *nyungne* rituals, Gelongma Palmo is unmentioned in the work of Dargyay (1982) and Mumford (1989) and appears only as a tangential character in Gutschow (1999) and Ortner (1978: 51; 1989: 205). However, a lengthier version of her biography is attached as an appendix in a later publication of Ortner (1999: 297–305). Contrasting earlier structural–functionalist analyses of Sherpa society (Fürer-Haimendorf 1964), Ortner (1978) took an interpretive approach to Sherpa ritual including *nyungne*, exploring its social significance as an expression of social problems inherent in marriage, family and old age for Sherpas in the Solu Region of Nepal. In Ortner's analysis, the *nyungne* ritual becomes a means through which she can establish how the structures of Sherpa society work. Assuming societal conflict (rather than harmony) from the outset, she focuses on the familial dissonance that emerges for parents when their children marry and claims that the *nyungne* ritual of renunciation and fasting prepares parents for aging and becoming childless. The family unit is broken when a child marries; a son leaves his parental home, withdraws his labour from his father and receives land and moveable property to establish his own family unit; a daughter is no longer tied to their estate and a dowry is provided for her hand in marriage (1978: 45). For her Sherpa informants, late-adulthood is a time when children depart from their parental home, property and wealth are reduced, health degenerates and the ability to work declines. Thus, in the process of aging, the Sherpa experience a marked degree of social and economic loss.

Drawing parallels between this experience and the series of ascetic rites observed in *nyungne*, Ortner presents the fasting ritual as a symbolic performance of these societal problems. In the preliminary stage of the ritual, men and women are separated from their everyday routines and segregated from society in the confines of the temple. Removed from everyday social intercourse, participants renounce their ordinary dress and behaviour for more modest clothes and actions. The power structures of the household are no longer relevant, sexual activity is suspended and people consume a minimal, ascetic diet. Reintegration occurs with the ritual conclusion when a feast marks the villagers' reintegration of its older members who are now more prepared for the loss of status that will come in the future:

> In real life, as one gets old and one's children marry away; as one's property disperses bit by bit with each of their marriages; as one's physical powers, including one's sexuality, wane; and as the social structural realities of lay life are such that in fact one is not taken care of by one's children but is left to fend for oneself – as all of these things inexorably develop, the *Nyungne* observance as a microcosm of the entire ascetic ethic and practice provides a positive structure of accommodation to this process.
>
> (Ortner 1978: 52)

In Ortner's analysis, younger people are less likely to engage in the individualist spiritual pursuits of *nyungne* with its simulacrum of celibate monasticism; it is the older generation of Sherpas who participate in the ritual. Her older informants assume a monastic lifestyle to accumulate merit because their ascetic behaviour and devotional practices would negate the sins of past wrongdoings (1978: 35). She interprets the cosmological relations that participants forge with the deity Chenrezig as substitutive of the declining parental ties of the aging Sherpa. Social attitudes to familial connections take precedence in her analysis; *nyungne* is presented as an expression of and resolution to societal and family dissonance as Ortner delves beyond local perceptions in a symbolic analysis that reveals the latent functions of the ritual, an approach for which she has been notably criticized (Goldstein 1980: 217).

In presenting a participant-observation perspective on the ritual, Gutschow (1999) investigates the relationships between gender, power and economics in Zangskar, India, harnessing Victor Turner's notion of liminality to demonstrate a coalescence of structure and communitas in the *nyungne* rite. Her interpretation reveals how *nyungne* involves liminal attributes where participants are stripped of differentiating properties like status, age, gender or rank. At the same time as these structures become temporarily dissolved, however, she notes how other hierarchical orders proliferate, such as the economic and pragmatic needs met by reciprocal arrangements between monastic institutions and their sponsors. In Gutschow's view, participants were more concerned with the efficacy of the rite in removing the accumulated stock of negative karma in order to achieve a better rebirth than they were in forging any intimate or spiritual connection with Gelongma Palmo.

Recognizing the absence of Gelongma Palmo in accounts of *nyungne* rituals, Vargas' work (2001, 2003, 2006) attends to the life of the nun through an analysis of ritual and hagiographic literature as well as ethnographic research. Vargas explores multiple versions of the biography and ritual manual along with their implementation during *nyungne* rites in several ethnographic settings. Her study thereby reveals the variations in biographies, ritual texts and their performance, demonstrating the plurality of the ritual within the different communities in which it is constructed. Themes of re-embodiment and transformation, which are situated within cultured concepts of illness and renunciation, are largely drawn out of the biographies themselves, leaving room for further ethnographic investigations. Her extensive translations and textual analysis pave the way for future research on one of the most popular nuns in the history of Tibetan Buddhist traditions. This chapter is a contribution to that work.

Setting the scene: karma, merit and rebirth

The Yiga Chöling Monastery in Ghoom organizes an annual *nyungne* fasting ritual during *saka dawa*, an auspicious period during the Tibetan calendar commemorating the birth, death and enlightenment of the Buddha. In May 2005, I joined the seven monks and one high-status lama who led participants in 16 days

of ritualized activity divided into eight pairs, where one day involved abstaining from food after midday and the second refraining from the consumption of all food and drink along with a vow of silence.[2] The majority of the participants remained in the temple for the 16 days; others arrived in the course of the ritual. Effectively each 2-day period involved 36 hours without food, drink or conversation. Segregated from their daily lives, all participants left their family homes and pursuits to live in the confined and austere local temple for up to 16 days of ritual purification. The monastery gates marked the junction of the local village and the ritual setting, defining the spatial parameters of a temporary asceticism. Assuming a monastic lifestyle, the physical hardships and suspension of their everyday status and identity formed a liminal space out of time with ordinary activities, where merit could be accumulated, sins could be atoned and a more positive future rebirth assured. The final day marked the conclusion of this *rite de passage* as participants were reintegrated into society with a ritual feast.

Sentient beings, according to Tibetan Buddhism, take rebirth over an infinite number of lifetimes in the six realms: as gods, demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings. Transmigration across realms depends on a being's actions and their consequences, or karma, the doctrine regarding principles of causality and their effect (Obeyesekere 2006: 1–2). Patterns of thought become manifest in outward phenomena, sedimenting the way we think and act out in the world (Jackson 1997: 274). These habitual tendencies reflect a causal chain maintained in the mental continuum, which continue through successive rebirths in cyclic existence (Jackson 1997: 274). To transcend transmigration and the karmically conditioned cycle of death and rebirth and consequently attain liberation from physical and mental suffering, Gelongma Palmo sought to eliminate her accumulated stock of negative karma. Using the *bodhisattva* Chenrezig as a meditation object, she performed physical, verbal and mental actions involving prostrations, fasting, mantra recitation and visual meditation. Participants believe that her actions and the devotion with which they were performed caused a karmic purification, eliminating sickness and leading to enlightenment. This belief, as the following examples will demonstrate, shapes *nyungne* practitioners' ideas about their own capacity to transform, to heal or to positively alter their future circumstances.

When I arrived at Yiga Chöling to participate in *nyungne*, Dragpa, a friend, participant and prominent monk therein told me:

> It is very good that you want to do *nyungne*. When you have no food, no water and no tea it is very difficult. You want to eat and you cannot eat. You want to drink and you cannot drink. You want to speak but you cannot speak. When you do so many prostrations it is difficult. But because of this sacrifice you will not get a lower rebirth as an animal or hell being. Because you do not eat or drink you will not have the greed that makes you take rebirth as a hungry ghost. Because you prostrate you will not get a lower rebirth. So it is important and beneficial for you to live in *nyungne*. It is difficult but it will stop you from taking a lesser birth in the realm of animals, hell beings or

> hungry ghosts. This was the practice of Gelongma Palmo; the practice which purified her karma, curing her of leprosy, leading to her enlightenment. Her *namtar* shows us how to accumulate merit, heal our bodies and transform suffering.

Importantly, these ideas are not uniform. A monk from another local monastery told me that people have a lot of confusion about the purpose of *nyungne*:

> Many people perform *nyungne* because they wrongly assume it will give them a good future birth but we cannot be certain. It depends upon a whole lot of calculations. It depends on how you have lived in this life and in all of your other lives. We cannot say what the future holds.

Nonetheless, it is common for the performer to see the value of the ritual lying in its ability to purify enough karma to positively affect one's present life and ensure a human rebirth (Gutschow 1999; March 1979; Ortner 1978). The conviction in *nyungne* as a purification ritual was often expressed through verbal statements, such as '*Nyungne* brings merit and with merit you will have a good life and a good rebirth' or, 'If you accumulate merit you will not be reborn as a hungry ghost or animal.'

Noting a distinction between pragmatic, karmic and bodhi orientations among Buddhist practitioners, Samuel (1993: 172) states that health and prosperity are pragmatic concerns for one's present life, contrasting with karmic matters related to future lives and the bodhi orientation to liberation from cyclic existence (1993: 172). Practically speaking, *nyungne* is observed because of the belief that it is a means to accumulate merit, positively transforming one's present circumstances and future lives. Merit, *sonam* (*bsod nams*), is an index of the virtuous deeds enacted by a person, contrasting with demerit or sin, *digpa* (*sdig pa*), the accumulation of unwholesome deeds, which can lead to an unfortunate rebirth. As Ortner states:

> One's relative amounts of merit and sin determine one's fate in one's next life: The more merit and the less demerit one has when one dies, the better the state one will be reborn to.
>
> (1978: 36)

Although pragmatic and karmic orientations are primary motivators for participants, a strong bodhi orientation is also apparent in the biography of Gelongma Palmo, the ritual manual and the meaning that practitioners ascribed to the ritual. From my own engagements and conversations with participants, these approaches sometimes overlapped and could not be neatly differentiated. In one conversation, Sangay, a well-educated businessman, told me that he was performing the rite for 6 days because he spent too much time getting stressed, eating the wrong food and drinking alcohol in the previous year. He jovially said that the practice might even repair his liver. By fasting, he would be unable to drink

alcohol and through prayer, he could undo some of the damage, or 'karmic debt', that had already been created.

> Six days of *nyungne* is a good action. It might purify the other 300 and something days of the year when I am engaged in bad. It's all about checks and balances, an investment in my future lives.
>
> Some great masters have practiced *nyungne* continuously for 3 years or more. If we could do that, who knows, maybe we too could gain enough merit to also become masters.

Sangay expressed the belief that his hedonistic lifestyle might lead him toward a negative future rebirth, however he also felt he could influence his future reincarnation. By refraining from food and drink he could detoxify his body as well as purify his karma and by following the example of Gelongma Palmo he could attain a good rebirth and perhaps even eventual release from the cycle of transmigration. Indeed, in the life-story of the ritual's founding nun, the three orientations meet and coalesce as she experiences pragmatic, karmic and bodhi benefits; ritual purification heals her leprous body and leads her to spiritual liberation.

Certainly, this man's motivation for *nyungne* deviates from the view of the scholarly lamas, who, at different times, stressed to me the importance of undertaking this practice, not for my own benefit, but as a dedication to the lives of all other sentient beings: 'Think about all other beings, think about the humans and creatures who are helpless and cannot pray, cannot think. It is for them that we do this. We pray not just for us but for everyone, for the whole world.' In his anthropological reflections on tantric ritual manuals and semi-literate officiants, Sihlé (2010: 47) writes that the 'more literate and learned informants typically tend to fall back on normative, text-based theological constructions' and that their exegeses 'are very often articulated independently from local, lived experiences'.

Literacy

Yiga Chöling Monastery belongs to the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. At the time of my fieldwork, the monastery housed only a handful of lamas, three of whom, including the abbot, belonged to the Nyingma tradition. Since the death of its previous abbot, Dhardo Rinpoche (1917–1990), the monastery, according to local rumour, experienced a crisis, with its lamas incapable of handling its day-to-day administration or financial affairs. Consequently, much of the accommodation remained in a state of disrepair and was nearly uninhabitable, and only a few lamas resided there on a permanent basis. Adding to the one fully ordained Gelug monk who lived in Yiga Chöling, seven religious specialists were called into the monastery to help conduct the *nyungne* rituals – six of these were Sherpa village lamas from the Nyingma tradition who lived in nearby homes, and the other was Geshe Gyurme Dorje from South India, the ritual's presiding Geshe (*dge bshes*), a respectful title denoting an ordained

religious scholar of advanced degree in the Gelug Tibetan Buddhist order. The religious texts used by the lamas and the Geshe throughout *nyungne* – a ritual manual and biography of Gelongma Palmo – are exogenous, having been produced outside the various religious communities (Sihlé 2010: 37). The classical Tibetan language in which these texts are composed was not comprehensible to the majority of lamas involved in executing the rituals. My research thus has parallels with Sihlé's (2010) work on the nuances of textuality in 'moderately literate' Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Unlike the learned Geshe and the educated Gelug monk, both native Tibetan speakers who had studied the written language from an early age, the other lamas had studied Tibetan as a second language through classes held in the monasteries. These Sherpa lamas were able to read the Tibetan script (but not necessarily comprehend the meaning of the words) and communicate in a basic, localized, colloquial Tibetan. Their basic literacy was in stark contrast to the elite education of the Gelug monks.

The other local participants had varying levels of ability in the Tibetan language and were, at best, only moderately literate in Tibetan. Although all could understand some colloquial Tibetan, only one, a Tibetan nun, had a basic education in written Tibetan, and although three ritual participants could read, the majority could not follow the Tibetan text. Translations of some textual material were made available in Nepali and a local Tibetan-speaking Nepali interpreter translated the Geshe's evening sermons to participants. Unable to speak Nepali myself, conversations with the participants were also interpreted through the local translator, with the exception of five informants – two male and three female, with whom all my conversations occurred in English. An educated lama provided me with English interpretations of the Tibetan discourse and text. Importantly, the ritual environment with its frequent vows of silence made it difficult to converse to all participants during the rites and, in the coming pages, I attempt to convey the varieties of communication and a sense of the non-verbal in the intersubjective engagements that transpired over the *nyungne* rites.

As elaborated on in the previous chapter, the tendency to typify Buddhist practitioners and practices in accordance with a two-tiered system of monastic/lay, elite/popular, clerical/shamanic and so on, is long entrenched in research on Tibetan Buddhism. This division reproduces a hierarchy that is evident in researchers' classification of Tibetan Buddhist ideology and praxis, with the scholarly side of the binary often represented and valued over and above common lay tradition. Accordingly, there exists a propensity among scholars to focus on traditional liturgical accounts over the everyday, embodied and sensual sphere of popular religious practice. Increasingly, recent scholars on Buddhist ritual argue that these 'elite versus popular models, however they are articulated, do not sufficiently recognize the variety and relativity of positions' (Sihlé 2010). As Cuevas (2008: 8) rightly asserts, 'there are certain sociological distortions created by dichotomizing Tibetan Buddhism and religious practitioners [and monasteries] in this way' because such rigid differences do not exist 'at the ground level of day-to-day life'. Since localized and nuanced ethnographic studies are necessary

if we are to meet the call from Buddhist scholars for culturally relevant investigations of ritual that take into account the variety of perspectives and understandings in any given local social order, I turn now to the shared meanings, practices and challenges between varying modes of Buddhism in this particular *nyungne* context.

The sacred repetition of hagiography

In Tibetan Buddhist tradition the life-stories of spiritually realized beings are both commemorative and didactic (Schaeffer 2004: 6), memorializing the religious lives of individuals and reproducing a socio-religious ideal. The lives of *bodhisattvas* such as Chenrezig and Gelongma Palmo re-present a model of the individual concerned by the condition of the world and the sufferings of sentient beings therein. These individuals renounce attachment to worldly existence, defiantly pursue religious lives, gain insight into the nature of existence through meditative practice, become liberated from the cycle of death and rebirth and help other beings in various realms of existence. In these stories the 'life of the individual is consciously lived as a "sacred repetition", as the explicit reanimation of prototypes' and the activities they perform are re-presented in *namtar* 'as a life lived in order that what was written might be fulfilled' (Connerton 1989: 62). In the repetition of re-enactment, lives are exemplary by virtue of being prototypical; structured exemplary recurrence becomes the epitome of advanced spiritual achievement as prototypical stories and events are made fresh through new bodies (Connerton 1989).

Chenrezig

The story of the *bodhisattva* Chenrezig, as presented by Geshe-la during the *nyungne* rites, portrayed him as a human being who vowed to continue to assist all sentient beings toward their enlightenment. He additionally promised that if he ever broke his vow his body would fall into a thousand pieces. It is this characteristic of returning to cyclic existence in order to benefit others which is the distinguishing attribute of the *bodhisattva*. A *bodhisattva* does not aim solely for their own enlightenment; their intention or motive is an altruistic compassion for all beings and an aspiration that they will all become buddhas. This was the sentiment expressed by the ritual's presiding Geshe. Chenrezig is both a person who became a *bodhisattva* and also a symbolic representation of the quality of compassion. It is believed that Chenrezig emanated in human form, incarnating in the early kings who propagated Buddhism and also in the lineage of Dalai Lamas (Jackson 1997: 272).

In the duration of his evening talk, Geshe-la proceeded to inform his attentive audience of the manner in which Chenrezig, after many eons of taking his vow, gazed upon the number of persons who had attained Buddhahood and the number of those who were still suffering in cyclic existence. Discouraged by the afflictions of countless beings, he felt moved to break his *bodhisattva* vow and

his body fell into a thousand pieces. However, through the blessings of the Buddha Amitabha, he was transformed into his 11-headed and 1000-armed manifestation.[3]

The dramas encountered by Chenrezig in his physical transformation represent key Buddhist ideas of impermanence and selflessness. His falling into a thousand pieces and becoming re-embodied in new form suggests the transient nature of physicality, a deconstruction of the idea of a permanent individual existence (Vargas 2006). The experience is not confined to his physical embodiment; it also affects a spiritual shift or re-envisioning of the world. With greater perception of humanity and its inherent sufferings he is able to manifest a form that can create even more benefit for sentient beings. But this transformation does not come from him alone. It is brought about through the blessings of a spiritually elevated buddha. Negotiating the dialectic between self and other, presence and absence and life and death, the Buddhist doctrine reproduces a notion of continuity despite its emphasis on the impermanent nature of all phenomena. In dramatizing the basic Buddhist assumption of the inherent non-existence of an individuated self, the story of Chenrezig also mediates contradictions in ideology. Chenrezig is not monadic in character; he (like all beings) is interconnected to a wider cosmos and his receipt of blessings from the Buddha Amitaba signifies the intersubjective connections through which extensions of the biographical process are made possible.

This life-story, which is common knowledge among many Tibetans, employs religious meanings that were communicated to participants in the course of the ritual. Participants were reminded of their ability to manipulate states of consciousness and instructed to cultivate the experience of devotion through which such transformations can emerge.

Gelongma Palmo

While Geshe-la briefly narrated the above tale of Chenrezig during one of his evening discourses, the life-story of Gelongma Palmo was given precedence in the course of the sixteen-day *nyungne* in which I participated.[4] Most evenings were spent in the temple, as participants listened to the highly descriptive prose of her biography, empathizing with her sufferings and joys through expressions of concern, smiles of relief and even on occasion, tears.

In following the path toward Buddhahood, Gelongma Palmo re-enacted prototypical events of the *bodhisattva* in that she experienced profound suffering and physical disintegration, disassociation from previous ways of being a transformation inspired by devotional practice and a masterful death. Leaving her noble home to pursue religious practice, she rejected her royal lineage and proposals of marriage from prominent Asian kings. Then, having acquired permission to follow a religious life from her parents and brother Indrabhuti, she spent years as an ordained nun training her mind under the instruction of a guru. Later, and in recognition of her supreme knowledge and commitment to the Buddhist path, she became a teacher and abbot of a monastery until contracting

the disease of leprosy. When the condition intensified, accompanied by the loss of all fingers and toes and the noticeable appearance of blood and pus, she was cast out of the monastery by her fellow brethren.

Throughout these hardships of physical suffering and social exclusion, her faithful attendant Sampelma cared for her with devoted attention. Gelongma Palmo's suffering intensified when she learnt that her parents had passed on, her brother could not avail her in her time of need as he had renounced his worldly life and her guru had died. Consumed by leprosy, her body continued to deteriorate during the journeys she made with Sampelma. Eventually arriving at the destination where Gelongma Palmo undertook retreat, Sampelma built a retreat house then reluctantly left at her mistress' request. Entering a meditational state and focused on the *bodhisattva* Chenrezig, Gelongma Palmo endlessly recited the Chenrezig mantra and experienced an experiential vision of the *bodhisattva* after 21 days in retreat. Following his instruction and in spite of her ailing body, she travelled to a temple to see an image of his 11-faced form. At this time her brother Indrabhuti appeared to her. Holding a vase of water with healing properties and a skull-cup filled with substances that generate bliss, he instructed her to invoke strength and wisdom. Then five realized feminine figures or *kandroma* (*mkha"gro ma* Skt. *dakini*) appeared in order to take her to the temple of the 11-faced Chenrezig.[5] Overflowing with devotion she remained in meditation, generating *bodhicitta* when the caretaker, enraged by her presence, beat her and dragged her out of the temple. Moved by the misconceptions of this angry man she resolved to pay homage to Chenrezig and fast for the sake of liberating all sentient beings. Through her ascetic practice and the compassion of Chenrezig, she attained the rainbow body. Upon her return, Sampelma supplicated the *kandroma* until Gelongma Palmo appeared before her. Then, fainting with the intensity of love for her mistress, she too attained a rainbow body. Both being liberated from karmically propelled death and rebirth, they then travelled to teach the dharma to others and place them on the path to enlightenment.

At the end of the Geshe's narration, he informed participants that they were blessed by having heard her life-story and through these blessings Gelongma Palmo would permeate their practice and bodies as they re-enacted the *nyungne* sequence of rites that led the nun to liberation. The remembrance of Gelongma Palmo through biography or even recall can yield certain effects, in this case, the evocation of Gelongma Palmo's presence. This is a feature of the Tibetan *namtar* that I have already mentioned in Chapter 2 and will return to in a discussion on the effectual power of words in ritualized speech acts later in this chapter.

Nyungne: transforming body, speech and mind

I turn now to examine how participants re-embody the devotional practice of Gelongma Palmo. In what follows, I outline some of the forms and contours of *nyungne*. Elucidated through an ethnographic experience of the ritual, I demonstrate how Gelongma Palmo's life-story influences the meaning and experience that participants ascribe to their actions, words and imaginings. Attention

is paid to the varieties of communication and intersubjective engagement inherent in the ritual experience and also the creative interplay between formal religious doctrine and practitioners' praxis.

Where in Ortner's analysis (1978) *nyungne* is a demonstration of the social isolation experienced by late adults and the elderly, my particular field experience prompted a different perspective.[6] In *nyungne*, participants of varying ages and both male and female actively engaged with each other in a social rather than individualist setting. Various exchanges transpired in an intersubjective experience that unified and bridged the bodily existence of individuals with other human beings and with spiritual others.[7] Abiding by common ritual observances, I joined 25 local men and women including one nun and of ages in the range of 25 to 80, in a small temple. Each participant, having made a pledge that confined them to this space would eat, sleep and re-enact Gelongma Palmo's devotional practice to Chenrezig, performing prostrations, reciting mantra and for some participants chanting a ritual manual through daylight hours from dawn to dusk.[8]

Prostrations

> Tomorrow in the morning you will take vows. You will make a promise to live in *nyungne*. Each day you will do this. The day after tomorrow there will be no speaking, no eating and no drinking. But there will be prayer and many prostrations. Each day is the same, prayer, mantra and prostration. But every other day no food, water, tea or speaking. On the days that you do not eat, drink or speak you might feel weak, dizzy. You may not want to move. On those days you can prostrate slowly.

Lama Drakpa's cautionary words of advice underscored the difficulties of physical prostrations experienced by *nyungne* participants, myself included. We performed our prostrations facing the altar with its large golden ornate statue of Chenrezig in his 1000-thousand armed form, flanked on both sides with sculptured images of Gelongma Palmo and other figures within Tibetan Buddhist cosmology. Each day of the *nyungne* ritual consisted of nine sessions of prostrations and of these nine sessions three were almost an hour in length. These physical exercises continued on the alternate days when, dehydrated and hungry, we had taken vows that deprived us of food and drink. Additionally, we did not bathe for the duration of the *nyungne* rites. Denied access to washing facilities, the prohibition of bathing heightened participants' sense of withdrawal from customary everyday behaviour and added to the physical hardships endured.

In prostration, our sweaty bodies stretched out along the carpet with arms and legs as far apart as possible, faces pushed into the dust-laden fibres of the material beneath us. Over time, the floor covering caused skin to tear and burn, prompting all but one practitioner to alter their prostration from half- to full-body. The full body prostration is a physical gesture of submission where the whole body is placed flat on the ground. In bowing down to Chenrezig, the devotee performs their surrender to the *bodhisattva*. The half-body prostration is a

moderation of this. Refraining from total extension, one kneels taking the head to the floor before rising into a standing posture.

Each day, Migmar, a middle-aged Tibetan man with a crooked back, prostrated up to one thousand times, his whole body stretched across the floor despite scathed knees and elbows. Between sessions, he attended to bandages and pads of cotton that soaked blood from raw patches of skin that had worn. When I casually asked Migmar how he felt one morning, he replied, 'I am fine' and although he commented that '*nyungne* is difficult for my ailing body' he also expressed his certainty that he would be able to continue with the prostrations each day. His stance of confidence echoed the instructions of Geshe-la some days before:

> If we experience suffering ourselves, we can then relate to the sufferings of others. From birth to death and the stages of loss, grief, old age and sickness between there is suffering. But courage in face of suffering is possible. Suffering can be overcome and we are all capable of transforming hardship. In regards to *nyungne*, we must all believe we can do it. We must have strength and think 'I can do it.'

Curious as to the source of Migmar's confidence, I asked him, some months after the *nyungne* rituals, how he was able to maintain a sense of certainty that he could complete the prostration sessions. Migmar regularly made morning circumambulations of the Yiga Chöling temple and it was there at the temple complex that I found him seated on a bench with the resident Lama Drakpa. Migmar replied that it was 'by the blessings of Chenrezig' that he was able to do so many prostrations during his annual *nyungne* practice. When I prompted him further, enquiring as to how he came to receive the blessings of Chenrezig, he stated that it was through Gelongma Palmo.

> Before prostrating I visualize Gelongma Palmo introducing me to Chenrezig. I then imagine myself becoming Chenrezig. Gelongma Palmo, her life, teaches us how to pray to Chenrezig and this is because she was Chenrezig herself.

Nyungne practitioners had varied ideas about the prostrations that they performed. During the *nyungne* practice, Pema, a female participant in her early thirties, echoed the sentiments of Sangay, when she informed me that prostrations 'stop the body from carrying out harmful actions'. As the position involves standing straight with hands in a position of prayer, the practitioner is unable to create any further misconduct of body. Nyima, her older friend, another woman active in the local religious community and a regular *nyungne* participant, told me that in the upright posture practitioners are better equipped to concentrate on Chenrezig. Both participants believed their actions to effect transformation; the negative karma built up through previous misdeeds can become cleansed. The importance of prostration as a form of karmic purification was often conveyed to me in a common statement: 'Prostrations dissolved karma and self-attachment.'

According to the Geshe, prostrations were 'humble actions' and a requirement in cultivating altruism and effacing psychological impurities, particularly pride.

The belief that self-identification is a negative force to be annihilated or at least purified influences the nature of Tibetans' spiritual practices as well as many of their social interactions. To appear humble is to appear saintly. It is no surprise then that practitioners rarely boast about their worldly achievements, let alone their meditative practices or accomplishments. In Tibetan idiom, 'self' is an illusion based on a dualist perception that perceives 'other'. In order to quell and eventually obliterate this sense of a separation, there is a need to reduce the sense of superiority and pride from which it derives. Bowing down to Chenrezig, the Buddha or other enlightened beings are self-effacing actions: embodied demonstrations of the conceptual divisions (high and low) that characterize the power differentials between humans and deities. The prostration then 'does not only express subordination, it portrays it, in fact is it' (Strathern and Stuwart 1998: 238).

Just as Gelongma Palmo experienced bodily affliction through the corrosion of her corporeal form, which eventually led to her physical rejuvenation and spiritual renewal, followers, by fervently adhering to the devotional practices that led her to salvation, perceive that they too can endure the physical hardships of *nyungne*. In the words of one *nyungne* practitioner:

> In *nyungne* we have to overcome physical discomforts. Having our hair and bodies unwashed, fasting, prostrating on an empty stomach, all of these are difficult. But by these difficulties you can relate to the suffering of others and the physical sufferings of Gelongma Palmo. After some days though it becomes easier. It's like the body just gets used it.

The labours of the ritual with its associated bodily exertions soon bring the practitioner into confrontation with their own physical limitations, which they often overcome, or which their bodies 'just get used to', in the course of the ritual. Participants' bodies, streaked with trails of sweat, became accustomed to the habitualized actions and this was understood as analogous to the transformative process of Gelongma Palmo. Thus, the body in ritualized and repetitive action will

> co-ordinate an increasing range of muscular activities in an increasingly automatic way, until awareness retreats, the movement flows 'involuntarily' and there occurs a firm and practised sequence of acts which take their fluent course.
>
> (Connerton 1989: 94)

For participants, these figurative repetitions are not merely representational of Gelongma Palmo's exercise; they 'represent' in its literal etymological association. Re-presenting the past, they become the past and in embodying Gelongma Palmo their bodies re-member her in the present (Connerton 1989: 69). Re-producing her passage from physical suffering to liberation through devotion to Chenrezig, they dissolve their own immediate afflictions. As their bodies move

from the endurance of pain to submission, they experience themselves to be delivered from their suffering. Prostrations become a physical expression of Gelongma Palmo's path from suffering to liberation, extending her biographical process through embodied re-enactment.

Varieties of communication

Remembering the past in present conduct occurs through varied technologies of the body. While prostration simulates Gelongma Palmo's physical movements, replicating her acts of speech and silence also serve a mnemonic function. Fixed utterances of mantra, the recitation of ritual text and vows of silence assist the performer to remember the elocutionary acts and renunciations of Gelongma Palmo, effectively re-living her presence. This section considers both the role of speech and silence in the *nyungne* ritual as a means of social transmission, a communication in both verbal and non-verbal form that takes place between a myriad of beings. Through re-enacting the exchanges that transpired between Gelongma Palmo and the deity Chenrezig, participants attempt to replicate their communion and experience Gelongma Palmo as a dynamic, communicable and accessible force.

Acts of speech: vows, mantra and the ritual manual

The ritual required daily verbal expressions, even on the alternate days when everyday speech was forbidden. Vows prescribing self-restraint from mundane conversation were uttered each morning and mantras and prayers were recited alongside the chanting of the *nyungne* manual.

The days commenced at four o' clock in the morning with participants kneeling at the feet of the Geshe to receive their vows. Repeating after him, they would state that from that moment until sunrise the following day and for the purpose of bringing all sentient beings to a state free from famine, sickness and toward Buddhahood, they would observe eight vows against killing, stealing, lying, sexual activity, consuming intoxicants, eating after noon, leisure and adornment, and taking an elevated seat.[9] Participants informed me that the acts of taking the oaths and abiding by them would deliver them from some sufferings of cyclic existence, or at least purify some of the karma which binds them to that existence. Further, these vows, having been recited from the *nyungne* text and passed from the mouth of the lama to the ear of the disciple and then repeated, contained the power of breath or wind, *lung*. According to Pema, Nyima and several other participants, the *lung* associated with the performative utterance of vows is an oral transmission, which takes place in and through hearing and enunciation. Pema clarified that 'The *lung* comes from Chenrezig and it has been passed on to the lineages of lamas. We receive the *lung* from hearing and speaking. Receiving it is a blessing.'

After the morning vows, the monks continued to chant the ritual manual, line-by-line, page-by-page, in a systematic fashion. This text was recited three times

daily. Like many other Tibetan ritual texts it served as a guide to the practice, indicating what to do and when. Written into it were the details and wording of the vows, instruction on the technique of prostration, mantra and accompanying visualizations. Aside from the classical literacy of the two Gelug lamas, the literary Tibetan and poetic style of the text seemed abstruse not only for the uneducated, non-Tibetan speaking laity who attended the *nyungne* rituals, but also for the local monks who led the laity in these rites. As aforementioned, there exists a 'substantial element of incoherence and obscurity which the ritual manuals do retain for the officiating tantrists' (Sihlé 2010: 48). The majority of monks who performed the rites were Sherpa. They had been born in the area and had studied Tibetan as a second language through formal language classes held in the monasteries. These monks had only a rudimentary understanding of Tibetan language. They were able to read the Tibetan script and communicate in localized colloquial Tibetan, which differs greatly from the literary Tibetan language used in Buddhist texts.

Nearly a third of the laypeople had texts. Two participants brought their own Tibetan copies, from which they read aloud but which they could not semantically comprehend. Others had a locally produced Nepali version of the ritual manual. Informants told me that the liturgy for the *nyungne* ritual had been phonetically translated from Tibetan into Nepali script with a glossary of some of the terms. These translations were not organized according to the chronological structure of each day's prayers, so the reader had to flick through the pages, an ordeal too difficult to carry out while in the midst of chant. In a conversation with the only participating nun, *ani* (*a ni*), I was informed that the Nepali translation was much easier for many participants to follow: 'The Tibetan text is very difficult, very difficult. I can understand only some.' Ani.la had learnt English through the high-school education that preceded her ordination and she received only a basic education in literary Tibetan from the nunnery where she resided, a common situation for nuns and nunneries across Buddhist India. Without reflecting on the gender inequalities of Buddhist monasticism, she informed me that she was content to read without knowing the meaning of the words.

During sessions of textual recitation, participants engaged in varying speech activities: some chanted from the text consistently, others intermittently and others could not or did not read at all. The majority of lay participants used this time to recite the shorter mantra of Chenrezig, '*om mani padme hung*', their volume overpowered by the resonant chants of the Geshe, the lamas and a frequent roar of horns, drums and conch shells. A conversation with a lay participant who frequently recited the '*om mani padme hung*' mantra and who was unable to read revealed the ways in which she gleaned meaning from *nyungne* without being able to follow the intricacies outlined in the ritual text.

> If you cannot read, that is okay. If you cannot remember the long mantra, that is okay.[10] It is more important to be here, just by taking the vows and being here you are following Gelongma Palmo. Gelongma Palmo endured sufferings and her endurance through those sufferings is what we experience here. We do not have leprosy but we have sufferings in our lives and we

> suffer here now. It is difficult to do prostrations each day, to be in silence, to not eat. Gelongma Palmo practiced *nyungne* the same as we do here. In a cave she prostrated and said the mantra of Chenrezig and through her devotion to him received his blessings and became like him, full of compassion and enlightened. Now, for us, if we take those vows we connect to both Chenrezig and Gelongma Palmo and we receive their blessings. Those blessings can cure sickness, purify our bad deeds and be a cause for a good future rebirth. In the practice I use my prayer wheel and say the short '*om mani padme hung*' mantra, make prostrations and observe the vows but I do not read the text. It is enough.

In the *nyungne* ritual, semantic understanding is a secondary concern and not considered to influence the effectiveness of the ritual. Uninterested in the written word, many participants recited the short six-syllable mantra of Chenrezig. With *trenga* in hand they chanted, sounding out the sacred text. Attempts to find out the meaning participants ascribed to the sequence of words revealed that the literal meaning of the text had little to no significance to them. The power was in the words themselves. The morning vows, the words contained in the ritual manual and the mantras 'could do something effective' because they were enunciated under suitable conditions (Tambiah 1973: 221) of ritual prescription. The power of the words is not in the meaning of the words uttered, rather it is linked to the utterance of a fixed sequence of words (Connerton 1989: 58), which in itself carries a lineage deriving from spiritually elevated *bodhisattvas* of the past and carried through time by way of oral transmissions. As Sihlé (2010: 39) writes, 'Ritual texts and words, over and above their semantic content, are here primarily instruments for the mobilization of ritual power.' Infused with the qualities of posthumous masters who transcend past and present, life and death, words, as transmitters of *jinlab* travel by way of *lung*, extending a lama's presence from the past in ways that make them accessible in the here and now.

The sounds of silence

Although every second day was marked by a vow of silence prohibiting vocalization other than the chant of ritual text and the mantra recitations contained therein, participants were immersed in sounds. Hours of ritual performance were joined with an auxiliary of Tibetan instruments and lunch breaks were audibly satiated with mantra recordings transmitted through loud speakers. During the evenings and at the conclusion of the ritual activities, other utterances were possible amid conversational silence. Each night the women sat together chanting the mantras that would close their day (see Figure 4.1 overleaf). In a closely formed line they settled atop their sleeping space, huddling together with a mutual affection shaped, sustained and communicated without verbal discussion.

In the course of fieldwork, it became apparent that local categories of knowledge are often sedimented in habitual tendency. Consequently the anthropologist must learn to utilize other non-verbal means of communication. Not only useful

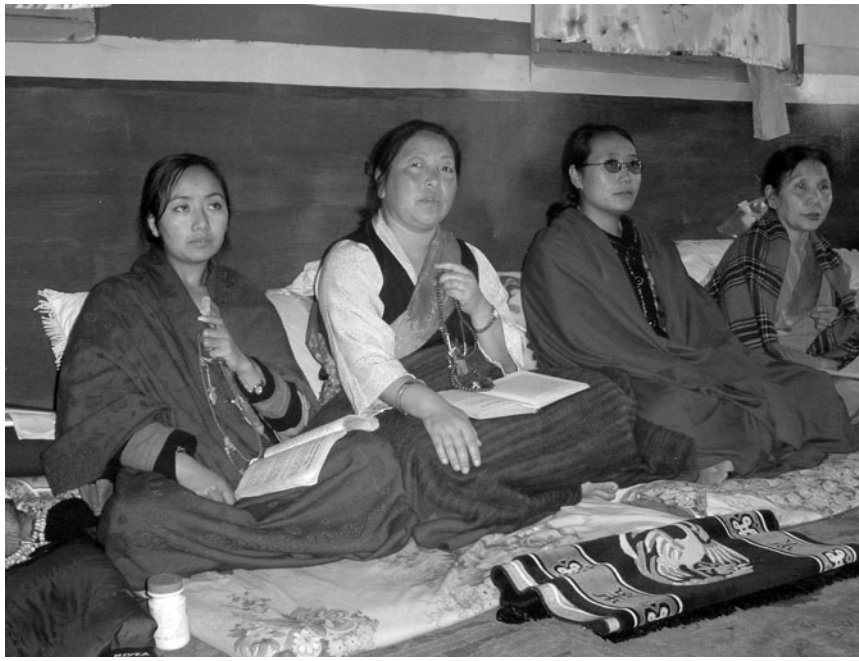

Figure 4.1 Women reciting mantras at the end of the day

during *nyungne*, non-verbal communication was compulsory: alternate days of silence were mandatory in the practice and they also enabled other types of communication vital to the ethnographic project. Indeed, socialization persisted amid vows of silence (cf. Vargas 2006: 73). *Nyungne* participants interrelated in ways other than the spoken word. Participants engaged with one another through body language, using their arms, heads and even mouths to express or mime what they needed to convey. By means of common local hand gestures where the little finger points through a clenched fist, they would indicate when they were going to the toilet, questioning each other as to whether or not they needed to go to the bathroom before wandering off together sometimes holding hands. With a nod of the head in a certain direction and a contorting pout of the lips to follow the motion, participants could sway their neighbours' attention toward their own interests, be it an occurrence inside the temple or a scene witnessed through the window as they gazed outside.

With ongoing exchange and no spoken word, sandwiched between bodies and body odour, we worked to make more sleeping space for each participant. Body language was often misinterpreted in dim light. When limbs were sometimes trampled upon, or blankets pulled away from their owners, laughter would surface in our attempted silence. By the end of the *nyungne* retreat, I had become

privy to this shared language of women and joined in both their laughter and silent conversations.

In the same way that participants were prostrating, using their bodies as instruments of devotional expression towards Buddhist divinities, they were engaged with one another: communicating with their bodies, making gestures with their limbs, their hands, contortions of their shoulders and facial expressions. With the silencing of everyday verbal communication, nuances of social exchange became apparent in person to person interactions and, as the following section will demonstrate, between participants and the central figures of *nyungne*, Chenrezig and Gelongma Palmo.

Imagining the deity

A diversity of visualization methods reveals the manifold ways in which textual prescriptions are translated to and embodied by different types of practitioner. The deity visualizations outlined in the ritual manual were too detailed and elaborate for all of the *nyungne* participants to follow. Although understood by the visiting Geshe and the resident Gelug lama, neither the local lamas nor the other *nyungne* participants were sufficiently trained to elicit these mental images from the directives of ritual texts. The extent and intricacy of these depictions could not be fully translated from literary Tibetan into the Nepali language common to all participants and nor were they achievable for the novice lay practitioner. Among the *nyungne* participants I spoke to, brief visualization exercises sometimes formed a part of their regular practice, however none were experienced with the advanced exercises expounded in the ritual manual. Consequently, textual instructions to practise were tangential, sidelined in favour of the simpler techniques prescribed by the Geshe or the practitioners' own sense and understanding of cultivating a vision of Chenrezig. This was also true for the local lamas, who regularly imagined the form of Chenrezig in their daily lives but who could not understand all of the visualization cues written in the Tibetan prose. These disparities became apparent when I encountered various instructions from different people. From here, I turn to the plural visualization methods, looking first at the lengthy formalized directions laid out in text, then moving on to the Geshe's explanation to the group and finally the experience of the nun Ani.la, who felt transformed through visualization practice.

Textual instruction

The following instructions on the method of visualization were translated from the *nyungne* ritual manual by Khen Rinpoche, a learned Gelug scholar in Darjeeling. It is not my intention to provide some exegesis of Buddhist scripture here. This is not a work of Tibetan studies, Buddhist religion or linguistics. Rather, I include this translation, almost verbatim, to convey a sense of the intricacies and sophistication of Tibetan Buddhist visualization practices. I then turn to the contrasting methods used by participants to demonstrate how personal

creative experience articulates with religious doctrine. I contend that the visualization method expounded in scripture operates as an idealized guide that is remade and reconstituted in the ritual practice of participants.

> From emptiness the practitioner is to visualize the mantra of Chenrezig spreading light over the whole world cleansing the practitioner's body, purifying all sin. Then arises a white moon on which the mantra '*om mani padme hung*' remains. Surrounding the moon, a golden lotus flower manifests. From the moon, lotus flower and mantra lights extend in countless directions and on top of each beam of light is the *bodhisattva* Chenrezig. Each Chenrezig purifies countless sentient beings, cleansing them of misconception. Every sentient being becomes Chenrezig and all sounds become his mantra. In their resonance clouds are formed and from them rain appears. The rain relieves the hot suffering of hell realms as the sentient beings within are cooled. The luminous light beams, each with Chenrezig, are drawn back vanishing within the mantra '*om mani padme hung*'. The mantra, moon and lotus then dissolve into one's mind. From them a multicolour lotus flower arises. On top of the lotus practitioners visualize themselves as Chenrezig. This form has 11 faces, the main one is a brilliant white. Ascending are eight more faces with smiling peaceful expressions in the colours green, red and white. Above them is a terrifying black face with three fangs, three eyes and orange hair. Atop of all of them is the face of Buddha Amitabha, who wears a peaceful expression. Of his thousand hands the first pair are held against his heart holding a jewel in a gesture of prayer. The second hold a rosary and lotus. The third hold a vessel, which removes the thirst and hunger of hungry ghosts. The fourth hold a bow and arrow. The other 992 hands are smooth like the vessel of the lotus. Every hand has an eye in its palm and together they make a circle that surrounds his 11 heads. An antelope skin covers his breast, complementing an elaborate lower robe and an ornate crown with precious jewels. He is also adorned with earrings, necklaces and bangles around his wrists and ankles. Incandescent white light shines from him and throughout the vastness of space.
>
> On his head is a white syllable *om*, on the throat a red *ah* and in the heart a blue *hung*. Then in this meditative visualization one is to imagine within their heart a white *hrih*. At this point there is another mantra to be recited five times, '*om pema audabowa soha*'. Upon reciting these syllables the hands move to the heart, throat, head and then towards the shoulders, while the practitioner concentrates on the blessings of Chenrezig. Then from the heart and the letter *hrih* within it light spreads out toward Chenrezig. Inviting the deity along with many disciples and *bodhisattvas*, the practitioner and Chenrezig become identified. First Chenrezig appears atop the head, then descending through the body from the head he and the practitioner are united in a connection that will never sever. Here the practitioner utters '*am ho bama ho*' – *bam* means identified and *ho* means never disunited. Light spreads from the practitioner's body inviting the buddhas from the five

> buddha families, which come to bestow initiation. Making offerings of precious gifts the practitioner requests initiation. Responding, the buddhas present many female wisdom beings or *kandroma*, which carry vessels from which they pour purifying nectar down the central channel from the crown of the head. At this time in the ritual, as practitioners are visualizing the pouring of nectar through their bodies and becoming purified, monks distribute water into the cupped hands of participants. The water that participants consume with their physical bodies represents the elixir from the *kandroma*, which fills the whole body purifying misconception. Continuing in visualization, the residual water emerges from the top of the head transforming into Amitabha, the Buddha who crowns the head of one-thousand armed Chenrezig, the Buddha Akshobya appears on the forehead, Ratnasambhava behind the right ear, Amoghasiddhi behind the left ear and Vairochana at the back. Then another Chenrezig with one head and two hands appears upon a moon in the heart. One hand makes a gesture of giving and the other holds a *trenga*. In the heart of that Chenrezig there is another syllable *hrih*, from which manifests the longer mantra. From these syllables lights emerge, illuminating the whole world as they spread out in all directions purifying all sins of the body. The light radiates through hundreds of thousands of beams, each crowned with the *bodhisattva* Chenrezig. Each Chenrezig purifies the misconceptions of countless sentient beings and each of those sentient beings becomes Chenrezig. Retracting back each Chenrezig and light beam dissolves back into the *hrih*. With *trenga* in hand the long mantra is repeated and throughout the duration of the mantra recitation participants are, according to the instructions of the ritual text, to remain concentrated in the visualization that the text describes as above.

Word and vision have effective attributes for ritual performers. It is presupposed that various sequences of sounds are endowed with qualitative properties, which, in the case of mantra, contain both phonological and graphic expression. Practices have associated 'seed syllables', such as *hrih*, from which the deities and their mantras can emerge. Sound and form combine in intricate visualization patterns intended to create a bridge between the practitioner and the divine. The practitioners' body, speech and mind are ideally experienced, or imagined, as becoming identified with the enlightened body, speech and mind of the buddhas (Gyatso 1997: 266). However this idealized structure of the visualization process was considerably condensed in the Geshe's instructions. Filtered down to accommodate the language, dispositions and shared meanings of a lay audience, this imagined form of Chenrezig deviated from the scriptural directives. As the Geshe instructed participants:

> Visualize Chenrezig seated in front of you. His body is not solid. It is a body of light. Then his light enters your body. It descends from the crown of your head and then fills the whole body. You imagine a *hrih* in your heart with the syllables of the mantra circulating around it. All misconceptions are purified.

> Merging with the deity light radiates from your body to all sentient beings also cleansing them of delusion.

The ritual text and hagiography of Gelongma Palmo express the propitiation of Chenrezig through cultivating his form in front of oneself and also through self-generation, where the practitioner imagines themselves to be Chenrezig (Vargas 2003: 110). Gelongma Palmo first imagined the form of Chenrezig before her, then, remaining in a meditative state, she came to embody the qualities of Chenrezig. These concerns with front and self-generation were also specific to the Geshe's instructions. His directions regarding visual performatives were filtered down from the repertoire of imagined scenes represented in a canonical text, written in classical Tibetan language. The laity who could not understand the ritual manual were presented with an abridged version of the visualization: a brief schema, translated into Nepali, which made simpler the mental visualization process that accompanied speech acts. Content with the instructions given, participants did not seek further meaning or clarification on the visualized behaviours integral to the *nyungne* ritual. Performing what they believed to be the structures of Gelongma Palmo's practice did not necessitate or privilege a rigid adherence to detail, nor was it considered vital to efficacy. In integrating mantra recitation and graphic visualization, participants identified with their illocutionary function rather than semantics or strict canonical parallelism. This was the case in visualization practice and, as we saw previously, in the recitation of ritual text.

Ani.la: merging with Chenrezig

The day was coming to a close and I was settling into an ambience of sonorous chant. Cloud vapour continuously poured through green window railing, seeping through the temple. Bodies swayed over old texts crumbled at the sides from moisture and age. Repetition of word, of movement, of imagination; repetition of hours and days. Participants nestled inside robes or shawls in places that had become soiled with the practice of their purification: perspiration-laden clothes, bodies caked in grime and bedding infused with odour. I welcomed the alluring smell of incense as Ani.la's circumambulations of the temple brought her to my side. Initiating conversation about the method of visualization, Ani.la told me:

> When you visualize it is face to face, you are looking at Chenrezig, face to face. You see Chenrezig in front. When you bow down in prostration you also see Chenrezig. When I bow down I see Chenrezig in front of my body…

When I asked Ani.la about the importance of the visualization, she responded by telling me that the main purpose was 'to think of Chenrezig'. She seemed unsatisfied with her answer and consulted her Nepali version of the ritual manual in an attempt to provide more information. Skimming through the pages, she looked for a description to complement the instruction she had given to me. In the 2 weeks that had passed, she had not looked at her text to seek meanings or

instructions. However, aware of my researcher status, she wanted to provide the 'right' information. She searched through the book to find a definitive reason as to why she performed the visualization, consulting each page for the answer. After some time had elapsed, she came to a halt. Putting the book down, she reflected momentarily. Incense swirled around us, diffused in soft light, as a smile of content swept across her face. As if she had come to some sort of epiphany, Ani.la said 'It is like this', and she looked at me and smiled. With her eyes shining bright and her poise lengthened, she brought her hands together in a position of prayer and exclaimed, 'When I see Chenrezig I feel light', then extending her arms out as if to embrace the world, she continued:

> Then whole body is light. Feel it is light. It is filled with light and all of your sins are forgiven. Light goes out to the whole world and all sins are forgiven . . . This is the practice of Gelongma Palmo.

Just as Gelongma Palmo experienced pain and hardship through the corrosion of her corporeal body, which eventually led to her physical rejuvenation and spiritual renewal, followers, by fervently adhering to the devotional practices that led her to salvation are taught that they too can, visually and experientially, intersubjectively engage with the deity. Ani.la had read her Nepali text with its glossary of terms in an attempt to provide me with the *proper* culturally constructed system of classification. But her actions spoke louder than words. In simulating her embodied performance, she re-presented and relived the 'experiential force' (Desjarlais 1992:100) of her practice; the body as a vehicle capable of verbal communication but that can also transcend its limits; a relating that is charged with 'intensities' and tangible physical presence (Favret-Saada 1990).

Communicating a feeling of permeation with the deity at the expense of the particulars of the practice, Ani.la told me about her method of visualization. Evocative of Gelongma Palmo's re-embodiment from a diseased form to an elevated being of light, Ani.la's visualization practice re-enacted her (their) spiritual transformations. The visualization of Chenrezig before her and the dissolution of his presence into her body in the form of light signalled a reproduction of the cyclic recurrence of a prototypical ideal, its accompanying story, embodied practice and experience; a reproduction of the biographical template. Yet at the same time it was an intimate and spontaneous act. Visualization methods, such as Csordas' notion of ritual performance, can also be 'an aid to inculcating a disposition for guided spontaneity and regulated improvisation in imaginative practice' (Csordas 1997: 190). Ani.la's visualization, in this sense, is demonstrative of Jackson's imperative of play: 'To do things in one's own time and in one's own way, to think of the world as something one creates, as well as something of which one is merely a creature' (Jackson 1998: 29).

Reminiscent of the 'morphological imagination' (Weiss 1999), there is a new site of identification and bodily possibility; the intersubjective domain between the devotee and the deity, which for Migmar and Ani-la became possible through the mediating force of Gelongma Palmo. In the Hindu darsan, Sharf writes (2005:

257), 'the supplicant ritually invokes the presence of the deity and both supplicant and deity behold one another', usually through the use of consecrated images. Similarly, *nyungne* practitioners, in supplicating Gelongma Palmo and her devotional deity, Chenrezig, are able to envision and have an interexperience of and with the deity, which, according to Gyatso (1997: 266), is made possible through a changed perception of self: 'The assumption is that a person's identity, experience and existence are self-created and therefore can be manipulated at will.'

In Tibetan Buddhism, the practitioner is taught to literally re-envisage their external reality, a reality that is, according to key Buddhist themes, constituted by their own complex webs of karma and illusory notions of self. Extending their own subjectivity, they create a vision of Chenrezig emitting rays of light. This generated image then dissolves into one's own form. In a similar manner to Gelongma Palmo's imagining Chenrezig, her followers also cultivate a vision of his presence. This practice, it is believed, eventually effected Gelongma Palmo's own transformation from a leprous state into an enlightened re-embodiment of rainbow light. Tokarska-Bakir presents the allegorical character of this phenomenon.

> Disappearance is the most distinct metaphor of no 'self' and the simplest sign of full liberation . . . The manifestation of the so-called 'rainbow body' (Tibetan *'Ja lus*) is a metaphorical sign of the end of the 'self'.
>
> (2000: 110)

For the *nyungne* practitioner, visualizations effect a deconstruction of fixed perceptions of themselves as they replace their mundane form with 'a new appearance of the self as the buddha figure' (Vargas 2003: 111). This process is suggestive of Gelongma Palmo's attainment of a rainbow body. Having renounced her previous identity she takes on a new physicality, a more subtle way of being that relates to Buddhist ideas on the non-existence of a permanent self. Because the self is not considered to be a solid and fixed entity, Buddhist doctrine and practice emphasizes the movements and transmissions (of light and sounds and subtle bodies) that pass between people, deities and objects in, at times, very fluid ways. Not constrained to a rigid belief in the parameters of one's own skin, one person can more amenably merge with the presence of another (Jackson 1998: 6–7). In negotiating distinctions between self and other and absence and presence, such an outlook highlights both the permeability of devotees imagined bodily borders and the inseparability of Gelongma Palmo and her emanation of Chenrezig in participants' ritual engagements with their presence.

As in Migmar's assertion that Gelongma Palmo is Chenrezig, Cabezón (2010: 10) outlines in the Introduction to *Tibetan Ritual* there is no 'clear distinction between historical human beings' (such as Gelongma Palmo) and the 'historical deities' (such as Chenrezig) since 'the Tibetan tradition eventually came to believe that both the former historical figures were actually emanations (*sprul pa*) of the later deity'. Tibetan Buddhist traditions therefore affirm inter-connectivity between human selves and non-human selves, between the living and the

deceased, highlighting the analytic utility of intersubjectivity and its anthropological relevance to Tibetan social and cosmological relations.

Sensing the social

In an attempt to engage more with the qualitative experience of *nyungne* participants' interactions with each other and the objects of their devotional focus, I took a visceral approach to the ritual. This chapter, then, contributes a cultural phenomenological approach – 'as a counterweight and complement to interpretive anthropology's emphasis on sign and symbol' (Csordas 1997: 4) – to the question of how we can make sense of the distribution of ritual knowledge among a diverse group of *nyungne* practitioners. Not isolating ritual from the context of social activity (Bell 1992, 1997) and attending to the critical place of the body in ritual life (Csordas 1993, 1994, 1997; Desjarlais 1992; Jackson 1989; Stoller 1997), this chapter has considered the sensorial and embodied aspects of the *nyungne* rites. Bereft of my laptop or the ordinary auxiliary that might comfort an anthropologist in the field, my involvement in *nyungne* prompted a sensitivity to what Stoller calls a 'sensuous scholarship', a methodology that demands 'the presence of the anthropologists' body', where researchers become 'consumed by the sensual world' (1997: 23). Using a phenomenological approach to embodiment as a methodological tool, I actively participated in a series of *nyungne* rites and this enabled me to engage with and (when permitted) converse at length with participants during the ritual. Notwithstanding the socio-cultural and geographic differences in sites of fieldwork and the inevitability of the anthropologists' own lens, I suggest the 'social isolation' that Ortner sees 'dramatized in the observance of *nyungne* through vows of fasting and silence' (1978: 38) are less apparent in my own findings because my research explored intersubjective relations between ritual participants, the ritual's founder Gelongma Palmo and the *bodhisattva* Chenrizig. Just as participants were exchanging ideas and emotions with each other in varied forms of interaction, they were also intercommunicating with a wider cosmological world.

Incorporating the biographical details of Gelongma Palmo that are recounted during their participation in *nyungne* rites, new generations of followers are inspired by her austerities (Schaeffer 2004: 66), which they remember in and through their own bodies. Their familiarity with her life-story, combined with an engagement in the visualization prescriptives outlined in the ritual manual, shapes the inter-experience between participants and Gelongma Palmo and produces a particular kind of imagery of Gelongma Palmo and the deity whom she emanates. Borrowing from Gail Weiss' discussion on the phenomenon of the phantom limb as 'new sites of projection and identification and new bodily possibilities' (1999: 37), the incorporation of Gelongma Palmo is facilitated by a 'morphological imagination'. The plasticity of Tibetan body concepts alongside the intersubjective nature of bodily experience, shapes the effective power of mantra and deity visualization and re-makes the lama in the bodies of devotees.

In short, then, this chapter has explored the continuing presence of Gelongma Palmo in the lives and bodies of her followers. In re-enacting her austerities,

nyungne participants are in some way familiarized with the experience of Gelongma Palmo's suffering, her will to transform suffering and her identification with Chenrezig as a means towards that transformation. Through their own devotional expression, *nyungne* participants labour to connect with the liberated nun through a re-enactment of her practice motivated by an aspiration to receive, to varying degrees, karmic, pragmatic and bodhi benefits. As they participate in *nyungne*, they believe their sufferings and the ill acts of misconduct that produced them will be transformed in performances of body, speech and mind. In this process, the assumption of intersubjective relations with divine beings can be realized; ritual performance accommodates religious themes in a phenomenological and not only ideational sense (Csordas 1997: 159). Thus, the continuity of Gelongma Palmo's presence is made possible and reinforced by practices that affect a re-envisioning of practitioners' social worlds; pushing the limits of their physicality, the boundaries of bodies can be reconfigured.

Notes

1 Kathryn March's PhD dissertation (1979: 277–91), which explores oral versions of the life-story of Gelongma Palmo is an exception along with Vargas' (2003) translation and analysis of hagiographical accounts of Gelongma Palmo in her PhD dissertation.

2 The duration of *nyungne* is variable. As Vargas writes, 'The rituals may last two and a half days to several months and sometimes they are performed by practitioners for many years' (2003: 115).

3 See Neville (1998: 1–41) for a study on this 11-headed representation of Chenrezig in India and Tibet.

4 Anon. *Dge slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar nges 'byung rgyud la skye ba'i chos gtam*. Kalimpong: Tibet Mirror Press, 1953. This version of the Gelongma Palmo *namtar* was issued to all *nyungne* performers and read aloud by the ritual's presiding lama. I had the text translated by Khen (Jimpa) Rinpoche in Darjeeling and it is this translation that I narrate here. See Vargas for her full-length translation of this text, which she titles, *The Hagiography of Nun Palmo: A Religious Discourse Which Gives Rise to Aversion in the [Mind] Stream*, (2003: 172–219). The ethnic and historical locations of Gelongma Palmo are disputed. However, the hagiography on the life of Gelongma Palmo to which I refer states that she came from the Kingdom of Kha che, which refers to Kashmir (*Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 1.7). Vargas has not taken a position on Gelongma Palmo origins but highlights the ambiguity of her identity as Indic, Tibetan or Nepalese by a variety of sources including scholars and practitioners (2003: 17–24). Nor does Vargas make a definitive stance on the dates of her existence. Citing varies sources, the Blue Annals (Roerich 1976: 1007–18, 1044) among them, she suggests that Gelongma Palmo 'may have lived in the tenth or early eleventh century' (Vargas 2003: 20–2). According to the lama who presided over the *nyungne* rites that I attended, Gelongma Palmo lived in the eleventh century. See Gutschow (1999), Ortner (1999), Vargas (2003, 2006), Vargas-O'Bryan (2001) and Schaeffer (2004: 62–6) for different versions of Gelongma Palmo's biography.

5 *Kandroma* or *dakini* (Skt.) are female figures who can fly through the sky. Vargas states that the Tibetan term literally means 'sky goer' (2003: 141). They are particularly revered for an ability to impart wisdom to the practitioner during meditation (Mumford 1989: 178).

6 Of course, the divergence of opinion suggests not only the variant perspectives of the anthropologist but also the different realities that shape and are shaped by the *nyungne*

ritual in different socio-cultural contexts. See Vargas (2003: 114–19) for a comparative study of the ritual in Nepal and Tibet.

7 See Vargas (2003: 27–8, 72–83, 115–19, 136–48), March (1979: 277–91) and Gutschow (1999, 2004) on *nyungne* and gender. These scholars note the predominance of women at *nyungne* rituals. From her ethnographic research, Vargas has observed that 'women outnumbered men in this practice, it was usually performed in nunneries or primarily by nuns and it was often called a "woman's practice"' (Vargas 2003: 27–8). In contrast, the *nyungne* rites in which I participated were not labelled as a 'woman's practice' despite the higher ratio of women to men. The work commitments of men were presented as the justification for the higher numbers of women. Three female participants told me that their husbands wished to come to the temple for *nyungne* practice but were unable to take the time off work.

8 Dalai Lama VII. *Thugs rje chen po zhal bcu gcig pa dpal mo'i lugs kyi sgrub thabs smyung bar gnas pa'i cho ga*. The ritual manual is a poetic composition that narrates the instructions of the *nyungne* ritual. For English translations of this text, see Wangchen Rinpoche (2009) and for Zopa and Churinoff's translation see Dalai Lama VII (1995). The 16-day ritual involved a thrice-daily recitation of this *nyungne* text.

9 For more on this ritual abstention observed during *nyungne* see Zopa and Churinoff (1995: 35–6) and Jackson (1997: 271, 276).

10 The text contains a longer mantra of Chenrezig specific to his 1000-armed form. Geshe-la and the monks repeated this mantra at length in the course of each recitation of the ritual text. Devotees who had participated in *nyungne* were familiar with the mantra and knew the recitation by heart while others learnt the mantra over the course of the 16 days.

5 Buddhism across cultures

Bokar Rinpoche

Cultural assumptions from Tibetan Buddhism are increasingly being communicated to people from other cultures. Where the previous chapters examined the continuity of relationship between the posthumous lama and his or her followers in contexts more specific to a Tibetanized culture, this chapter will consider the ways in which this continuity is played out in a cross-cultural arena. It asks the question, how are Tibetan beliefs in varying levels of embodiment expressed through the social practices of non-Tibetans? Up until this point, this book has argued that relations between Buddhist practitioners and posterior forms of deceased lamas involve an extension of embodied intersubjectivity, in the sense that the bodily existence of others is assumed to be manifold, not confined to a particular body or place nor limited to a particular moment in time. These assumptions of intersubjectivity are imperative to a lama's biographical process. We have explored how ideologies and praxis regarding relics, reincarnation, ritual and hagiography can foster intimate relations between lamas and their followers over vast differences in space and time. Now we will turn to the extension of this biographical process across cultures. Exploring the concept of *trikaya* (Skt.)[1] as a dynamic system of interrelating bodies, I examine how a proliferation of physical and disembodied margins can transgress divisions, stripping them of their spatial and temporal particularities.

This chapter focuses on the life-story of Bokar Rinpoche, a Tibetan lama in the Kagyu order and teacher to both Tibetan Buddhists and other followers of Tibetan Buddhism. Biographical representations of Bokar Rinpoche were shared and distributed at the cross-cultural setting of his mortuary rituals in 2004 and the commemorative ceremonies that marked a year since his passing. These events took place in Bokar Rinpoche's monastery in the village of Mirik, 48 kilometres south of Darjeeling town. Therein, teachings about his life and death were formally narrated by the monastery's abbot and by other notable religious figures of his Kagyu lineage tradition. Informal biographical accounts of the lama were frequently circulated in the local community of Mirik by both laypeople and his monastic followers. Extending Samuel's argument that Tibetan Buddhism is a 'transformative practice' that can affect shifts in Western followers' sense of 'self', 'time' and 'community' (2005: 339), I assert that these 'shifts' transpire through a reciprocated intersubjectivity with the lama in ways that effectively

extend his life beyond biological death. While this is not to say that religious ideas can be wholly transplanted or meanings directly translated into other languages and cultural contexts, I argue against essentialist views that suggest the existence of an 'authentic' Tibetan culture, subject to acculturation from outside agencies and persons. I stress the 'new possibilities' (Jackson 1998: 29) that emerge from the changing milieu of Tibetan Buddhism for both Tibetans and non-Tibetans. My field research suggests that Tibetan notions of embodiment can, to some extent, be articulated and practised across cultures, creating new avenues for religious praxis.

Tibetan Buddhist embodiment

A long history of Cartesian dualism has assumed a mind–body dichotomy in the construction of human perception, which may not be the phenomenological reality for any given people and seems at odds with tantric understandings of an integrated mind and body (Samuel 1989). The division between cognition and bodily awareness, between subjective experience and an external world, between the sentient lived being and its decease, have shaped a 'natural attitude' about our existence in the world and our relation to others that we assume is shared between people (Schutz and Luckmann 1973). Phenomenological approaches to embodiment within philosophy (Abram 1997; Merleau-Ponty 1962) and anthropology (Desjarlais 1992, 2003; Jackson 1989, 1996, 1998; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Stoller 1997) have challenged these binary oppositions by examining the constructed nature of the so-called 'real world' as an indeterminate collectivity composed of a shared experience (Abram 1997: 39) that is interwoven differently in different cultural contexts.

Diverse modes of bodily experience have been explored in terms of their cultural particularities, emphasizing that our sensate existence is subject to cultural variation (Abram 1997: 41) and may result in shared understandings of varied states of human consciousness and notions of liminal bodies that vacillate between embodiment and disembodiment or otherness (Hallam *et al.* 1999) in ways that cannot be amenably interpreted through the lens of Cartesian dualism. My understanding of Tibetan body concepts is influenced by this field of scholarship. Moving away from philosophical discussions of mind–body dualism or non-dualism, this chapter concentrates on the *integration* between mind and body. It explores Tibetan Buddhists' conceptions of *trikaya* and how this system of three bodies is incorporated into the religious praxis of European Buddhist disciples.

In this common Tibetan discourse, whereby eminent lamas possess the three *kaya* or 'bodies' of the Buddha, the *dharmakaya* is said to correspond to an all-pervasive essence beyond any particular form, beyond time, space and all dichotomies; the *sambhogakaya* is the manifestation of celestial buddhas and *bodhisattvas*; and the *nirmanakaya* or emanation bodies are the vehicles into which spiritual exemplars consciously incarnate and reveal themselves to ordinary human beings (Cleary 1986; Cozort 1986; Hopkins 1984; Mills 2003:

275–7; Mumford 1989; Narayan 1987: 29; Samuel 1989, 1993: 255, 282–3; Thurman 1994: 330).[2] While the historical Buddha appeared in this latter form (in Tibetan, *tulku*), this is now a conventional term applied to any lama who is a recognized rebirth. These trans-historical and trans-spatial communications connect lamas, monks and the laity and take place within a social universe of cosmological entities including buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, tantric deities, hell beings and hungry ghosts. While mastery over this cosmos is realized by a select few individuals, usually high-lamas, their power or *wang* is filtered down to affect the common tantric practice of the majority. *Wang* can be transferred from teacher to student, enabling 'spiritual vitality' through continued religious practice (Desjarlais 2003: 240), and involves the practitioner's self-identification with the extended presence of the lama.

Trikaya: the bodies of a Buddha

The body of an enlightened lama represents an interconnected complex of shifting levels of corporeality that extend from a plane of shapeless indeterminacy to the realm of form. As Cleary describes, at the level of *dharmakaya*, there is 'no duality between being and non-being, action and non-action, oneness and diversity' (1986: 64). It is from this paradoxical and formless dimension that the accomplished lama can manifest in an infinite variety of appearances and become perceptible to sentient beings at different levels of spiritual realization (Cleary 1986: 66). In Tibetan idiom, the form bodies, *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya*, are unlimited manifestations of *dharmakaya* and the way these bodies are perceived varies according to the spiritual capacities of the viewer. In their human manifestations as *nirmanakaya*, they can be perceived by ordinary beings. It is commonly believed that many lamas appear through multiple human incarnations and establish trans-historical physical lineages of the *nirmanakaya* forms in which they teach. These teachings are carried through time in the process of incarnation, being transmitted back to the lama in their subsequent incarnations from other beings in *nirmanakaya* and *sambhogakaya* form. As this chapter will demonstrate, it is often the case that young incarnate lamas will once again be initiated into the traditions, to which they were heir in their former life.

The *dharmakaya* can manifest as *sambhogakaya* to teach beings of higher spiritual attainment, communicating the teachings of the Buddha in an infinite variety of ways (Cleary 1986: 74). Eminent lamas who are identified as expressions of the *trikaya* or buddha-body are able to impart many forms of approach to the Buddhist teachings. These lamas, then, as holders of a particular lineage or lineages, embody the teachings that those lineages represent in a process of fusion with the form bodies of other beings (Mills 2003: 317–19).

Bokar Rinpoche's religious attainments are synonymous with having accomplished these three bodies. Representations of his life not only reflect the temporal and historical dimension of former lives as *nirmanakaya*, but also incorporate the other modes of *dharmakaya* and *sambhogakaya*. In the following overview, the three *kayas* will be looked at individually, although there is a

concurrent recognition of the fluidity between the myriad of figures of which they are each and collectively composed. In the latter sections of this chapter, I discuss how this fluidity courses through the various modes of presence enabling an inter-experience of and with the lama for people from varied cultural backgrounds.

Nirmanakaya*: continuity through physical lineage*

In their *nirmanakaya* form, lamas are intricately connected to specific lineages of other temporal realized beings over multiple lifetimes. Accordingly, the descriptions of Bokar Rinpoche gleaned from field experience and the available biographical material on his life or lives include the various lama–disciple relations that criss-cross the history of his incarnations. Using the traditional biography or *namtar*, a biographical supplication written in poetic verse and narratives from people connected to Bokar Rinpoche in some way, I weave together the lineages of *nirmanakaya* to demonstrate the trans-historical and trans-spatial networks ascribed to his being.

The history of Bokar Rinpoche's lineage of form bodies is represented in *namtar*. The biography of Bokar Rinpoche (1940–2004) begins with a description of his former life as Sherab Ozer (1890–1938). Bokar Rinpoche's predecessor Sherab Ozer was born in Kham, the eastern region of Tibet. At a young age, he became a renunciate, leaving his family to seek instruction from the head of the Karma Kagyu lineage, Kyakyub Dorje the Fifteenth Karmapa, at his seat in Tsurpu, Central Tibet. Receiving empowerments and teachings from the Karmapa, he expressed determination to accomplish a thousand sets of *nyungne*.[3] After accomplishing these ascetic feats, the Fifteenth Karmapa recognized him as an emanation of Chenrezig. The relation between these lamas endured between bodies, with the Sixteenth Karmapa prophesizing Sherab Ozer's return as Bokar Rinpoche in 1940. Serving as a main teacher to Bokar Rinpoche, the connection continued through death and rebirth, with the teachings held by the Karmapa being passed on to Bokar Rinpoche, who, in turn, returned these religious instructions and empowerments to the Karmapa's seventeenth incarnation. In this way, the *nirmanakaya* forms are conceived as permeable vehicles through which the dharma can pass. The spiritual networks of Bokar Rinpoche are extensive, including a multitude of teachers and disciples too extensive to detail here. However, I will draw attention to a key figure in this network: Kalu Rinpoche, Bokar Rinpoche's *tsawe lama* or principal teacher.

At the age of 20, and after fleeing Tibet, Bokar Rinpoche became a close disciple of Kalu Rinpoche. He completed two extensive 3-year retreats under Kalu Rinpoche's guidance in his monastery in Darjeeling. As Khenpo Lodro, a devoted disciple and abbot of Bokar Rinpoche's monastery, wrote in the *namtar* of his late teacher:

> Having fully received from Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche the initiations that ripen, the explanations that liberate, together with the supporting instructions…

> Rinpoche's being was thoroughly filled; it was as if the contents of one vase had been completely transferred to another.
>
> (2004: 48)

This quality of devotional inspiration was particularly engendered at the time of Kalu Rinpoche's death in May 1989, when, in addition to reciting prayers for his expedient return, Bokar Rinpoche expressed the decision to embalm and preserve the lama's body as a devotional object. In a letter that Bokar Rinpoche himself wrote regarding the death of his teacher, he stated:

> [T]he decision has been made not to cremate the *kudung* [holy remains], but to prepare it as a *mar dung* [*dmar gdung*], so that it will always be with us. This was a tradition practiced in Tibet. In this way, the physical aspect of the lama's form remains as a relic, a basis for religious inspiration. The lama's activity continues as beings are liberated through seeing, hearing, considering, touching, or praising the relic of his *mar dung*.
>
> (Bokar Rinpoche 1995: 58)

Interested in the role of the mummified form in the life of Kalu Rinpoche's followers, I visited the monastery of his former life and the temple that housed his embalmed body.[4] The main seat of Kalu Rinpoche in exile is located in the village of Sonada, which lies around 20 kilometres from Darjeeling. At the ornate gates of the monastery, a young monk greeted me and introduced himself as Karma. Our brief exchange revealed that he had been a monk in the monastery since the age of seven. I noted that he would have entered the monastery around 7 years after the death of the previous Kalu Rinpoche and 5½ years after the recognition of the present incarnation, about whom more will be said shortly. Together Karma and I walked into the monastery temple where the embalmed body of the previous Kalu Rinpoche was displayed. A large elaborately embellished *chorten* made from golden and silver metals, along with gems of various colour and shape encased a gold-plated body perpetually poised in meditation. A photograph of Bokar Rinpoche sat before the *chorten*, a recognition of Kalu Rinpoche's main disciple to whom he passed on his lineage and who returned the lineage to his next incarnation. With hands in a posture of prayer, the young Karma looked on at the embalmed body of a lama he never knew in life. Reflecting on his gracious demeanour, I began to wonder about his relationship with this lama. Would he feel connected to this body of Kalu Rinpoche's previous life? Would he see the present incarnation as the continuation of his former self? Moments later, Karma's eyes glistened as he looked at me. Moving an arm forward, his hand palm up, respectfully motioning towards the body, he said: 'This is Kalu Rinpoche. Now he is in retreat.' Only weeks earlier, I had been at the ritual ceremonies that preceded Kalu Rinpoche's entry to the traditional 3 year and 3 month retreat. There the young 16-year-old incarnation received a lineage transmission from an eminent Rinpoche in the Kagyu tradition. Such transmissions from a lineage holder are considered essential for the living and unbroken lineage to

continue. Karma then added: 'After his retreat, in 3 years' time, Kalu Rinpoche will return to this monastery, his monastery.'

In 1990, the incarnation of Kalu Rinpoche was born and in 1993, Bokar Rinpoche presided over his enthronement ceremonies. Under the guidance of Bokar Rinpoche, the incarnation of his former teacher was instructed in the alphabet, reading, writing and various aspects of Buddhist studies (Lodro Donyod 2004: 52):

> In particular, he fully bestowed the complete set of empowerments, reading transmissions and instructions of the ocean of the secret and profound tantras, [completely imparting all the riches of the lineage] as a father would bequeath all his wealth to his son.

In 2004 the then 13-year-old Kalu Rinpoche presided over the funerary ceremonies to traditionally commemorate the passing of his teacher Bokar Rinpoche. In the evenings he and other disciples of Bokar Rinpoche would chant prayers for the expedient return of their lama, just as Bokar Rinpoche had done for him after his previous death and before his present incarnation.

The continuity of the lamas' *nirmanakaya* form is integral to the reproduction of the Buddhist lineage. The preservation of the corpse through embalming and the recognition of succeeding incarnations establish the re-creation of tradition. Belief in reincarnation and the animation of the seemingly inert deceased construct a notion of the lama 'as enduring and invincible' which defies the 'inevitable movement toward death' (Jackson 1989: 15). Although Buddhist tradition stresses the impermanent nature of all phenomena, the preservation of a lama's physical body, like the prayers made for their swift return, signals an emphasis on continuity. As previously stated in the letter written by Bokar Rinpoche shortly after the death of his teacher, Kalu Rinpoche's activity continues through his presence in the relic of his *mar dung* (*dmar gdung*) (1995: 58). In this same letter, he requests that disciples make prayers for the swift rebirth of Kalu Rinpoche in a new *nirmanakaya* form and this request is then made 15 years later by the incarnation of Kalu Rinpoche for Bokar Rinpoche's return. The final two lines of a prayer composed by the present Kalu Rinpoche (2004: 43) reads:

> I pray that your supreme emanation swiftly returns
> May the intentions of my aspirations be fulfilled!

In a 'soteriology of the senses' (Gayley 2007), liberation through seeing, hearing, considering, touching, or praising the lama are among the physical means by which blessings can be bestowed and spiritual mastery endowed (Bokar Rinpoche 1995: 58; Tokarska-Bakir 2000; Freemantle and Trungpa 1975). These activities continue through the posthumous form of the embalmed lama. In these mediums of 'carnal contact' (Tokarska-Bakir 2000), it is as if the practitioner and their objects of devotion, the 'perceiver' and the 'perceived', are 'interdependent' and '*of the same stuff'* (Abram 1997: 67). This reciprocal presence speaks of a flesh

that animates the world despite the appearance of inert objects. Merleau-Ponty's (1968) 'flesh of the world' signifies a shared tactile awareness between individuals and the people and world with which they interact. This notion of 'flesh' can benefit our understanding of the interrelation between the posthumous lama and their followers. As I have indicated in previous chapters, these means of receiving blessings, even attaining liberation, are possible through various bodies of emanation. Relics, reincarnations, even monuments and hagiographies are *animated* by the lama's presence after his death, a presence which the follower can respond to through an engagement with this posthumous 'flesh'. Karma conceives of the embalmed body as not completely separate from the living incarnation of Kalu Rinpoche. Both beings are animate; they are an extension of each other.

The lama is both localized in and able to transverse particular forms in an intercorporeal receiving and bestowing of blessings. Just as Bokar Rinpoche became endowed with the blessings of Kalu Rinpoche as though the content of one vase was poured into another (Lodro Donyod 2004: 48), this same process of transmission occurred between Bokar Rinpoche and Kalu Rinpoche in alternate roles, with Kalu Rinpoche as disciple and Bokar Rinpoche as instructor handing back the Buddhist teachings and enabling continuity of their lineage.

Sambhogakaya*: multiple manifestations*

Nirmanakaya and *sambhogakaya* are considered to be the emanation aspects of a Buddha. They can operate through multiple manifestations simultaneously, reflecting the unlimited potential of a being that has attained Buddhahood. In the particular case of Bokar Rinpoche, *nirmanakaya* forms incarnated successively, however his *sambhogakaya* aspect has been recognized as concurrently manifold.[5] The *sambhogakaya* of Bokar Rinpoche is thus an emanation of plural cosmological beings. To elucidate this coalescence of the human and the cosmological, I will look at the ways in which Bokar Rinpoche was portrayed as being inseparable from different Tibetan Buddhist deities on a range of occasions. I will mark out the various elucidations of his embodiments as two major Buddhist deities – Chenrezig and Drolma – in private discussions that took place with Khenpo Lodro and in his address to Bokar Rinpoche's foreign disciples during teachings that marked the 1-year anniversary of his passing.

In a private discussion, Khenpo Lodro articulated how fluidity and intersection bridge bodies and beings in ways that transcend conceptions of self-contained entities. I was told that Bokar Rinpoche was Chenrezig and that his capacity to embody this deity was affirmed by the spiritual accomplishments of his previous incarnation as Sherab Ozer, who was also an emanation of Dawa Gyaltsen. In the words of Khenpo Lodro:

> Dawa Gyaltsen became a master of *nyungne*, having accomplished Chenrezig through *nyungne* practice. Dawa Gyaltsen and Chenrezig are then inseparable. Sherab Ozer was an emanation of Dawa Gyaltsen. Bokar

> Rinpoche is the next Sherab Ozer and so Bokar Rinpoche in being Sherab Ozer is also an emanation of Dawa Gyaltsen and inseparable from Chenrezig. For persons of ordinary spiritual capacity, they see Bokar Rinpoche as a monk. But the realized *bodhisattva* can see his *sambhogakaya* form and that is Chenrezig.

Different personages meet and coalesce. Not only was Sherab Ozer a *nirmanakaya* or human vehicle, but he was also an emanation of Dawa Gyaltsen, a *bodhisattva* of Gelongma Palmo's *nyungne* lineage who lived in a physical body and attained enlightenment. The being 'who realizes his or her enlightened nature', as stated by Cleary, 'is in direct communion of being with the Dharmakaya and is physically a Nirmanakaya' (Cleary 1986: 71) and can manifest in a multitude of *sambhogakaya* forms. Bokar Rinpoche appears as *nirmanakaya* to other people, but spiritually accomplished beings perceive him in *sambhogakaya* form. Like Gelongma Palmo, Dawa Gyaltsen in his *sambhogakaya* form is Chenrezig, the principal deity in *nyungne* devotional practice. This *sambhogakaya* form manifested as Sherab Ozer, who attained communion with Chenrezig through his *nyungne* practice and the lineage of this emanation continued through to Bokar Rinpoche. These webs of connection show how the lama extends over time in various incarnations and transcends different domains; relations between the human and the cosmological permeate through a range of spatio-temporal localities within the Tibetan Buddhist socio-cosmological world.

The *sambhogakaya* is interconnected to *nirmanakaya* in dynamic ways. *Sambhogakaya* can take the form of Chenrezig, creating a trans-historical lineage of emanations not separate from *nirmanakaya*. *Sambhogakaya* is also believed to manifest as a variety of forms in an infinite variety of worlds (Cleary 1986: 74), even simultaneously. Thus, Bokar Rinpoche at the level of *sambhogakaya* not only manifests as Chenrezig over successive incarnations but, at the same time, embodies the deity Drolma (Skt. Tara) and potentially countless other deities as well.

'Precious Lama inseparable from Noble Tara to you I supplicate' (Lodro Donyod 2005: 1) is one of the lines in a stanza from Khenpo Lodro's poetic narrative of Bokar Rinpoche's life-story. In his address to foreign disciples, he explained that Bokar Rinpoche's being is synonymous with this female embodiment of Buddhahood. Giving examples of the expression of this embodiment he narrated Bokar Rinpoche's morning practice in which he communed with and felt inseparable from this *bodhisattva*.

> At five o'clock he would enter his shrine room, making various offerings including prostrations before practicing Drolma. He would chant her prayers and involve himself in the self-visualization aspects of those practices . . . Through this reception with Drolma his connection with the deity was maintained. Bokar Rinpoche and Drolma are inseparable . . . Because he is Chenrezig we can also say he is Drolma. Essence is the same. Because essence is the same we can say he is Chenrezig. He is Drolma. He is everything!

Neither *nirmanakaya* nor *sambhogakaya* is an individual entity but are permeable fields inseparable from each other and the *dharmakaya* from which they manifest. The extension of one's subjectivity to include cosmological divinities (Jackson 1998: 9) emphasizes not the 'isolate haunt of a solitary ego, but a collective landscape' (Abram 1997: 37), containing many other spiritual bodies which overlap and unite with the lama's worldly form. I assert that it is a belief in the extension of the lama into other temporal and spatial dimensions which places him in the field of *sambhogakaya*, another domain of conscious awareness, where he can interrelate with multiple beings. In this context, Tibetan conceptions of the body reveal their own logic. *Trikaya* reflects an idealization of intersubjective experience: the spiritually accomplished lama is able to extend through various spatio-temporal realities, crossing between human and other worlds as a result of an expansion of their being.

It is not the intention of this book to affirm or deny the possibility of such occurrences, but rather to outline the cultural logic that constitutes such beliefs and the pragmatic effect of such conceptualizations on the social lives of religious adherents. Narrations of the lama's life are represented as an ideal for the practitioner to emulate, revere and incorporate through praxis. *Trikaya* is not merely an abstract philosophical system. The plurality of human and cosmological beings that *trikaya* denotes effects an ontological plausibility of unlimited expressions of the lama and of ways to approach him or her. These pragmatic considerations will be elucidated shortly, but first I turn to the exposition of *dharmakaya*, to present the ways in which paradox is transgressed in Buddhist cosmology.

Dharmakaya*: the body beyond*

During the period immediately following physical death, Bokar Rinpoche was believed to abide in the state of *dharmakaya*. Sitting before the *kudung* (*sku gdung*) or bodily remains of Bokar Rinpoche, Khenpo Lodro explained that Bokar Rinpoche's level of realization enabled his continuation beyond physical form through the relics that were produced at the time of his death.

> Because of his level of realization his death was unlike that of ordinary beings. For 3 days after his passing, he remained in *samadhi* (Skt.). This *samadhi* is a profound state of concentration. It is an unshakable state of *dharmakaya*. When the body has the appearance of *samadhi* the mind is in *dharmakaya*. Then, 3 days after his passing Bokar Rinpoche released his meditation, manifested in *sambhogakaya* form and *bodhicitta* left from his nostrils in the form of red and white creative fluids.[6]

This *bodhicitta* had been mixed with water and Tibetan herbs to produce small pills along with small statues of Chenrezig, made from the water used to wash the body after death. Khenpo distributed these materials to an audience of international followers during Bokar Rinpoche's mortuary rituals in 2004. We were

informed that these aspects of relics, products from the *trikaya* complex, were 'an extension of his sacred body'.

The state of *dharmakaya*, though referred to in Sanskrit and Tibetan as a body, is formless. Beyond time and space, it is the origin or field from which the other *kayas* manifest, giving rise to the aspects of *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya*. It is not only the form aspects of the Buddha's being that are dependent on this formless body, *dharmakaya* is believed to be 'the independent basis of all phenomena' (Cleary 1986: 64). Though shapeless, it can be mediated in various ways (Cleary 1986: 71) and it is particularly amenable to diverse manifestations at the time of a great spiritual master's death. The dead body of Bokar Rinpoche produced relics, which were communicated as an embodiment of the eternally present *dharmakaya*. While Chapter 2 explored the relic phenomenon in relation to signs of saintly death, I want to consider briefly how relics, as manifestations of *dharmakaya* mediate the temporal absence of Bokar Rinpoche with a multi-dimensional presence, constructing a framework that expounds varying degrees of materiality with which the practitioner can engage.

In *dharmakaya*, the paradox between the one and the many, absence and presence, is fundamentally produced and reconciled. Relics in the form of *bodhicitta*, moulded into pills and small statues and salt used to absorb bodily fluids in the preservation of his corpse, are reflections of the atemporal and aspatial *dharmakaya*. In the above accounts, Bokar Rinpoche is presented as liberated from physicality; his form is de-territorialized from any particular spatial confinement and yet it is localized in his relics. Nor is it confined to a particular moment. Detemporalized, *dharmakaya* is mobile and yet it is of time: the relics derived from bodily substances that were expelled in a sequential order, emerging when Bokar Rinpoche released his meditation and manifested in *sambhogakaya* form. It is precisely these diverse manifestations of the lama that signal their liberation from all binary divisions. The extension of the lama's subjectivity to include diverse forms is dependent on *dharmakaya* (Habito: 1986: 55). It is in this vehicle that unlimited manifestations can occur. To abide in *dharmakaya* is to abide in a state with 'no duality between being and non-being, action and non-action, oneness and diversity' (Cleary 1986: 64), beyond concepts of absence and presence, life and death, divisions between form and formlessness can be transgressed.

Comments on the three bodies

Trikaya, the Tibetan concept of embodiment relating to a Buddha, involves a system of three bodies, each marked by lines of intersection, fluidity and interconnectedness. It is through these three bodies that intersubjective experience between human, cosmological beings and the absolute are made possible. The conversations and situations represented above reflect occasions when Tibetan notions of *trikaya*, a fluid relatedness occurring in-between bodies, were expressed by the Buddhist clergy in Mirik. Relevancies of the three-body complex were established within one person, the lama Bokar Rinpoche; they were communicated from one person to another through biography, conversation

and formalized teachings, and also conveyed to a number of people during the social context of mortuary rituals and commemorative ceremonies. These Tibetan body concepts correspond to physical and cosmological realities that are quintessentially Buddhist, and at the same time, they were also communicated across diverse cultural traditions. While the above sections took up the articulation of the three-body concept by the Tibetan Buddhist clergy, I want to concentrate now on the ways in which *trikaya* was interpreted by the non-Tibetan disciples familiar with other cultural understandings of the body. I draw attention to how, for non-Tibetan disciples of Bokar Rinpoche, the interplay of personal creative experience interweaves with culturally constructed inventories or systems of classification. While Tibetan Buddhists posit embodiment and religious understanding as shared and communicated experience, how are relevancies about interconnections with various different beings and ways of being over multiple lifetimes established across cultures?

Cultural adaptations

Trikaya provides a conceptual frame for articulating the intersubjective relations between a lama and his followers. In Mirik, the international community of disciples present during funerary and commemorative ceremonies became inculcated into Tibetan classifications of body concepts. This occurred in and through the proliferation of religious discourse in formal and informal presentations by the Buddhist clergy, the dissemination of religious texts and devotional practices commonly understood to evoke an experience of the lama's posthumous presence. Soteriological practices such as prayer chanting, the recitation of mantra, consuming substances derived from the body of the lama, recalling his life-story and circumambulating his *kudung* or physical remains were performed by Europeans and Tibetans alike.[7] These traditional activities were conducted alongside creative adaptations of Tibetan Buddhist practice as cross-cultural relations created 'new opportunities' (Jackson 1998: 29) for identifying with the lama. English translations made Buddhist discourse, scripture and prayer available to other linguistic cultures and, in turn, practitioners could apply their own cultural mediums to Buddhist practice.

The international extension of Tibetan Buddhism has raised questions about the quality, tenor and authenticity of traditions as they move into new cultural contexts, begging the question not only of what is lost in the transmission of tradition across cultures, but also of what is imposed by Western Orientalism (Bishop 1989, 1993, 1997; Lopez 1998a). In response to these concerns, researchers have asserted the view that fixation on cultural loss can overlook the reality of cultural change and Orientalist approaches detract from the control and development of Tibetan heritage on their own terms. Locking Tibetans into passivity, their beliefs and practices become consumed by outsiders' constructions.

The life activities of Bokar Rinpoche demonstrate a creative response to cultural change and the flux of social life. Situated at a juncture between Tibetan

Buddhists and other followers of Tibetan Buddhism, he was exiled in India after having crossed over the politically contentious geography of Tibet. Entering into processes of transnational communication and exchange, Bokar Rinpoche reacted imaginatively to economic, political and religious interest and support from India and abroad, contributing to the reconstruction of monasteries and religious educational institutions, in effect re-structuring the edifice of his lineage of Tibetan Buddhism both in India and on an international scale.[8] With the introduction of Kagyu Buddhist centres in America, Europe and Taiwan from the 1970s by his own teacher, Kalu Rinpoche, a growing international Buddhist community emerged.

As cross-cultural collaboration combined foreign interest with Tibetan Buddhism, translations of the teachings were made available in other languages. Tibetan monks and lamas travelled and sought residence abroad, acting as teachers for the new wave of Buddhist disciples. In turn, many of their students made trips to India and Nepal to receive individual instruction. When interest grew, group teachings in India began to emerge and Bokar Rinpoche actively pursued these new formations. After years of travelling and teaching overseas, he developed an annual seminar programme which was held over 12 days at a hotel a couple of hours drive from Darjeeling. In these seminars participants with varying degrees of experience in Buddhism were initiated and instructed into some of the tantric teachings of Mahamudra in the Kagyu tradition. Hundreds of students from around the world received instruction for over a decade, until his death in 2004. The seminars and their entailed teachings were designed to meet the lifestyles of lay practitioners involved with family and careers; participation required a commitment to an hour a day or more of formal practice, a modification to accommodate the 'busy lives' of Western practitioners.[9]

In these seminars, the lived cultural heritage of Tibetan religious belief and practice were creatively adapted to the interests of individuals from various cultures and the financial transactions implicated in this socio-religious exchange contributed to the proliferation and redevelopment of Buddhist monasticism in exile. In these cross-cultural endeavours, Bokar Rinpoche's assertions are reminiscent of Jackson's 'existential imperative', the agency that enables individuals to redefine their world, 'regaining or renegotiating a balance between what we can and what we cannot control' (Jackson 1998: 32).

In his research into the Westernization of Tibetan Buddhism, Samuel stresses that 'Tibetan Buddhism is better seen as what it has, in a way, always presented itself as being: a transformative practice, a technology for remaking the self and in the process reconceptualizing both self and the world to which the self relates' (2005: 338). He suggests that this transformation involves shifts in the nature of 'self', 'community' and 'time' and these shifts are singled out as significant and shifting realities for Western Buddhists (2005: 339). Integrating these 'shifts' with Jackson's 'existential imperative', I turn now to the interplay between conventional and innovative religious practice to show how foreign disciples, in revering the lama through a personal engagement with body, sound and image, enact the creation and recreation of Tibetan Buddhism.

Calling the lama

The passing of Bokar Rinpoche was commemorated with the traditional 49 days of ritual ceremony, an occasion where monks from varied lineages in Tibetan Buddhism gathered together to conduct specialized rituals in separate rooms within the grounds of his monastery. I attended the final week of these funerary rites at the invitation of local Sakya monks, joining Bokar Rinpoche's disciples in the main shrine hall where eminent lamas along with lay and monastic disciples chanted songs of realization composed by Kagyu masters.[10]

Each week monks performed a different ritual sequence up until the 49th day, which marked the end of the ceremonies. At the head of the hall, high thrones faced each other in front of the *kudung* or bodily remains of Bokar Rinpoche. Positioned in descending order of superiority, the regents of the Kagyu lineage were seated nearest to the *kudung* and next to other prominent lamas including Kalu Rinpoche, the heir of Bokar Rinpoche's lineage and his teacher in a former life. Monks sat in line behind these eminent figures and international disciples filled the remaining space, sitting in allocated areas along the fringes of the hall. A procession of local laity entered to pay their last respects to Bokar Rinpoche. Often joined by other disciples, they would prostrate toward the *kudung* and circumambulate the circumference of its enclosure. On occasion, they would sit among the international disciples, many of whom accompanied the monks in prayer.

Sitting cross-legged was a regiment of bodies and robes. Stillness of body infused with reverberating sound as melodious song travelled through the monastery and surrounding village. Following old wood-block texts with pages crumbling at the edges, monks lifted each leaf of prose carefully page by page. Day after day, prayers were recited, their voices blending in rhythmic harmony. Spacious and immaculate, the shrine room increasingly accommodated the new arrivals, culminating in hundreds of disciples, many of whom were Bokar Rinpoche's foreign students.

Lining the outer reaches of the room, international guests from regions as far-ranging as Europe, America, Australia, Taiwan and the People's China participated in various capacities.[11] Arriving in Calcutta or Delhi after long-haul flights and further journeying into the foothills of the Himalayas to ceremonially commemorate the passing of their lama, they remained in the main shrine to be near his physical remains. Many read and chanted the *Kagyu Gurtso* in the Tibetan language from either wood-block texts or modernized versions, published in overseas dharma centres, which contained Tibetan script as well as phonetic and semantic translations. Alongside the fluent recitations of Tibetan chant others quietly read the English language publication of the *Kagyu Gurtso*, titled 'Rain of Wisdom'. A handful of people had brought their well-loved copies of this text and read it line by line as those around them chanted.

In the evenings, foreign students and monks from Bokar Rinpoche's monastery chanted prayers for his quick return. Nearly everyone who entered the shrine hall carried copies of books produced for the occasion. Composed and published in

Tibetan, Nepali and English, biographies of Bokar Rinpoche had been produced since his death and were freely distributed inside the monastery. The evening prayers were also available in book form. Chanting was encouraged through the accessibility of ritual literature; involvement was possible for English speakers as the books contained English translations and phonetics of the Tibetan prayers. A substantial number of foreign disciples did not chant or read from the array of available prayers and texts but instead engaged in repetitive mantra recitation. The six-syllable mantra of Chenrezig was an audible hum through the continuing chants. Even those who followed the recitation of prayer often stopped periodically to repeat this mantra. On occasion, foreign students of Bokar Rinpoche would sit quietly with their eyes closed, assuming a position of meditation as the reverberations of chant moved around their bodies.

Meal breaks interspersed liturgical practices and the occasional discourse presented to foreign disciples in the main shrine hall. During a lunchtime interlude, I spoke with Anne, a German woman who had attended several of Bokar Rinpoche's seminars in India. Elegantly sipping from a cup of coffee in a roadside café, she expressed a sense of gratitude for being able to hear and engage in the mortuary rites for Bokar Rinpoche:

> It is by the blessings of Bokar Rinpoche that we are here. There are no accidents, not with the masters and he is such a master. Being here right now is an incredible experience. To sit in the shrine room with the body of Bokar Rinpoche and amongst other Rinpoches who are leading the chanting is a very precious experience. For us Westerners who cannot follow the pace of the chanting it is an opportunity to just think about Bokar Rinpoche. In reading his biography we are recalling his life-story and more than that we are connecting with him.
>
> The dharma works in incredible ways. Even if we cannot read Tibetan or understand what is being said the words are powerful in themselves.[12] The chanting of the Kagyu Gurtso, the songs of realization of the Kagyu masters is very powerful. These songs enter through you and connect you to the lineage. These songs do not come from an ordinary or common perception like ours . . . These masters in the lineage are enlightened. Like Bokar Rinpoche they are totally liberated. Their actions in the world are spontaneous, beyond the neurosis of social conditioning. They are open vessels transmitting the dharma through their physical body life after life for the benefit of all sentient beings . . . This is not something that we can really understand. It is beyond conception. But we don't have to understand to receive his blessings and we are receiving his blessings here, right now; you and me and everyone. It is being transmitted from the *sambhogakaya*. Bokar Rinpoche's *sambhogakaya* is Chenrezig, one and the same, and now in this body of compassion he is working for the benefit of all of us. In reciting the mantra '*om mani padme hung*' we are connecting to Bokar Rinpoche as Chenrezig. These evening prayers that we sing are us calling out to him, requesting his swift return. They invoke the presence of Bokar Rinpoche.

Interactions with the lama and belief in the inseparability of his being from a lineage of incarnations, teachers, cosmological beings and an endless potentiality of animate and seemingly inert appearances, transforms practitioners' sense of community to accommodate a spacious social universe (Samuel 2005). Negotiating their own position in relation to this social network, practitioners engage with the traditional soteriological rituals through which they establish intersubjective relations with spiritual others. For Anne, the very repetition of the Chenrezig mantra is a transmission from Bokar Rinpoche that enables her to interact with the multidimensional world of *sambhogakaya*. Interrelating with Bokar Rinpoche is an activity that can transcend his death; not limited to the human body or lifespan, his presence continues beyond any localization in space and time. Connecting to the lama through her own conceptualizations and embodied intersubjectivity, she used specific arrangements of sacred sounds to absorb *sambhogakaya* into her own being. Communication was reciprocated: the lama engaged with her through the bestowal and receipt of blessings.

Tasting the lama

Enshrined in a cube-shaped structure and adorned with colourful Tibetan brocade, the bodily remains of Bokar Rinpoche were the focal point of the main shrine room during the funerary ceremonies (see Figure 5.1). Together with long chains of marigold flowers, colourful fairy lights decorated the *kudung*, flickering on and off, complementing the manifold colours of the structure in which the body was enclosed. A platform around the body displayed flowers, ornamental statues of the Buddhas and photographs of Bokar Rinpoche, along with incense, jewels, money and silken scarves, which disciples had offered during the continuous flow of circumambulations that extended throughout the ritual ceremonies.

As is common in Tibetan (and South Asian) contexts, the bodies of spiritually superior beings are transformed through religious practice to such an extent that even in decease their bodily wastes, by-products and flesh are given the same status as the living person from where they came (Martin 1994: 273–4; Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 77). In the course of the funeral ceremonies, participants were informed that Bokar Rinpoche's dead body continued to carry a soteriological power and accordingly various methods were used to 'extract and benefit' from its properties (Ramble 1982: 353; cf. Garrett 2010). Salt crystals, which were used to embalm the body, drawing out the moisture and drying the corpse, were distributed to devotees for their consumption. The blood and semen that exited the nostrils after the lama's death were ritually prepared and refined before being distributed to devotees in the form of red and white *bodhicitta* pills. Although commonly understood as the virtue of an altruistic intent, *bodhicitta* also refers to the creative substances of the body, which can be transformed and purified through tantric practice. The Tibetan abbot of the monastery, Khenpo Lodro Donyod, discussed the appearance of *bodhicitta* as integrally connected to Tibetan Buddhist embodiment. He informed the international disciples that Bokar Rinpoche had attained *trikaya*, the three bodies of a Buddha. His material and

Figure 5.1 Kudung of Bokar Rinpoche

impermanent form, or *nirmanakaya* body, had now passed away. This death was communicated as consciously determined by Bokar Rinpoche, who, it was reported, remained in a state of meditation for 3 days after his physical death. This state of meditation, or *thugdam*, was marked by his 'abiding in *dharmakaya*', a non-dual and consequently non-spatial and non-temporal vehicle, from which all things and beings are said to emerge. Made possible through his accomplishment of the deity in tantric practice, the cessation of this *thugdam* involved his manifestation in *sambhogakaya* form and the discharge of red and white *bodhicitta* from his nostrils. This meditative state was accompanied not only by the expulsion of *bodhicitta*, but with the appearance of *ringsel,* which were said to fall from the sky like rain.[13] Turning to the ways in which bodily relics were consumed by foreign disciples, we will explore how physical objects became signifiers of a continuing relationship with Bokar Rinpoche and effected transformations in their sense of space and time.

A German devotee later explained the emission of these substances as the accomplishment of an advanced meditation involving the movement of subtle energies around the body and through five power centres (genitals, navel, heart, tongue and crown). The simultaneous release of *bodhicitta* and arising as the deity, or manifesting in *sambhogakaya* form, signals a transmutation of gross physicality into purified nectar, a process described at length in Tibetan texts and

which is believed to be achieved by union with a deity through tantric practice (Garrett 2010). Diluted with water and mixed with herbs, *bodhicitta* was circulated among devotees in the form of tiny red and white pills, along with other pills made from the water used to clean Bokar Rinpoche's corpse. Mixed with clay, this water was also used to make small *tsatsa*, or images of Chenrezig, commonly understood among the devotees as the deity of compassion who Bokar Rinpoche was said to embody or emanate in *sambhogakaya* form. These clay images along with squares of fabric from the robes worn by Bokar Rinpoche at the time of his death and during *thugdam* were also distributed to devotees. The abbot informed us that these objects were relics from the *trikaya* complex of Bokar Rinpoche and devotees commonly held that these materials were blessed by virtue of their impregnation with *bodhicitta*, both an altruistic quality and the bodily substance of their lama.

Foreign disciples often discussed these bodily remains as a means through which they could access *dharmakaya*. His physical corpse and the *bodhicitta* pills, made from the procreative substances, were said to contain his '*dharmakaya* mind'. I was told:

> This is what he can offer to disciples. Now is the time that they can merge their minds with his. When an enlightened being dies he remains in the *dharmakaya*. The ceremonies and prayers are performed so that we can merge with his mind. We are assisted in this process by being here, by circumambulating the *kudung* and even just by being near the physical body we are strengthening our connection with Bokar Rinpoche and receiving his blessings. This is why the body is being kept. The body will be preserved and later, once the embalming process is complete, displayed inside the monastery for the benefit of his disciples and anyone who sees it.
>
> By eating the pills and salts we can become closer to the lama . . . It is the manifestation of his realized mind, the *dharmakaya*. Bokar Rinpoche abides in these substances and depending on the strength of your devotion he can pervade your being when you taste it.

By appropriating Tibetan understandings of the activities that unfold in and around the lama's body at the time of death, devotees came to perceive bodily substances not as representations of an absent lama but as the materialization of his presence, a sacred embodiment of *dharmakaya* materialized as *bodhicitta*. In identifying both the lama and his relics as physical embodiments of this altruistic intent, it was not unusual for European devotees to speak of their experiences of love and compassion when in contact with his materializations. In a similar way to which Freund (2009) has discussed morphological imaginations of photic or light experiences as the materialization of charisma for devotees of the Guru Maharaj Ji, I understand the quality of *bodhicitta* to be embodied in relics. The 'pervasion' of the lama into the bodies of followers indicates an intersubjective extension of bodily integrity where boundaries between self and other, presence and absence and even life and death are blurred.

Extending Samuel's argument that Tibetan Buddhism is a transformative practice that can affect shifts in Western followers' sense of time (2005: 339), I assert that these 'shifts' also affect understandings of space and transpire through practices like the ingestion of relics. As objects imbued with histories (Empson 2007), relics both signify the former lama and simultaneously make him *present*, extending the spatio-temporal dimensions of the lifecourse. Consuming relics can enable an experience of reciprocated intersubjectivity with the lama in ways that permeate followers' own bodies in a 'transmission of force or intensity' (Clough 2010: 224). These affects or intensities are not limited to eating relics. Even coming into contact with highly realized lamas and their posthumous embodiments, or materializations of *bodhicitta* can be a palpable physical experience. In communicating these affects, devotees often described a general feeling of contentment, even blissfulness, sometimes accompanied by sensations of lightness or subtle vibrations felt both inside the body and on its surface. Devotees would frequently remark that they felt the lama inside them, as if there had been a 'pervasion' of their own bodies. Importantly, such affects sometimes occurred spontaneously but, more frequently, they were cultivated through Buddhist practices including meditating on the lama and reciting prayers or mantras and consuming sacred substances. It could be said that these devotees were 'learning to be affected' (Latour 2004) through increased engagement with Buddhist categories of knowledge and the development of sensory capacities or new modes of attention. Like Thai Buddhist meditation on cadavers and photographic images of dead bodies (Klima 2001), religious followers see the lama's deceased body or bodily substances as a 'desirable aesthetic' as they *learn to be affected* in ways that 'lead to an intimate awareness, a seeing of the body in the body, a visceral reproduction in which, ultimately, a copy of a body can be re-transformed and restored into an original: into a body once again' (Klima 2001: 569).

Importantly, these bodily substances were not raw, dead flesh: they were refined and consecrated in their ritual preparation as pills, salts and iconography. They were by-products of a cadaver, albeit a holy one. Common ideas about the desirability or repulsiveness of certain bodily objects were thus eschewed in discussions about Bokar Rinpoche's corpse. In refashioning categories of edibility to reflect Tibetan classifications of bodily purification, foreign disciples reconstructed the lama within their own bodies and renegotiated their understanding and experience of the world in ways that overcame Kristeva's source of abjection, the appearance of an object or that which is 'opposed to I' (Kristeva 1982: 1). Practitioners could resolve the paradox of qualitatively different categories of knowledge: self and other, life and death, absence and presence were traversed in the consumption of substances derived from Bokar Rinpoche's body, as his '*dharmakaya* mind' and *nirmanakaya* form passed through the substrate of their own bodies.

(Re)productions of the lama

Materials from the *nirmanakaya* body of Bokar Rinpoche, and mantras considered synonymous with his *sambhogakaya* form, not only had a place within the theoretical frameworks of *trikaya*, but also had a practical function. The sensory contact involved in traditional practices of tasting sacred substances and verbalizing divine sounds have a soteriological power for Tibetan Buddhists and, as we have seen, these beliefs have been incorporated into the conceptual and practical lives of foreign practitioners. Turning from these traditional practices to the production of a documentary about the funerary ceremonies, the articulation of personal creative experience with the theoretical underpinnings of *trikaya* will be explored through the production of images contemporaneous with a consumption of 'self'.

Chöying Wangmo had worked for years as a documentary film-maker in France before becoming a disciple of Bokar Rinpoche.[14] Incorporating her professional and artistic skill with the Tibetan Buddhist teaching was what she termed her 'activity in the dharma'. Film-making was a spiritual practice inspired by devotion; the activity itself was a path with soteriological meaning. Motivated by the presence of Bokar Rinpoche in her life and the experience of his all-pervading nature after physical death, she filmed the funerary ceremonies and later produced a documentary.[15]

More than a decade had passed since Chöying Wangmo met Bokar Rinpoche. In a small restaurant over dinner, she shared stories laced with emotional impact, the intensity of devotion felt through her memories of Bokar Rinpoche:

> He was the first Rinpoche I ever met and he was my *tsawe lama*. I once asked him how you know your *tsawe lama* and Bokar Rinpoche said it was very simple to know because they are a mirror to your true self. I remember so clearly during his last seminar Bokar Rinpoche gave the Tilopa initiation.[16] We were all writing and he said, 'Now, I want you to stop writing, to close your books and put you pens down.' We did this. Then he gave us a transmission, the Six Dharmas of Tilopa. You need transmissions from a lama to practice the dharma. You can study for years and years and this is very important, but through the transmission you receive the blessings of the lineage. On this day he gave us a special gift. One after the other he gave the whole Six Dharmas and I felt them enter me. Bokar Rinpoche had entered me as the deity, as *sambhogakaya*. There was no me. I did not know my name or who I was there was only Bokar Rinpoche. It was so deep, so strong. When I had this feeling I was overwhelmed with deep, deep love for Bokar Rinpoche. I looked at him and I was overflowing with this feeling. He returned my gaze and then said, 'If anything remains it is only devotion for the master.'
>
> For me Bokar Rinpoche is my master, a reflection of my true self. He is also my mother, my father, sister and brother, the whole family, everyone and everything.

I asked Chöying Wangmo how her sense of devotion had changed since his death. Instantly she smiled as she tried to convey the current significance of her relationship with the lama:

> Since his death I feel him even more strongly. Before I needed to go and see him. Now I know I will not see him again, not in the same form. Before I always had to be near his physical body and now I do not have to go anywhere. I feel his presence inside. He is *dharmakaya*. He is inside, outside, everywhere. Now he is always with me, guiding me. I know I do not need to be here in India near the monastery. When I go home to France I will feel him; he will be there with me. He is with me as I work, as I edit and film. Both the process of filming and editing are dharma activities. If I am feeling this way and that way and not really focused on my work my films are no good. My images will not work. They will be blurry or my battery will go flat. But if I am focused and aware not of myself but of what I need to do, what I need to do to make powerful images for many people, then, then my films are beautiful. Sometimes I am up all night editing. I have been filming in the presence of the *kudung* and the high masters who are leading the ceremonies. I watch these images over and over again. In order to edit I need to know the images. Say there are 25 images in 1 second in 1 second I see 25 pictures of the lama. I hear every beat of the drum in the ritual. Every beat is played over and over again until I know it. *Dennadennandenna den*. I go over and over them. I say it with the moving image so that I know the precise moment to cut and edit. The images are powerful. People watch them and tell me that they can feel the power of them. It is good for me and for all the people who see them. I put my emotion into this and it is my offering to others. I wanted to create something beautiful about Rinpoche and film is what I know. It is what I do best.

A year later, when foreign disciples gathered together in Bokar Rinpoche's monastery to commemorate the 1-year anniversary since his passing and to hear discourses on Bokar Rinpoche's life-story, I again met with Chöying Wangmo and saw the documentary she had made. Her film opened with a magnificent view of the white peaks of Kanchenjunga in a radiant blue sky. A sequence of beautiful images revealed the vantage point of Chöying Wangmo, her angle of vision, the discernment of her eye, its acumen with the moving image and the devotion which informed its direction. Interlaced with interviews of the late Bokar Rinpoche, the film captured a quality of gentility: images of him in soft light complemented a voice like nectar. These visions patterned through the film, accompanied by a dynamic multiplicity of ritualized scenes: the resonance of sacred musical combinations and the rhythms of bodies in prostration. The hive of bodies and sounds in motion were artfully presented and yet there was a portent of stillness. The force of devotion, the momentum which drove its becoming was infused into every pixel of its creation, manifest through sensitivity to the nuances of colour, light and sound. Close-up angles steered over hundreds of

bright orange and blue flames of flickering butter lamps in an otherwise unlit room. The deep, guttural sound of monks in chant accompanied the resonant bass of Tibetan drums, providing a soundscape that showered the viewer, capturing intensities beyond the scope of vision. Before the final credits a dedication to her lama appeared on the screen against a background of melodious song:

> I give thanks to our master Venerable Bokar Rinpoche for inspiring and accompanying me throughout the making of this film. At each instant I felt my heart was guided and Rinpoche's love is imprinted in each frame, each sound, from prayers to his unforgettable laughter.

The production of a film about the funerary ceremonies of Bokar Rinpoche was an expression of Chöying Wangmo's relationship with the lama. This relationship enabled a transformative experience in her life, through which she re-made her sense of self. Bokar Rinpoche not only represented her 'true self' and other key figures in her life such as her mother, father and other family members, but encapsulated Chöying Wangmo's connection to 'everyone', to 'everything'. Perceiving the lama as all-encompassing enabled her to relate to him in dynamic ways. With the belief that his presence permeated the world in which she lived, her relationship with him was a catalyst for transformation. This transformation entailed moments where she felt a sense of unity that transcended both the idea and experience of being a separate self. A personal absorption by the lama was made possible through his direct transmission, where he entered into her being. *Trikaya* provides a theoretical reference to conceptualize something that is experienced as non-referential. For Chöying Wangmo, this experience transformed discursive notions of self and other. Consumed by the lama, she had lost her sense of self and even forgot her name:

> There was no me. I did not know my name or who I was. There was only Bokar Rinpoche.

While Chöying Wangmo interpreted the transmission as a gift, it was not merely a gift to consume. In this intersubjective experience, the gift also consumed her; Chöying Wangmo's sense of self was expended through the transmission. Absorbed by the bodies of Bokar Rinpoche, she experienced no separation. This interconnection fluctuated while he was alive and was heightened after death. While he was alive, she would more readily perceive divisions between them, but after his death, she did not have to seek him out to be with the physical body because she always felt his presence. He accompanied her during the funerary ceremonies when she shot the film that would be used in her documentary. The act of filming was itself a meditative experience requiring mindfulness and concentration. Then, as she worked to edit the images in a repetitive production process, she absorbed the images frame by frame, experiencing the presence of Bokar Rinpoche, as if the blessings of his lineage were pervading her work and absorbing into her sense of subjectivity. Capturing these images was a dharma

practice involving a meditative experience guided by the lama, an experience that transformed discursive notions of self and other, which she offered back to the monastery in the creative medium of film. In doing so, Chöying Wangmo was creating new possibilities for self-formation, establishing a Buddhist identity for herself and experimenting with alternative avenues for Buddhist practice.

Chöying Wangmo's application of *trikaya* vocabularies and meditative techniques of concentration in the production of film, demonstrates Jackson's imperative of play (Jackson 1998: 29). Her 'activity in the dharma' reflects the 'existential imperative', the ability of the individual to 'make it [the dharma] their own and experience it as a product of their praxis' (Jackson 1989: 37).

Trikaya, with its immeasurable variety of configurations, provides a vast possibility of means by which practitioners can engage with the lama. In the context of their familiarity with quintessentially Buddhist categories of knowledge, practitioners can come to experience a transformation in their sense of 'community', 'space', 'time' and 'self'. The ideological foundations of the *trikaya* complex to some extent allow for a conceptual articulation of this transformation. Within the frameworks of trikaya, perceptions of the self can potentially extend into a wider, extended community of intersubjective relations, where concepts of time can collapse into infinity and bodies can be all pervasive. Experiencing a subjective elasticity, practitioners can sense Bokar Rinpoche in ways that make their own presence analogous or even consistent with his. I contend that in their reception of Tibetan body concepts they were re-inventing their bodies and also re-creating Tibetan Buddhism.

Cultural innovations

Cultural innovations have been criticized by those who adhere to notions of a 'salvage mentality' where the negotiable nature of cultural influence is undermined in favour 'of authenticating the past by placing more value on it in the present' (Korom 1997: 3). Such views disregard the general trans-temporal and trans-spatial nature of cultural processes (and cultural displacement) and, more specifically, pass over quintessential Buddhist categories of knowledge regarding space and time. Tibetan assumptions of the trajectory of the lifecourse entail a constantly evolving existence in a sequence of rebirths. Human beings exist in the linear temporality of a finite existence, but they return in the currents of cyclic existence. The temporal and spatial habitations of high-lamas, reflected in the conceptual framework of *trikaya*, take hold in diverse forms. In their *nirmanakaya* vehicles, they can endure in material formations. In *sambhogakaya*, they reign in a quasi-physicality. In *dharmakaya* they pervade all appearances in a plane of existence beyond birth, death and all other reference. In this ontology, the biographical process of the lama continues from life to life and in ever-changing material and ethereal constitutions. This extension or evolution of the biographical process is itself evocative of Jackson's 'existential imperative', the vehicles through which lamas relate to others and engage with the exile world are constantly remade in the human 'ability to

gainsay and invent, to countermand in our actions and imagination the situations that appear to circumscribe, rule and define us' (Jackson 1998: 29). In the creative manipulation of traditional Buddhist practice, a new wave of Buddhist practitioners domesticates their perception and experience of the trajectory of the lifecourse. In assuming the continued existence of other human beings, they endeavour to make sense of the 'flux of experience' extending a person's life and life-story through conceptual models such as *trikaya*, which 'provide a way of salvaging some sense of mastery over a world that masters us' (Jackson 1998: 32). By its very nature, culture and its categories of knowledge are elusive; they are always a negotiated process of the give and take of social life. Claims to authenticity, like assertions of mastery, are marked by attempts, endeavours and hopes to make order from chaos, to make the uncertain real, to breathe life into death.

This chapter has discussed the presentation of Tibetan Buddhist body concepts through written and verbal narrations of Bokar Rinpoche's life and death during funerary and commemorative ceremonies. Tracing the depiction of Bokar Rinpoche in terms of a dynamic system of interrelating bodies, the conceptualizations of *trikaya* elucidated earlier in this chapter act as a precursor to understanding how the body is articulated and digested in the social lives of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners from other cultures. In turning from the networks of incarnate lamas exiled Tibetans in India to the adherents of Tibetan Buddhism who travel to India in pursuit of teachings, the second part of this chapter explored how sounds, bodies and images effected a transformative experience of 'self', 'time', 'space' and 'community' that enabled them to connect experientially with the posthumous presence of Bokar Rinpoche.

Notes

1 The Tibetan term is *kusum* (*sku gsum* Skt. *trikaya*). However participants frequently used the Sanskit *trikaya* to refer to this religious system of 'three bodies'.
2 Sometimes *trikaya* is extended to four or five bodies (Tucci 1980: 94, 243). I did not encounter these systems during my research. Samuel (1993: 282) notes that the three 'bodies' might be better translated as 'planes of existence'.
3 Following the system where two sets consist of observing a partial day of fasting followed by 2 full days of fasting (Lodro Donyod 2004: 60). This is a variation to the *nyungne* practice that I participated in and that was detailed in the previous chapter.
4 On the mummification of high-status Tibetan lamas see Ramble (1982: 348–9).
5 There are cases of multiple *nirmanakaya* incarnations existing at the same time. Kalu Rinpoche (1905–1989) was recognized as one of five incarnations of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thai (1813–1899) (Zangpo 1997: 32–4). Instances of reported multiple incarnations are not without controversy. Presently there is contested status about the Seventeenth Karmapa with two different candidates recognized by opposing parties (Brown 2004).
6 In directing the flow of *bodhicitta*, Bokar Rinpoche, like Khenchen Sangay Tenzin (Chapter 2), displayed various signs of 'saintly death'. He remained in a meditational state, exhibited a delayed deterioration, retained heat in the physical body, passed the creative fluids of *bodhicitta* through his nostrils and demonstrated both an abiding in *dharmakaya* and manifesting as *sambhogakaya*.

7 This is not to directly refute Tokarska-Bakir's assertion that, 'What Europeans grumble about or do in secret, Tibetans do not hesitate to get involved in openly, saying that the activities we laugh at, such as prayer pattering, *stūpa* circumambulation, speed *mantra* chanting, drinking, eating sacred food and touching sacred objects, guarantee liberation' (2000: 70). Academic enquiry has explored the ways that Tibetans and Westerners differ in their approach to Buddhist theory and practice in terms of a heightened degree of 'normalised and routinised' behaviour amongst the former and a more 'conscious involvement' in practice amongst the latter (Samuel 2005: 338). While this chapter is concerned with some practices performed by Tibetans and non-Tibetans, there is a need for further research in this area.

8 For discussions on economic exchange and its social implications between Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and their lay international patronage see Klieger (1992: 84–98), Prost (2006). See McMillin (2001: 131–6) on how patronage affects Tibetans' self-representation.

9 Students were encouraged to complete *ngondro* practice. *Ngondro* involves 100,000 prostrations and recitations of the refuge prayer, 100,000 visualization practices of Vajrasattva, 100,000 mandala offerings and 100,000 sittings of guru yoga. For a detailed explanation of these practices see Jamgon Kongtrul's *The Torch of Certainty* (1977).

10 The monks chanted the *Kagyu Gurtso*, which are songs of realization composed by the Kagyu masters. These songs have been translated into English under the name of *The Rain of Wisdom* (Trungpa 1980).

11 The participants whom I have focused on in this chapter are European despite the broader multiethnic community of Bokar Rinpoche disciples. My documentation and analysis of the Chinese interest in Tibetan Buddhism and pilgrimage to India is a work in progress. This is a particularly interesting (and under-studied) area.

12 As explored in previous chapters, the discursive measures undertaken by a reasoning mind to understand sacred words are not always considered essential for the efficacy of ritual practice. Emphasis is often placed on the activity rather than meaning or content (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 94). However, there are contrasting views, some of which were taken up in Chapter 3.

13 This presentation of Bokar Rinpoche's decease has parallels with the saintly death of Khenchen Sangay Tenzin explored in Chapter 2. This is the only account I heard where *ringsel* was said to fall from the sky.

14 This is the Tibetan name given to her by her lama.

15 Chöying Wangmo (2005), *Tribute to Our Master: Kyabje Bokar Rinpoche* (DVD), Snow Lion Publications.

16 The Kagyu lineage began when the primordial Buddha, as Vajradhara, gave a direct transmission of the teachings to Tilopa. In an interview with Bokar Rinpoche contained in Chöying Wangmo's film (2005), he states: 'The notion of spiritual lineage is fundamental in Buddhism. Born in Tibet, the Kagyupa lineage is the one of the Karmapa . . . Karmapa lineage came to being in India with the yogis Tilopa and Naropa then in Tibet with Marpa the Translator and Milarepa. And finally Karmapa that is the Kagyupa lineage . . . Karmapa is a Sanskrit word meaning "enlightened activity" – enlightened in the sense that he brings benefit to all beings. Karmapa is the one who accomplishes the pure activities of the Buddhas.'

6 Conclusion

Births and deaths are marked by socially sanctioned practices that reproduce culturally specific notions of a lifespan and reconstruct shared understandings of the body, its boundaries, its position in time and space. These conceptual frameworks are foundational to our common understanding of the stages often assumed as inherent in the lifecourse. Given that our relationships are structured by a spatio-temporal physical proximity of persons, where the biographies of individuals are experienced as a sequential flow of events that progress in a linear and non-reversible fashion, Schutz asserted that a 'community of space' and a 'community of time' is the basis of intersubjective life (Schutz 1945). This presentation of intersubjectivity emphasizes the co-presence of living breathing bodies in shared time.

This commonsense view, our 'paramount reality', also shapes the way we engage with our own and others' bodies. We presume that we have bodies and that our bodies are like the bodies of others. We presuppose that our life trajectories are 'natural' and that biology determines our experience of death. This view, however, has little relevance to the lives and deaths of incarnate Tibetan lamas. Extending Schutz's assumptions of intersubjectivity to more adequately reflect Tibetan Buddhist understandings of the body and the lifecourse, this book points out that the way people manipulate biological imperatives varies between cultures.

Tibetan Buddhists accept that the experience of death can be influenced by religious practice. Not assuming that a person is limited to a singular body or lifespan, the Buddhist believes in the cyclic promulgation of life through reincarnation. In this larger life history, the lifecourse of the individual can abide in various times and places in new bodies. The death of an accomplished lama is different, however, from the death of ordinary people. An ordinary person leaves their relatives and all of their personal possessions behind and has no idea where they will be reincarnated or what form their reincarnation will take. In contrast, the spiritual adept is believed to have attained the body of a buddha and is able to move wilfully from one body to another with conscious awareness. They return to the world in their new incarnation to continue the work of their predecessors, often becoming re-incorporated into the social networks and relationships of previous lives.

This book has grounded notions of intersubjectivity (Jackson 1998; Schutz 1945, 1980 [1932]) and biographical process (Strong 2004) in the varied social engagements – between devotees and lamas with their tutelage of deities and multiple posterior forms – that transpired in the field setting. In the case of these eminent religious figures, the processional nature of events that occur throughout a lifetime continue beyond death in other modes of presence. In line with the particularities of Tibetan religious heredity, reincarnation was duly explored as a vital modality of posthumous extension and continuity remade in the flesh. Other physical signs of the lama's biographical process can be read on the body after death, and effect a continuing relationship with followers. The delayed decomposition of the corpse, the expulsion of *bodhicitta* through the nostrils, the etherization of the body into a form of rainbow light and the manifestation of pearl-like relics from bodily remains are some of the ways in which the presence of the lama can be experienced by the disciple. This ethnography has revealed how witnessing or physically engaging with signs of spiritual attainment, recalling or narrating them, or even writing or reading about them, memorializes the lama in the minds and bodies of devotees.

Although biographical representations have been used as a structural device to orient the reader to the social lives of deceased lamas, this ethnography is more about the everyday and sensual arena of embodied praxis than it is about textual representations. An attempt to elucidate the *mode de vie* of contemporary Tibetan Buddhist lama and devotee relations in the Darjeeling Hills, it contextualizes the seemingly exotic and esoteric aspects of Tibetan Buddhist culture with what is common and familiar in local knowledge and practice. In emphasizing these situated Tibetan contexts of knowledge, which do not necessarily prioritize (Western-informed) notions of historical accuracy, the genre of *namtar* itself can be seen as more of an attempt to accentuate 'the existential urge to remaster experience rather than the epistemological need to preserve an exact record of it' (Jackson 1998: 24).

Tibetan assumptions of intersubjectivity reveal something about how devotees reproduce the lama's posthumous presence as a social reality. The vehicles in which the lama is memorialized, alongside the phenomenon of blessings, provide an orientation for exploring how various modalities of a lama's presence can affect the lives of their followers. We have followed the movement of this *presence* in travels from body to body in the process of reincarnation; its passing through words uttered by religious practitioners during mantra recitation and hagiographical narrations; its pervasion of landscape, monastery, hermitage and home; its infusion into *ringsel* and other relics; its penetration into the dreams of devotees; its transmigration into others; its saturation of ritual performers; its consumption by the bodies, words and visions of the faithful. These various modalities of presence permeate boundaries: they pass *in-between bodies*.

Expressing what it is that moves between masters and their devotees requires an approach to embodiment that takes seriously the body as an instrument that can be receptive to and diffuse with other persons and things (Csordas 1994: 7). This sharpened receptivity may arise spontaneously in line with the temporal

persuasions of the simultaneists and their descendants (Chapter 3) or form part of a 'progressive enterprise' (Latour 2004: 207). Either way, practices such as mantra recitation, sitting in meditation or imagining the deity can extend the repertoire of embodied experience and open possibilities for broadening the spatio-temporal reach of Buddhists to a greater cosmos. This opening to the world enables what Latour calls 'learning to be affected' (Latour 2004). It is an increased engagement with a world that becomes more highly differentiated with heightened or more experience; 'the more *sensorium*, the more bodies, the more affections, the more realities will be registered' (Latour 2004: 213; cf. Latour 2002). This proliferation of realities and sensory capacities has resonance with the ways in which Tibetan Buddhists transform their bodies and the world. In cultivating, and discriminating between, various types of embodiment, practitioners are aware of the lama's modes of presence, vehicles that are coterminous with and through which they can access, a broader world, the body of a buddha. Whether it be *trikaya*, relics and reincarnation, the 72,000 'subtle channels' with their series of 'centres' and bodily 'winds', or the general mind that rides on the currents of these 'winds' – both advanced Buddhists and laypeople create 'at once a sensory medium and a sensitive world' (Latour 2004: 207). In becoming or being attuned to different subtleties of embodiment, lamas and laypeople can acquire, at least ideally, more 'body parts' *and new bodies.*

Glossary

Term[1]	*Tibetan spelling*[2]	*Translation*
ani	*a ni*	Nun
bachag	*bag chags*	Mental imprints, habitual patterns
bardo	*bar do*	The intermediate state between death and rebirth
Bön	*bon*	Variety of pre-Buddhist and non-Buddhist religious systems
Chenrezig (Skt. Avolokitesvara)	*spyan ras gzigs*	Buddhist deity of compassion
chö (Skt. *dharma*)	*chos*	The Buddhist teachings
chöga	*cho ga*	Ritual manual
chöku (Skt. *dharmakaya*)	*chos sku*	Unmanifest formless body of a buddha
chorten	*mchod rten*	Reliquary
chuba	*phyu pa*	A Tibetan-style dress
dam tsig	*dam tshig*	Commitment or vow
delog	*'das log*	A person who has died and returned to life
digpa	*sdig pa*	Demerit or unwholesome action
dön	*gdon*	Category of malevolent spirits
dre	*'dre*	Category of malevolent spirits
Drölma (Skt. Tara)	*sgrol ma*	Popular female Buddhist deity
dung	*gdung*	Bodily relics
gek	*bgegs*	Category of malevolent spirits

Term[1]	*Tibetan spelling*[2]	*Translation*
gelong	*dge slong*	Highest grade of monastic ordination for men
gelongma	*dge slong ma*	Highest grade of monastic ordination for women
Gelongma Palmo	*dge slong ma dpal mo*	Buddhist nun, founder of *nyungne* practice
Gelug	*dge lugs*	One of the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism
Geshe	*dge bshes*	Title of monastic degree
getsul	*dge tshul*	A male novice, grade of monastic ordination for men
getsulma	*dge tshul ma*	Female novice, grade of monastic ordination for women
gompa	*dgon pa*	Monastery
Guru Rinpoche (Skt. Padmasambhava)	*gu ru rin po che*	Indian master regarded as one of the main founders of Buddhism in Tibet
jalu	*'ja 'lus*	Rainbow body
Jambeyang (Skt. Manjushri)	*jam dpal dbyangs*	*Bodhisattva* of wisdom
jangchub kyisem (Skt. *bodhicitta)*	*byang chub kyi sems*	Altruistic wish to attain enlightenment for all sentient beings
jinlab	*byin rlabs*	Blessings
Kachupa	*dka' bcu pa*	Advanced monastic degree
Kagyu	*bka'brgyud*	One of the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism
kandroma (Skt. *dakini*)	*mkha"gro ma*	Woman of high spiritual attainment
Kangyur	*bka"gyur*	Tibetan Buddhist canonical scriptures. These are works believed to have been said by the Buddha
katag	*kha btags*	Ritual scarf often used to show respect when greeting in Tibetan culture
khenpo	*mkhan po*	Abbot

Term[1]	*Tibetan spelling*[2]	*Translation*
korlo (Skt. *chakra*)	*'khor lo*	Energy 'centres' in the subtle body
krag	*khrag*	Menstrual blood
kudung	*sku gdung*	Mummified body of a holy teacher
kusum (Skt. *trikaya*)	*sku gsum*	Three bodies of a buddha
kyil khor	*dkyil 'khor*	Mandala
lama (Skt. *guru*)	*bla ma*	Spiritual teacher
Lamdre	*lam 'bras*	System of teachings in the Sakya tradition
Lobpon	*slob dpon*	Title conferred upon completion of advanced monastic degree
longchöku (Skt. *sambhogakaya*)	*longs spyod sku*	A body of the buddha, commonly referred to as an 'enjoyment body'
lung (Skt. *prana*)	*rlung*	Wind, breath
mar dung	*dmar gdung*	Mummified body of a holy teacher
namshe	*rnam shes*	Consciousness
namtar	*rnam thar*	Religious biography or autobiography usually of a lama
ngag (Skt. *mantra*)	*sngags*	Sacred sounds or words which protect and focus the mind
ngagmo	*sngags mo*	A female tantric lay practitioner of mantras
ngagpa	*sngags pa*	A male tantric lay practitioner practitioner of mantras
Nyingma	*rnying ma*	One of the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism
nyungne	*smyung gnas*	Fasting ritual
pecha	*dpe cha*	Religious book, usually refers to loose-leaf books with cover plates
peldung	*'phel gdung*	Multiplying remains

Term[1]	*Tibetan spelling*[2]	*Translation*
phowa	*'pho ba*	Practices for transfer of consciousness to higher realm at death
Rabjampa	*rab'byams pa*	Advanced monastic degree
ringsel	*ring bsrel*	Bodily relics that are 'like pearls'
Rinpoche	*rin po che*	Meaning 'precious one', a common title for incarnate lamas
rolang	*ro langs*	'Rising corpse', a corpse that has risen from the dead
saka dawa	*sa ga zla ba*	Observed religious holiday that commemorates the birth, death and enlightenment of the Buddha
Sakya	*sa skya*	One of the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism
samsara (Skt.)		Cyclical existence
sang	*bsang*	Smoke offering of scented herbs and woods is a common practice among monks and laity, ensuring protection and auspiciousness
sem	sems	Mind
sheba	*shes pa*	Consciousness
sonam	*bsod nams*	Merit
Tengyur	*bstan 'gyur*	Tibetan collection of commentaries on the Buddhist teachings
terma	*gter ma*	'Concealed' or 'treasure' teachings of Padmasambhava
tertön	*gter ston*	Lama who discovers or reveals *terma* teachings; *tertön* are believed to be rebirths of disciples of Padmasambhava
thugdam (Skt. *samadhi*)	*thugs dam*	Post-death state of meditation
tigle	*thig le*	Seminal fluid

Term[1]	*Tibetan spelling*[2]	*Translation*
tong pa nyi	*stong pa nyid*	Emptiness or a void, that is, the lack of inherent existence in persons and phenomena
trenga	*'phreng ba*	Rosary of 108 beads for reciting prayers and mantras
tsa (Skt. *nadi*)	*rtsa*,	Subtle channels within the body
tsatsa	*tsha tsha*	Small figures made from clay, used as offerings
tsawe lama	*rtsa ba'i bla ma*	'Root lama', one's principal guru or spiritual teacher
tsog	*tshogs*	Ritual food communion or sacred feast
tulku (Skt. *nirmanakaya*)	*sprul sku*	Physical emanation body; reincarnate lama
vetāla (Skt.)		Spirits that inhabit corpses
wang	*dbang*	'Power'; ritual empowerment

Notes

1 Sanskrit (Skt.) terms are indicated parenthetically.
2 Tibetan spellings follow the Wylie system of transliteration.

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