INTRODUCTION

One sunny afternoon in Sharlung village outside the city of Shigatse, Drolma, Mingzom and I were sitting in the porch of the Gongbo house, spinning wool and playing with the youngest baby. Drolma, the in-married wife (*nama*) of the house, explained to me: 'In my birth village, only few people used to marry polyandrously (*zasum*), but now it is widespread. Now everybody marries like this.' Outside Tibet and the Himalayas, the marriage of one woman and two or more men has been both a rarity and often ridiculed. 'Why does everybody marry like this?' I asked. She smiled and summed up: 'Everybody wants a better life.'

During this conversation in September 2002, I recognised how Drolma's story illustrates changing marriage preferences and practices in this particular place and time. Born to parents who had been labourers without land before the Chinese invasion in 1950, Drolma was the first woman to marry polyandrously in her family's history. At 22, her father had approached her with a marriage proposal from a household in a different village within the same valley. She had suspected for some time that her parents were involved in marriage negotiations, although the details had not been revealed to her. In this period, Drolma had eagerly scrutinised any unexpected visitor coming to their house, wondering if some of them might be her future husband, for she knew that potential grooms might visit in disguise. She had paid extra attention when she was serving tea to guests and aimed to present herself as humble and polite while also trying to get a closer look at the visitor. When her father finally told her about the ongoing negotiations, she was

not surprised to learn that the marriage potentially involved three husbands. Several of her friends had married this way already – polyandry was common in her village – and hence the arrangement was not foreign to her. She was glad, she said, when she heard that the suitors, who were brothers, were close to her age. She realised that she had in fact met the eldest groom-to-be, who had come to her home with the pretence of being a business contact of her brother, and she had liked him. After a few days of consideration, she decided to agree to the marriage.

The preparations for the wedding began, and after four months, shortly after the Tibetan new year celebrations, she was taken to her grooms' village. They had borrowed a white car, substituting the white mare that traditionally brought the bride to her wedding, and the ride took only half an hour. Drolma was happy that she was to relocate to a place so close to home. During the wedding celebrations, she shared the podium with all three husbands; they were seated at her side, placed according to their age. The eldest husband spent the first night with her, reflecting his authority over his brothers and initiating his special relation to their wife. The second night Drolma was with the middle husband, and one week later, with the youngest one. After the wedding, Drolma moved into her eldest husband's room. He had made a tentative schedule for when she would visit her other two husbands. In the beginning, she felt shy in her new house, and although her mother-in-law had made it clear that the wife's preferences regarding the organisation of access to sexual activity mattered, Drolma did not voice her opinions. In fact, Drolma said, reflecting back, at the time she did not have an opinion or a preference, as the situation was so new to her. However, as the years passed, she found a way to organise what they call *kora khor* – going round in circle – that worked well for all the marriage partners. Through giggles and laughs, she explained that because her eldest husband often was working outside the village, she had her own room, and, with time, she preferred that the two remaining husbands visited her there. Together with her middle husband (*ajok*), she worked out a two-week schedule for the three of them, of which he then informed the youngest husband (*achung*). A large house enables this kind of arrangement, providing the wife with the freedom of a separate room.

The household Drolma had married into was relatively wealthy. Her husbands engaged in complementing economic activities; one worked as a carpenter and one as a driver, both bringing income to the household, and the youngest was in charge of the agricultural work. Drolma's chores included helping the *achung* in the fields and tending to the animals and the children, as well as sharing domestic work with her mother-in-law. Her father-in-law administered the household chores, helped with the fields and represented the household in external affairs. In this perspective, the advantages of polyandry

Figure 0.1. The Panam valley. Panam is an ordinary farming area in the western part of Central Tibet, in the region Tibetans called Tsang. © Heidi Fjeld

are clear, and the economic organisation and ambition of farms is at the core of both the emic and the etic explanations of polyandry.

In Central Tibet[1] before 1950, fraternal polyandry – the marriage between two or more brothers and one woman – was a common marital form of the upper agrarian classes, particularly those with hereditary access to land and (the often heavy) tax obligations attached. This category of farmers were called 'taxpayers' (*trelpa*). However, from 1980, Tibetan farmers of all social backgrounds, including Drolma's family and the lower ranked skilled workers (blacksmiths, butchers and corpse-cutters), had also started to arrange polyandry. When I surveyed Sharlung village in 2002, I found that almost 60 per cent of all marriages were polyandrous, and of the remaining 40 per cent, 13 per cent were the result of partitions of former polyandrous marriages. According to Sharlung villagers, all those that have more than one son in the household would attempt to arrange polyandry for them. The return of polyandry, including its new social distribution, is surprising.

Polyandry has been recognised as directly related to sociopolitical organisation in general and land tenure and taxation systems in particular. Already four decades ago, it was described as a marriage form that was particularly 'fragile in the face of external pressures [for example, from missionaries and modern nation states] for social change' (Levine and Sangree 1980: 405). The administrators of the 'modern nation state' of the People's Republic of

China (PRC) have loudly opposed the practice of polyandry. By prohibiting polygamy already in the first Marriage Law in 1950 and frowning upon polyandry as abnormal and primitive, the Chinese government has effectuated a pressure similar to that which Levine and Sangree expected would lead to 'complete cessation or decrease in the incidents of polyandrous marriages' (ibid.). Melvyn Goldstein concluded in a similar way, based not on state interventions but rather on the particular sensitivity to the economic rationale of polyandrous organisation. In 1987, he wrote: 'New opportunities for economic and social mobility in these countries, such as the tourist trade and government employment, are also eroding the rationale for polyandry, and so it may vanish within the next generation' (1987: 77). With the massive economic changes and rapid expansion of opportunities in and outside the agricultural areas of Central Tibet from the 1980s, but in particularly since 2000, we could expect a decline of new arrangements and a cessation of polyandry in rural Tibet. This, however, is not the case. In fact, in Panam valley, the pattern is opposite.

Moving into the Takrab family home in Sharlung for the first time in 2002, I was not surprised to find that the three sons in the house shared one wife. While preparing for fieldwork, I had talked to and read the excellent work of Ben Jiao, a Tibetan anthropologist who had done his PhD with Melvyn Goldstein, graduating from Case Western University in 2001. His work, conducted in a bigger village in the same valley, had shown a significant increase of polyandry since 1980 (Ben Jiao 2001). Ben Jiao identified this increase to be directly related to post-1978 economic reforms in China, which 'created a set of socio-economic conditions that has led to a substantial number of Tibetan families to choose the traditional Tibetan marriage pattern of polyandry over monogamy' (2001: xi). In his dissertation, Ben Jiao showed how polyandry was an effective economic strategy, increasing not only income of the household but also social status. Tibetans, he wrote, 'view it [polyandry] as a means-end strategy that households used to maintain or increase their economic status' (ibid.: 193). The main, and most relevant, post-1978 reform was the national Household Responsibility System (*gentsang lamluk*), which marked the end of the collective commune period and involved de-collectivisation; the village land (and animals) was divided and redistributed, providing each household with fixed plots of land to maintain over a long period of time. In Panam, this reform started at the end of 1980 and re-established the household as the central locus for production, as it did across the PRC. From a social history perspective, the renewed emphasis on the household established all farmers as structurally similar to the former 'taxpayer' (*trelpa*) category of the pre-1950 land tenure system in Central Tibet. Although they did not have the same tax obligations, through de-collectivisation and redistribution all farmers held estates, with

hereditary access to land to be administered from one generation to the next. Importantly, in Central Tibet, it is normative that all sons have equal rights to inheritance of land, which means that if all sons marry independently and move out, the land will be fragmented. Agrarian societies attempt to solve the issue of land inheritance in different ways; some give the eldest or the youngest all inheritance rights, others negotiate between the entitled, while others simply identify one person to take over the farm.[2] In Central Tibet and the Himalayas, people have preferred a so-called monomarital principle – that is, to arrange only one marriage among the sons, per generation (Goldstein 1971a). As daughters usually marry out and live with their husband's family, their weddings have less effect on the future of their natal household. Hence, with the renewed status of the household and the redefined relation to land following the Household Responsibility System in 1980/81, many of the farmers in Panam found polyandry to be the best way to organise marriage and inheritance in their new situation of being in charge of a restructured type of farm.

A materialistic explanation of Tibetan fraternal polyandry, which dominated earlier research, is based on the emic wish to secure the estate across generations on the one hand, and to maximise access to male labour on the other. As such, polyandry is closely connected not only to inheritance rights but also to the traditional three-folded economy of agrarian areas of Central Tibet. Economic diversification involves members of the same household engaging in agricultural work, like herding, as well as a range of off-farm activities – traditionally trade and transport and, more recently, construction work, as in the example of Drolma's husbands. Surprisingly, starting from the 1980s but intensifying with the Open up the West (Ch. *xibu da kaifa*) campaign in 2000, the economic development policies of rural Central Tibet have confirmed and enhanced the advantages of polyandry. Incentivised by state subsidies, farmers in Panam have steadily transformed from a subsistence to a much more diversified economy as members of the households seek new forms of income outside the farm (Goldstein et al. 2003; Goldstein, Childs and Wangdui 2008). By arranging polyandry, farmers are able to participate in these economic opportunities opening up in their vicinity; polyandrous households have more members to perform new types of work, and hence bring income back home, while keeping the farm production. When talking about polyandry, people in Panam villages explained that these marriages allow them to improve the economy of their household – that is, the unit they call *khyimtsang*. Moreover, it enables them to maintain the *khyimtsang* for generations. What does it mean to maintain the household, beyond mere economy? I suggest a broader social approach to polyandry and the household as the increase and spread of polyandry in Panam not only manifests the interconnection between marriage, land and reforms but

provides an opportunity to rethink relationality and sociality and how we conceptualise and understand kinship and village life in Central Tibet.

There has been a curious analytic disconnection between polyandry and kinship in previous research (with the exception of Levine 1988).[3] Thus, the title of this book both refers to the empirical return of polyandry in farming communities in Panam, and to the theoretical return of polyandry in the study of kinship. The first of two main arguments in this book is that the new arrangements of polyandry are part of a process in which farmers are (re) creating and consolidating households as fundamentally meaningful social, cultural and ontological ritual places manifested in the physical houses, with a particular social history and possible future. These houses are the loci for kin-making and constitute the core of kinship groups in Panam, hence polyandry is a kinship matter. These processes can be fruitfully analysed by engaging a house perspective inspired by Lévi-Strauss' concept of the house as a 'moral person' (*personne morale*) (1983: 174), a kinship analytic that unites contradicting principles, such as descent and residence, two organisational principles that have been a puzzle in Tibetan kinship studies. Yet, a house perspective does not necessarily imply that Tibet should be classified as a house society, and this brings me to the second argument in the book. The centrality of the house, and its interconnection with polyandry in Panam at beginning of the 2000s is an example of the flexibility and pragmatism inherent in Tibetan social organisation and can serve as a case of what I call kinship of potentiality. Across the vast and diverse Tibetan ethnographic region, a range of kinship principles and idioms are shared, albeit to different extents, based in flesh and bone, in residence and filiation, in lineage, laterality and locality. These provide Tibetans with culturally available possibilities and potentialities, when manoeuvring social and political contexts affecting the kinship sensibilities of being related; of a sense of belonging on the one hand, and the organisation of membership, rights and obligations to a collective – to the village or other communities – on the other hand. In particular places, at particular times, kinship is formed, enacted and maintained, leading to great variation but also a strong sense of continuity, as these principles, idioms and practices are foregrounded and backgrounded, depending on a range of internal and external factors, concerns and forces.

Kinship Developments: From Classification to Practice, to Pragmatism

A house perspective is one of the many approaches that social anthropologists have taken to challenge the much-criticised traditional kinship theories, aiming to move beyond classifications, rules and biocentric perspectives

towards daily practices, domestic lives and the making of kinship (Carsten 2004: 16). Kinship has been at the core of the anthropological endeavour since the discipline's very beginning, and – through reinventing itself over the last four decades – it remains fundamental to our analysis of social and cultural life. Kinship is both a theoretical concept and a social category (Franklin and McKinnon 2001), and anthropological approaches to both aspects have taken many turns from its nascent start in the end of the nineteenth century. In 1870, Lewis Henry Morgan, a lawyer with an interest in native American societies as well as in evolution, published an extensive work on kinship terminology, in which he developed the first grand theory in kinship studies, the so-called classificatory and descriptive systems, and later subcategories of these (Parkin and Stone 2004: 5–9).[4] Morgan's, and his followers', theories were based on the idea that language directly mirrors culture, and hence relationship terminology was a way to understand social life and behaviour. Although the evolution theories that motivated Morgan and his associates' comparative projects were left behind rather quickly,[5] this way of approaching kinship became very influential, and continuing until today, much research effort has gone into systematic mapping of kinship terminology, also in the Himalayas.[6]

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the functionalist turn in social sciences at the beginning of the twentieth century directed anthropologists' interest in kinship, and descent groups in particular, towards the political functions of kin-based institutions in small-scale societies (without states), and away from history (and evolution). Mid-century, leading British social anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard and Fortes, were very influential in their investigations of the role and function of corporate descent groups in Africa. These studies were firmly placed in Fortes' distinction between the 'domestic' and 'the politico-jural' domains of kinship (1959), and their interests were clearly in the latter. Peripheral to the corporateness of descent groups, marriage more generally was deemed uninteresting and irrelevant. In many ways, this interest in kinship as it unfolded in the political, legal and public domain continued Morgan's American project, as it developed into a technical, rather abstract endeavour, and with time also included ambitious comparative efforts by bringing African lineage models to Southeast Asia and Papua New Guinea (Barnes 1962). Early kinship theories were to a large extent detached from the complexities of people's everyday lives (Carsten 2004: 10–12). In France, Lévi-Strauss was working on an alternative to functionalism and what developed to be a competing grand theory of kinship, in which marriage, and the alliances formed between groups through the exchange of women (wives), formed the core. A structuralist approach, alliance theory was concerned with cultural logics and underlying structures – most prominently found in negative marriage rules and binary

oppositions – and, by default, was even more disinterested and disconnected from people's lived lives. Much ink has been spilt arguing over whether descent or alliance was the most fundamental principle of kinship. Another, and very different theoretical approach of the 1970s, based in Marxist critique and with particular vigour in France, shifted focus away from the politico-jural domain that had dominated mid-century social anthropology towards the domestic – that is, to the household as the central unit of analysis.[7] These theorists were concerned with the household as a corporate unit of production and property and represented a turn closer to lived lives, although it was the large-scale social analysis of power relations, exploitation and economic and political change that drove their theoretical developments.

More and more removed from people's lives (with the exception of some of the (neo)Marxists), kinship left the centre of the anthropological stage in the 1970s and 1980s. Or, rather, it was helped off stage by David Schneider. Trained in the North-American school of cultural anthropology (descending from Morgan and Boas), Schneider opposed the technical and schematic way to look at kinship and the prominence given to language, and shifted his focus towards meaning and symbols – an interpretive anthropology represented most prominently by Clifford Geertz – in his seminal study *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (1980 [1968]). Schneider argued that American kinship was based on two main ideas, namely shared biogenetic substance and solidarity that endures over time, reflecting biological and social aspects of kinship, or what he called the order of nature and the order of law (1980 [1968]: 25–30). Together with his later book, *Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984), Schneider convincingly showed that kinship theory was permeated with Euro-American assumptions about the primacy of relations formed through sexual procreation, epitomised in the idiom of 'blood is thicker than water' (1980 [1968]: 49). These assumptions about the meaning and value of biology and substance are not universal, he argued, and hence former kinship analyses were not only wrong but the whole comparative kinship project was doomed to fail (1984). This echoed what the British anthropologist Rodney Needham had argued already in 1971, but perhaps due to the interpretive turn more broadly in anthropology coinciding with Schneider, his critique gathered more momentum, and mid-century kinship studies as we know it disappeared into the background of the anthropology debates. However, Schneider's critique was not only destructive, in the sense that research on kinship almost vanished for two decades, it came to be productive to the revitalisation of kinship theory and the development of the so-called 'new kinship studies'.

The encouragement to detach kinship from biology, to complicate the relations between nature and culture, and to include what had conventionally been classified as kinship into other anthropological themes, such as gender, personhood and the body, brought new life to the analytical kinship

endeavour (Carsten 2004). Coinciding with the developments and increased availability of reproductive technologies, which so clearly challenge the distinctions between nature and culture and the biological and the social, kinship studies returned to the forefront of the discipline in the 1990s, particularly influenced by Marilyn Strathern's book *After Nature*, published in 1992. *Cultures of Relatedness*, edited by Carsten (2000), marked a new, broader approach to kinship, based in the messy, lived experiences of the everyday. This focus on what 'being related does for people living in particular localities' (Carsten 2000: 1) proved to be very fruitful, as it enabled analyses that started with a sensibility to emic terms and understandings of relationality. It captured the creativity that people bring to the production of close relations and the performative aspects of kin-making and maintaining, and it transgressed gender, class and other power relations that had narrowed perspectives (and relevance) of previous kinship theories. Importantly, a focus on relatedness enabled an epistemic dissolvement of the distinction between the domestic and the political domains that had dominated kinship studies.

Many issues have contributed to '"undoing" kinship in its various classic anthropological guises' (Carsten 2004: 16), and this brings me back to the house. Together with issues such as reproductive technologies, gender and food/substances, the house brought perspectives discussed in 'new kinship studies' to old social and cultural concerns. In this book, I give the house a central analytic force, as a place where the everyday unfolds, where kinship is (re)produced and performed, and where the individual is positioned in the order of the world. The house is also a social group to which individuals belong and to which other houses relate. Hence, the house is a locus for the study of relatedness, combining social, ontological, symbolic, political and architectural aspects. I take the house, as Carsten writes, to 'embody the interconnection between the individual trajectory, kinship and the state' (2018: 103). This approach comes out of the house debates that developed in social anthropology at the beginning of the 1990s and onwards. Lévi-Strauss' notion of a 'house society' (*société à maison*) – a particular type of social organisation – was the starting point for these theoretical and ethnographic debates. What made this concept so useful was its 'symbolic unifying capacities' of kinship principles (Carsten 2018: 106), such as alliance/descent, affinity/consanguinity, matrilineality/patrilineality. This informed a new, more holistic approach to kinship in cases such as Tibet, where the role of descent is ambiguous. A house perspective is broader than Lévi-Strauss' work and intentions, as reflected in the title of the seminal volume *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond*, edited by Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995), and offered 'a way of grasping the significance of kinship "from the inside", that is through explorations of everyday intimacies that occur there (Carsten 2004: 56).[8] Inspired by these early house studies, Elisabeth Hsu, in an article

on the social and material life among Naxi and Moso in southern China, listed three aspects of what a focus on the house in kinship studies might entail: first, an increased emphasis on residence and territory; second, a focus on local concepts of house, hearth and home, which includes not only the locality but also the physicality of the house; and third, a perspective where daily domestic life is given preference as an entry into kinship issues (1998: 70–72). These three aspects are at the core of my choice to engage a house perspective in the analysis of the return of polyandry and of kin-making in rural Central Tibet.

Polyandry in Kinship Studies

Polyandry has not only remained disconnected from kinship theories in Tibetan studies; it has also been curiously peripheral in kinship studies in social anthropology more broadly. Of course, polyandry is an ethnographically rare phenomenon, although it has been practised in many corners of the world.[9] It is also a type of marriage that challenges fundamental notions of gendered sexuality and reproduction. Fraternal polyandry in Tibet implicates shared fatherhood and, as such, contradicts commonly held underlying perceptions of male sexuality and reproduction in Euro-North American culture, such as the notion of a man's evolutionary drive to spread his genes. In fraternal polyandrous marriages, men are unable to, and seemingly uninterested in, identifying and establishing biological fatherhood (in a scientific sense of the 'biological'). On the contrary, they readily accept socially validated paternity – that is, they do not make a distinction between pater and genitor.

Polyandry has also challenged the very definition of marriage. If anthropologists were interested in polyandry in the mid-twentieth century kinship theories, their main concern was with how to classify these practices, asking, for instance, whether they should be defined as 'plural mating' or 'plural marriage'?[10] If we follow Leach's classic lists of 'distinguishable classes of rights' defining marriage, namely that they serve to establish legal parenthood, they establish monopoly in the spouses' sexuality, they give right to the spouse's labour, and rights to property, provide a joint fund of property for the offspring of the marriage and establish a 'socially significant' relationship of affinity (1955: 183), polyandry would qualify as marriage. In what ways, if any, do such definitional discussions matter? Well, they point to concerns, to the taken-for-granted notions underlying a phenomenon. For instance, in principle, polyandry is not more difficult to define than its conjugal 'opposite', polygyny.[11] The unwillingness to define polyandry as anything else than cicisbeism or plural mating is an indication of an underlying androcentric bias and also that men's involvement in these types of relations has been met

with suspicion. Discussing the lack of comparative studies of polyandry, Berreman sums up: 'We have tended to regard monogamy as expectable (even moral), polygyny as reasonable (even enviable) and polyandry as puzzling (even disturbing)' (1980: 378). Lévi-Strauss is another example of this, as he claimed that men's natural disposition has 'deeply polygynous tendencies' and from that assumed that polyandry would only be practised when there are no other alternatives (quoted in Levine 1988: 4; see also Cassidy and Lee 1989). Underlying and implied in this contention is the expectation that with economic improvements polyandry would be abandoned as a viable form of marriage. Using the return of polyandry in Panam as a case, I aim to challenge these underlying assumptions.

Polyandrous Houses

People who are married polyandrously live, share and belong to the same household. The household has been a central unit in the research on Tibet; it has, as Sophie Day writes, '*stood for* the Tibetan-speaking region just as caste or tribe have done in other parts of the word' (2015: 174). Throughout the Tibetan ethnographic region, villages were made up of households of different character, groups with distinct rights and obligations to each other, to local monasteries, to the village and to the polities of which they were part. Often termed *drongpa*, *khangpa* or *khyimtsang*, the status of the households depended on relations to land, ancestors and material and ritual wealth but also on biography. In some areas, such as in Ladakh in India and Humla in western Nepal, types of households were, and are, clearly distinguished by terminology where a corporate, named house is called *khangchen* or *drongchen* (large house), while a satellite, adjunct unnamed household is called *khangchung* or *drongchung* (small house) (Levine 1988; Day 2015; Hovden 2016). In theory, *khangchen* constitute the main members of the village, with clearly defined and strictly regulated rights and responsibilities in the village, while the *khangchung* either belong to the *khangchen* or has independent status but limited formal obligations in the village. The last decades of social, economic and legal changes in the Himalayas have complicated both these distinctions and the relations between the large and the small houses, as Day describes in detail from Ladakh (2015). Polyandry was associated with the *khangchen/drongchen* – the large, named houses that formed the core of the communities (Levine 1988; Day; 2015; Hovden 2016). While polyandry is decreasing in numbers across Himalayan communities, including Ladakh and Humla, this association remains.

Before the Chinese invasion and massive restructuring of Tibetan society from the 1950s onwards, the households in rural Central Tibet were also of

distinct character and status, reflecting relations to land and to the administers of land – whether they were the government, monasteries or aristocratic families.[12] Among the farmers, the main household categories were *trelpa* and *düchung* – the landholding taxpayers and the landless labourers – of which the *trelpa* households shared characteristics with *khangchen/drongchen*, including the association with polyandry. *Düchung* were not satellite households of the *trelpa* but shared some characteristics with *khangchung*, in the sense that they were unnamed, more temporary units without known biographies, poorer, and often in a precarious relation to the *trelpa* or others with rights to farm land.

Marriage forms and arrangement patterns also varied among *trelpa* and *düchung*. *Trelpa* often held parent-arranged (more or less) elaborate weddings called *changsa*, while among *düchung*, informal couple-initiated marriages with small weddings, called *khathukpa* ('meeting of mouths') was most common. A *khathukpa* marriage most often led to the establishment of a new household, while *changsa* most often led to patrilocal residence, except in the cases where there were no male heirs in the receiving household, when matrilocal residence was common. The Chinese takeover made the categories of *trelpa* and *düchung* redundant. During the collective period, lasting until 1980, *khathukpa* marriage was most common across the social landscape in Central Tibetan villages.

Marriage and class is intertwined in Tibet, as elsewhere. Returning to Panam, marriage, class and state bureaucratic practices formed the households in particular ways. Before 1950, most landless farmers (*düchung*) lived in unnamed nuclear families (Goldstein 1978a; Aziz 1978a), and this was also the case in Panam. Labourers without hereditary access to land were called *yokpo* (a term that elsewhere refers to serfs), and they lived in small households, often in a rented room in one of the 'taxpayer' houses (called *genpo*). With the introduction of the first 'Democratic Reforms' in 1959, a reform much appreciated by the poor labourers, the Chinese government redistributed the houses and land from the local landholders to the former landless labourers. For administrative reasons, the local government officials encouraged the villagers to give a name to their new house, and these names came to represent the group of people living in the house as well as the attached land – that is, a form of estate (Ben Jiao 2001: 94). The Democratic Reforms lasted only one year, to much dismay, and with the collectivisation starting in 1960, the then named houses no longer had attached land; however, the names remained as house names (*khangming*) and developed as reference points for identity and belonging in the villages. Then, following the redistribution of land in 1980/81, fixed amounts of land were attached to these named groups, and hence, structurally, all households became named, corporate estates, in ways that resembled the former *genpo* in the area. This

context is important for the renewed interest in polyandry, and it is within these reconstituted named estates, associated with formal plural marriages (*changsa*), that fraternal polyandry stands out as a highly valued sociocultural practice.

The return of polyandry, and the parallel transformations of the domestic that it involved, calls for a more nuanced way to conceptualise households in Central Tibet. Aziz described agricultural Tibet as a society where the place of residence was of major importance, and where the household was the prime group to which individuals belonged: 'It is not the idea of descent, but rather the concept of household which stands out as the keystone around which social relations are articulated. It is the residence principle which is central', she wrote (1978a: 117). What, then, is the relation between residence and household? A term often taken for granted in anthropology, studies of 'households' have primarily been concerned with comparing form and functions of groups of co-residing individuals who engage in common economic endeavours (Netting, Wilks and Arnould 1984; Gray 1995). However, a focus on the household, with its temporal and ad hoc connotations, can only bring limited understanding of corporate units and does not explore the full potential of 'residence'.[13] 'The residence principle', as Aziz called it, should not necessarily be operationalised as the analytical term 'household' but should rather, I hold, inspire a general focus on residence – that is, 'the fact of living in a particular place' (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* 1995: 996). Residence, as a principle, implies the actual place of living, the people who live there and the social groups of which these people are members. An important critique of household studies is that due to a lack of holistic perspectives, the conceptual constitution of households – that is, the cultural meaning of the domestic – remains unexplored (Gray 1995: 16). This is valid point also for Tibetan households. Taking a broader approach to polyandry and the households in which these marriages take place, we might ask why it was so important for farmers in Panam to strengthen and perpetuate the household. And, related to that, what are the cultural meanings of the domestic in these farming communities?

While polyandry has often been analysed within the socio-economics of households, marriage is inherently also about kinship, and broadening the analytical frame of polyandry to kinship and relatedness opens new paths to explore. One such path is house perspectives, inspired by, but moving beyond, Lévi-Strauss. Taking European noble estates as the starting point, Lévi-Strauss introduced houses as 'moral persons', or 'corporate bodies', with names, material and immaterial wealth, biographies and reputations – that is, with social lives. The house endures over time, not only through the reproduction of its members but also through the transmission of material and immaterial wealth, which constitute the house itself. Hence, a house is

more than the constellations of people living there at any particular time (the household); it is a social group that is perpetuated over time through filiation, adoption, descent and marriage, and other ad hoc arrangements. Houses make up significant social groups with which individuals identify and are identified by others, often legitimised in kinship terms, and they are ranked in a defined social hierarchy.[14] Perhaps the most productive aspect of the house perspective though, is the idea that houses are more than a domestic space and combine social, symbolic, ontological and architectural aspects of village life. As Howell noted: '[t]he house as the object of the anthropological gaze, let alone the historical, the political and the economic gazes, will, I suggest, yield hitherto unsuspected new insights into old concerns' (Howell 2003a: 33). This holds true for the study of Tibetan polyandry.

Many Tibetan households can be understood through such a concept of 'house', as has been recognised particularly in Ladakhi studies (Phylactou 1989; Mills 2000; Day 2015). Indeed, before 1950, the estates of the aristocracy and the land-holding farmers in Central Tibet can be seen as houses, in a Lévi-Straussian sense of the word, and in the case of Sharlung village, the *trelpa* and the *genpo* can easily be classified as houses. At the time of my fieldworks in Sharlung, most households were houses, albeit in different ways. Some had well-known names with a long biography, a good reputation, elaborately decorated physical buildings and ritual wealth, while others were newly established houses with limited material and immaterial wealth, but enough to consolidate a house. When exploring the status of marriage in the history of the various houses in the village, a clear pattern is evident: while we might find polyandry in all types of houses, there is more likely to be polyandrous marriages over several generations in houses with long biographies, and only among the younger generation in newly established houses.

Kinship of Potentiality

A focus on the house in Panam – and the polyandrous house – means a focus on the organisational principles of residence, which in a study of social relations in rural Tibet is not in itself new. Yet, there are unresolved contradictions in the ways that kin groups and meaning are described with reference to descent (primarily the patrilineage) and residence (primarily the household). Already in 1978(a), Aziz argued against the prominent role given to descent in Tibetan kinship studies when she described and analysed village life in Dingri, Central Tibet.[15] However, patrilineal descent has remained a strong undercurrent in studies of social organisation and clans in both historical periods, a point also made by Samuels (2016),[16] and periods closer to our time (Stein 1972; Prince Peter 1963). Despite more recent studies critically re-engaging

with the concept of the 'clan', both from an anthropological perspective focusing on Amdo (Langelaar 2017, 2019) and from an historical perspective focusing on Central Tibet and its southern borderlands (Samuels 2016), the idea of patrilineages and descent groups remains strong. Also, the emic presence of patri-ideology in many Tibetan communities has blurred the analysis of other forms of social organisation, and particularly the significance of co-residency and the domestic group. In Panam too, there is a patri-ideology present, yet, the core, organising unit in which the local farmers manage their people, land, wealth and relations and in which individuals gain their rights and duties, and belonging, is the house. Lévi-Strauss suggested 'house society' as a particular kinship typology, consolidating contradictory kinship principles, such as descent and residence. Following the arguments above, we might call Central Tibet a house society; the *drongpa* or *khyimtsang* fit Lévi-Strauss' criteria of house as a 'moral person' – external relations across generation are house-based, the physical houses themselves are socio-symbolic spaces of particular cultural meanings (Toffin 2016 [1991]) – and this model allows for ranked classifications.[17] At the same time, other categories of farmers in Tibet, as well as pastoralists and urbanites, primarily activate both the patrilineage (and patrilateral kin) and, for some purposes, matrilateral relations in their kin-making practices, suggesting that if Tibet is defined as a 'house society', there are significant exceptions to this model. While recognising the value of the house in Panam and rural Tsang, as well as in Ladakh and some of the eastern borderland communities, we must also note the heterogeneity in the social organisations found across the Tibetan ethnographic region. Often in our attempts to build models and theories in anthropology, we tend to define deviant cases as merely exceptions; however, with the concept of a kinship of potentiality my aim is to bring also the 'exceptions' into the theoretical framework.

The broad range of marriage forms culturally available to members of Tibetan communities and in the borderlands can be understood as a range of socially accepted, potentially beneficial organisational principles that can be employed (or attempted to be employed) in a given time and place. The continuity and change in marriage practices depend on external and internal factors, such as household composition, gender relations, morality, land tenure systems, and political regulations and relations to the state. This leads to the dominance of certain marriage forms in certain contexts while allowing others to continue to exist in the background. For instance, while polyandry is less prevalent among Tibetan pastoralists today, or among urbanites in Lhasa, we do find a few cases in most of these communities.[18] In addition, we know that there are some cases of polyandry among Tibetans in India, initiated after arriving into exile (Grent 2002). Polyandry is a possibility to consider; it is a potential. Likewise, while polyandry was the preferred

marriage form among farmers in areas of rural Tsang, polygyny remained an alternative when certain factors prevail, such as fertility problems, expressed also among younger couples in Lhasa.[19] Marriage forms are flexible, and choices are pragmatic, depending upon the perceived potential of the various forms socially and culturally available – that is, monogamy, polygyny, polyandry and combinations of these. Across the Tibetan ethnographic region, not only marriage but also kinship more broadly is formed, maintained and explained in a myriad of ways. Kinship principles, idioms and practices are (unevenly) shared, and the formation and maintenance of these is a process in flux, formed in a continuum of potential principles and practices that can be foregrounded or backgrounded – in different localities at different times. The flexibility, especially of marriages, might seem remarkable, but kinship and relatedness is always – albeit to different degrees – pragmatic and creatively produced through and for both ordinary and extraordinary days and events. The availability of this broad range of possible principles, idioms and practices that do not challenge kinship epistemologies but form, and are formed by, what can be called a kinship of potentiality is shared – although differently distributed – in Tibet and its borderlands.

Panam Valley and Sharlung Village

The fieldwork for this book was done in Panam (Tib. Pa snam, Ch. Bai nang), a valley located in Tsang, the vast area in west-central Tibet, between and to the south of Shigatse and Gyantse towns. The origin of its name can be traced back to two Buddhist scholars of the thirteenth century, Badra Nyima Drapa and Nalang Dorje Denshong, who practised in this area; their two names combined are Ba Na, which with time has turned into Panam (pronounced locally as *Bena*) (Ben Jiao 2001: 34). Panam is a central area for grain production in Tibet, located between the Himalayan mountain range and the Yarlung Tsangpo river (the upper stream of Brahmaputra). A river valley, it covers some 120 km from north to south, and its width varies from the narrow and high-altitude (semi-)pastoral areas in the north-west to wider areas of well-irrigated land in the south-east. Farmers produce the five main grains – barley, wheat, buckwheat, peas and rapeseed – as well as potatoes and radishes. Due to the harsh climate, with cold winters and uneven distribution of rainfall, the fields only produce a harvest once a year, as in most of the high-altitude farming areas in Tibet.

Panam County (Ch. *xang*) is an administrative unit under Shigatse prefecture, including eleven townships (Ch. *xiang*), out of which Kyiling *xiang* is an average place both in terms of scale, population and economic position. According to the *xiang* leaders, in 2001 there were 4,512 people in the

township, and these belonged to 595 households. Kyiling *xiang* consists of eleven administrative villages (Ch. *cun*) varying in size and basis for livelihood. Three of the villages are located in the narrow upper valley, located at some 5,000 meters, where there is little arable land or access to irrigation, and where people are semi-pastoralists (*samadrok*). In the mid-2000s, Panam was ranked number 6 of 18 counties in in per capita income in Shigatse prefecture (Goldstein, Childs and Wangdui 2008: 518, n11). However, Kyiling township was, according to the local leaders, one of the poorest in the county, and most of the *samadrok* villagers depended on help from the local government for food security throughout the year. In the lower parts of Panam, at around 4,000 meters, where Sharlung is located, people were farmers, with relatively small numbers of livestock. Further east towards the county seat, the farmers to a larger degree engaged in off-farm income activities, working in the construction industry, renting out trucks or other means of transport (Goldstein et al. 2003, 2010; Goldstein, Childs and Wangdui 2008).

Sharlung village is located in the narrower part of the valley with limited arable land and irrigation options. During our stays in the early 2000s, the village seemed far away from the urban centres in the area, despite the rather close physical distances. For instance, despite the intentions from the regional government to introduce electricity to all the villages, due to some unfortunate events, Sharlung was excluded from the installation process and was therefore without electricity. Electricity poles had been built from the county seat, but, according to the township leaders, lack of wires caused the project to come to a halt between Sharlung and the neighbour village, pointing to the precariousness of development initiatives in the area.[20] As in most high-altitude places in Central Tibet, wood was limited; hence, people primarily used dried dung from yaks, cows, sheep and goats for heating iron stoves for cooking. There was no mobile phone coverage, and to make a call, people used the public phone in the township. Yet, Sharlung was not an isolated place; people socialised with those in immediate neighbouring villages and with others from across the valley, and many had relatives in Shigatse or Lhasa. Through marriage, work, pilgrimage, business and the search of various services, people moved easily in and out of the villages, mostly using three-wheel tractors for transport.

Before 1950, land tenure in the area surrounding Sharlung followed the same general structures as we know from elsewhere in Central Tibet, dividing the land between aristocratic families, monasteries and the government (Goldstein 1989; Fjeld 2005). An influential aristocratic family administered the land to the west of Sharlung, and Sachung monastery managed the land to the east. Sharlung and their closest neighbours to the west were villages of government serfs (*zhung gyukpa*), which meant that the fields belonged

Figure 0.2. A newly renovated house in Sharlung. © Heidi Fjeld

Figure 0.3. Harvest time. Primarily subsistence farmers, much of the life of residents in Sharlung revolved around agricultural work. Soon after we arrived in Sharlung in 2002, the harvest started; it was a hard but happy time, and school children were brought back home to help. © Heidi Fjeld

to the government (and not the monastic or aristocratic estates) and were administered and worked by taxpayers (*trelpa*). Some *trelpa* also hired landless labourers to perform agricultural work on their farms. In Sharlung, there were two houses that served as government representatives, also referred to as *genpo*, and they were the only houses with some affluence. The majority of the population was very poor, calling themselves *yokpo* (serfs). In addition, Sharlung and the neighbouring villages were served by a number of blacksmiths, butchers and those handling the dead (*baru*), who were lower ranked than *yokpo*, endogamous and lived on the outskirts of the villages.

During our first stay in 2002, Sharlung village consisted of forty-four households, counting some 350 individuals. These numbers are obviously fluctuating, not only reflecting demographic processes of birth and death, marriages and divorces, but also household demise and new establishments, as well as outmigration. Most households consisted of three generations sharing a house and cooperating economically. However, there were great variations in household compositions, including single men and women with or without children; monogamous couples with children and/or their parents; as well as plurally married partners with children and/or their parents.

Sharlung is approximately one and a half kilometre in length and one kilometre in width – it is a small place. Agricultural areas of Tibet are recognisable by the vernacular architecture; two- or three-storey fortress-like houses built from handmade dried earth bricks and limited amounts of wood, and these houses were also common in Sharlung. Moreover, most houses were surrounded by a courtyard, in which farming implements and other valuables, such as a tractor or a horse were stored. Some houses were whitewashed with black door frames with bright paint above it; others were yet to be painted. The roofs were flat, some framed with black paint as well, and some with visible shrines on the roof – painted red or white. A tall stone wall framed the courtyards and reinforced the impression of isolation. When walking around the village, the economic and social differences were apparent simply by looking at the houses. The materiality and structure of the houses not only gave an indication of its social status and wealth but the history and distribution of marriage forms.

Doing Ethnography in Tibet

I felt very fortunate to be able to stay with a family in Sharlung for almost five months. Given the sensitive nature of both doing social science studies in the TAR and exploring intimate relations and everyday lives, this gave me the chance to engage informally and over a prolonged period with people there. My methods are ethnographic, and I combine observational

and conversational data, including interviews and informal conversations. I started by conducting a survey and visited most households in the village. The survey not only gave an overview of household composition, social background, and family history, marriage and economic organisation, including off-farm activities, but it also gave me an opportunity to make kinship charts and memorise names and connections, which was a productive way to start conversations later. I focused on participation and observation among two main categories of interlocutors: farmers of *all* backgrounds in Sharlung, and farmers and non-farmers of hereditary low-rank background in Sachung, the neighbouring village. As it turned out, these categories of people included all households in Sharlung and twelve households in Sachung. Following the survey, I had extended and repeated conversations with residents of fifteen particular households. Of these, I put emphasis on five key interlocutors in addition to the eight people in my host household. These five people were: one *nama* (in-married wife) with young children; one older unmarried woman residing with her brother's family; one young polyandrously married man with a newly established household; one monogamously married man with adult children; and one younger nun from the local nunnery. Further, I spent time in the nunnery and also interviewed township leaders, village leaders and deputy leaders in Sharlung, leaders of the two closest villages, and monks in Sachung monastery. Of the low-ranked households of skilled workers in Sachung village, I repeated my visits as often as possible, in particular to one blacksmith household. Further, I visited and interviewed ritual experts from several villages in the area, including several *ngakpa*, one diviner (*mopa*), one hail protector (*ser sungpa*) and one medium (*lhapa*). Despite the relatively short time I was allowed to stay in Panam, I consider the data to represent a broad range of people and perspectives in Sharlung and its vicinity, much because of the excellent co-researcher I shared the experience with.

Our days in the villages consisted of more or less the same routines. In the morning we – my co-researcher Samdrup, my daughter Runa and nanny Mingzom – ate breakfast together in my room, sharing tea and *tsampa*. At this point, the grandmother in the house had often already joined us, chatting about everything and nothing. We always asked her about the happenings of the day in the house and around the village, and she always asked us who we were going to visit. Samdrup and I would then walk to one house in the morning, usually coming home for lunch, and visit another house in the afternoon, heading back at around six or seven in the evening. At the beginning of our stay, Mingzom and Runa spent their days playing in the house and in the garden and helping with chores such as fetching water, collecting dung and dusting. After about one month, Runa, wanting to be together with other children, joined first grade in the local school, with Mingzom accompanying her. In the evening, while Mingzom prepared our dinner, I

wrote fieldnotes and, together with Samdrup, transcribed interviews. If we were at home during the day, I would often sit with some of the women in the house, and, together with Mingzom, we could discuss issues that were taboo to mention in the presence of males (relatives in particular), such as women's work (burden), pregnancy and sexuality. Being there with a child opened many conversations, and particularly the women were curious about my experiences with motherhood and marriage. Often in the late evenings we would join the rest of the family around the stove in the main kitchen/living room (*taptsang*). These hours proved to be of value not only as an occasion for discussing relevant issues with the family but also for learning about other villagers' concerns. Tashi-la, the Takrab household head and a highly respected village leader, was often called upon as a mediator for conflicts in the village, and often times people came to consult him in the evenings. On many of these occasions, I was present and able to observe their discussions together with the rest of the household. Tashi-la became engaged in my learning, and he was quick to understand my interests in cultural and social affairs; often he would inform me of events in the village that he thought would be useful for my research. These were often connected to religious events, and included household rituals of neighbouring families, special offerings to the local protector (*yul lha*) or other protectors, trips to the medium (*lhapa*), or readings and rituals in the nunnery. Just before our departure from Sharlung in 2002, he even changed the schedule of the performance of the ritual for cleansing the house so that I would be able to take part in it.

In addition to the more general participant observation approach, my main methodological strategy was to follow leads. This included to follow and following-up information provided by villagers in our talks: the terms and terminology used, people's concerns and their plans, and the ongoing events in the village, be it village meetings, public work, slaughtering, or household rituals, or travels to neighbouring places. This following-up involved asking additional questions, probing, revisiting and pursuing points of friction.

The value of closely cooperating with a local scholar cannot be underestimated for the effectiveness of the fieldworks and the possibility of producing ethnography within the very restricted frames of the Tibet Autonomous Region. All foreign students and researchers with a research permit were obliged to work together with a local scholar, and this person has many – muted and conflicting – roles, including research assistant, interpreter, gatekeeper, observer and a companion for the trip. As the representative of the government institution providing the permits to the foreign visitor, the local scholar is personally responsible for making sure the research is conducted within acceptable frames. During the first four months in Sharlung, I was accompanied by Samdrup, who was then a teacher of Buddhist philosophy and history. His knowledge about Tibetan culture, religion, history and

society was very impressive. Samdrup had grown up in a farming village in a different part of Central Tibet and was in all ways accustomed to village life. He had also studied the history of anthropology, through which he had developed an interest for local cultural practices. His main field of expertise was Buddhism, but during our stay he became increasingly interested in both social organisation and local ritual practices, and he served as a mentor not only to me but also to villagers who had a particular interest in scholarly Buddhism. After our stay in the village, he remained in touch with some of the people in Sharlung, serving as a Lhasa contact for them, which reflects his kind and caring personality.

Access to people for only a short period of time, surveillance and the changing political climate make writing ethnography from TAR challenging. Also, both the intimate nature of the topics of marriage and domestic lives and the eighteen years that have passed since the fieldwork complicate the process. In addition to using pseudonyms for all place names in Panam, all participants have been anonymised. To secure an ethically sound ethnography, I have made small adjustments in the presentation of my interlocutors, adding and removing some information to facilitate anonymity. I have occasionally combined persons for the same purpose. I have done this carefully in order to keep the general impression and the main points accurate.

The Chapters: Moving Into and Out of the House

The book explores village life from the entrance into a house, through its internal organisation, to the ontological and symbolic aspects of the house, and finally to inter-house relations. Chapter 1 narrates the coming-into-being of a polyandrous marriage arrangement in the Döling house – that is, the considerations and dynamics involved when parents plan their children's futures. It presents a range of local explanations of polyandry and discusses the sociocultural constitution of the domestic unit within which polyandry is preferred. In Chapter 2, we are in the process of moving into the house, as it discusses the pathways to becoming a member. Membership possibilities open up critical analysis of kinship ideologies and practices and their discrepancies, and this chapter makes a distinction between lineages as constituting personhood and as constituting social groups. In Chapter 3, we start exploring relationality within polyandrous marriages, starting with brothers being husbands, and focus on relative age, masculinity and fatherhood. Detailing distribution of sex, authority and leadership, and the collective handling of marital conflicts, we see the encompassing role of the eldest brother in a polyandrous house. In Chapter 4, we remain within a marriage setting, situated in a multigenerational house, as we look at polyandry from

the wife's perspective, through her relations to other women and to her husbands. It looks at gender models, possibilities for gender alternations and the fascinating phenomenon of the biological sex of a baby changing during birth. Chapter 5 takes us away from the marriages, but we stay within the house, exploring it as a meaningful, ordered place. This chapter details the architecture of the house, its interiors and the openings to the outside and show how the house is a bounded ritually efficacious space in which humans and nonhumans can interact in an orderly fashion, properly separated in domains, in ways that enable a prosperous and safe life. In Chapter 6, we leave the protected space of the house, change perspectives and examine relations among the houses and the inherent limitations of these. It describes relatedness in networks of mutual assistance and explores enduring social hereditary hierarchies and new forms of dependencies among the houses. The Conclusion draws attention to the temporality of the book and situates Panam as a case study of a flexible and pragmatic approach to, and enactment of, marriage and kinship – a kinship of potentiality that I argue characterises communities in Tibet and its borderlands. The book ends with an epilogue that reports a serendipitous encounter during my last visit to Lhasa.

Notes

1. After the Chinese invasion, Tibet's borders were redefined, complicating the terminology describing territory before and after the 1950s. By 'Central Tibet', I mean Ü and Tsang (when describing political administration and official categories, I use Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)); by 'Tibet', I mean all three regions (*cholka sum*) – that is, Ü-Tsang, Kham and Amdo; and by 'ethnographic Tibetan region', I mean communities in the borderlands of Tibet where people speak Tibetan (dialects) and identify as Tibetans, or closely related to Tibetans.
2. When I have talked with Norwegian small-scale farmers about polyandry, they immediately see the benefits, as they have often been through a complicated process of transfer, based on the old Nordic allodial right called *Odelsrett*, which, based on primogeniture, gives any family member the right to buy the land, if it is to be sold.
3. See, for example, Steward (1936); Mandelbaum (1938); Berreman (1962); Otterbein (1963); Prince Peter (1963); Goldstein (1971a, 1978b); Haddix (2001); Ben Jiao (2001).
4. In a classificatory terminology, kinship categories are expanded to include persons with the same lineal connection – that is, lineal kin is merged with lateral kin if linked through the same connection. For instance, a father and father's brother is termed 'father' because they are both connected through father, while mother's brother is not, and parallel cousins are classified as siblings, but cross-cousins are not. Morgan took these to represent a 'primitive' organisation; an early stage in the evolution of societies. In descriptive kinship terminology, on the other hand, the relations between parent and child is distinct, and lateral kin is coined in common categories independent of lineal connections – that is, uncles, aunt, niece, nephew etc. (Parkin and Stone 2004: 5–6).
5. In the nineteenth century, kinship was a way to explore (pre-Darwin) ideas of social

evolution, focusing on language and terminology, and through a large network of collaborators, Morgan started a global comparative project in which he and others aimed to identify what they saw to be the development of human societies. Their interest in kinship terminology of the Others was primarily to look for similarities with their own past. While the ideas of the nineteenth century, seen also in evolution theories of 'family formation' – from primitive promiscuity, to group marriage, to matriarchy and patriarchy, to nuclear families – have been abandoned, occasionally we see traces of similar ideas in the Chinese scholarship of marriage in general and polyandry in particular.

6. See, for instance, Benedict (1942); Allen (1976); Hildebrandt, Bond and Dhakal (2018) for Tibet and Himalaya examples, and Ball (2018) for a review of current work in linguistic anthropology on language of kin relations.

7. See, for instance, Meillassoux (1984); and Goldstein (1978a) for an example from Tibet.

8. See also Waterson (1990); Joyce and Gillespie (2000); Sparkes and Howell (2003).

9. In addition to Tibetans, the Irava of Kerala, Todas (Kodas) of southern India (Mandelbaum 1938) and Pahari in the Indian Himalayas practised fraternal polyandry; Kagoro in northern Nigeria (Sangree 1972), Sinhalese peoples (Tambiah 1966), indigenous groups in north America (Steward 1936), as well as Marquesan islanders in the Pacific (Otterbein 1963) practised what was termed 'associated polyandry'. There was also the rather particular case of Nayar marriages, simply termed 'Nayar polyandry' (Gough 1959).

10. Fisher concluded in his much-cited work that all known cases of so-called polyandry were forms of polykoity or plural mating (1952), and thus he denied the very existence of polyandry as a marital form. His argument was that in the known unions of one woman to two or more men, she would only truly be married to one of the husbands because he alone would be sufficient to legitimate the offspring of such union.

11. As both polygyny and polyandry are arranged from a male position, they are not opposite practices.

12. According to Chinese accounts, monastic estates held 37 per cent of arable land, while aristocratic estates held 25 per cent, hence leaving 38 per cent to be held by the government (and used by taxpayers) (Epstein in Goldstein 1989: 3). These figures should only be taken as indicative of land distribution.

13. See Yanagisako (1979); Gray (1995); Carsten (2018).

14. House societies, Lévi-Strauss suggested, are societies that can be placed between kinship and class organisation; however, this evolutionary undercurrent of his house concept was dismissed early on (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995).

15. Aziz produced her ethnographic material by conducting extensive interviews with Tibetan refugees settled in Nepal, due to lack of access to Tibet.

16. For instance Davidson (2005); Van Schaik (2011); Dotson (2012).

17. Yet, 'société à maison' was introduced by Lévi-Strauss to solve the theoretical puzzle not of lineage organisation but of cognatic kinship, a characteristic different from the earlier descriptions of Tibetan societies.

18. Personal communication in Lhasa with Tibetans from pastoral areas, between 2001–2016.

19. In 2008, I was talking with Tibetan couples about fertility problems, aiming to investigate the use of reproductive technologies. Several couples mentioned the possibility of inviting a sister of the wife into the marriage before trying medical technology.

20. In Sachung, each household paid 800 yuan for the preparation of electricity introduction; however, by 2004, people were complaining that for the past two years there had been a complete halt in the process, with no indications of continuance.