

## Chapter 2

# TRAJECTORIES TO HOUSE MEMBERSHIP



Houses, as physical buildings and social units, host individuals who are often related by agnatic kinship. Yet, the role of patrilineal descent is not obvious. Exploring kin-making and its informing principles, trajectories to membership are an analytical opening as they illuminate the often confusing relation between residence and descent in Tibetan social organisation. Membership pathways indicate how patrilineal descent is an ideology – rather than a practice – in social life, house constitution and continuation.

## The Trouble of Descent

Social organisation in communities across the Tibetan ethnographic region has been described through a range of principles and concepts, such as patrilineality and residence, unilateral and cognatic/bilateral kinship, or clans and households. While Tibetans often talk about the patrilineage (*rü gyü*) as significant for belonging and identity, I found that it had few, if any, practical implications for village life in Panam. In practice, *rü gyü*, which literally translates as the ‘lineage (*rgyud*) of the bones (*rus*)’, denotes the more general patrilineal kin in Central Tibet. Likewise, *sha gyü*, which literally translates as the ‘lineage (*rgyud*) of the flesh (*sha*)’, refers to matrilineal kin. These differences of lineage and laterality closely relate to the significance of clans among many Tibetan-speaking peoples in the Himalayas, and the absence of these in Central Tibet. Moreover, the practical use of the terms *rü gyü* and

*sha gyü* points to significant differences in kinship ideology and practices of relatedness on the one side, and of kinship as constitutive of personhood and of social organisation on the other.

The ideological significance of patrilineal descent might suggest an organisation closer to unilineality with significant complementary filiation; yet, as in many ethnographic cases, in daily life a range of practices suggest other more relevant criteria for group formations. As with Central Tibetans in general, the villagers in Panam did not express much interest in their family's ancestors; they did not keep long genealogies of lineages. This does not mean that they were uninterested in the past, or in biographies. On the contrary, they kept a record of, discussed and emphasised the biographies of the named houses.

While people recognise different strengths of relatedness depending upon male or female links, for all significant purposes, links through both men and women, laterally and lineally, are important in Central Tibet. This is particularly apparent in the negative marriage rules, which, in principle, exclude all relatives as potential marriage partners; all those called *pa pün* (father's relatives) and *ma pün* (mother's relatives).<sup>1</sup> These are generic terms that include those related by *rü gyü* and *sha gyü*.

Kinship theory can be complex and perhaps confusing, but two points on the interconnections between the house and descent in Panam are most important in the following. First, the role of patrilineal descent as the language through which continuity of the corporate named houses is expressed, hence, the lineage does not generate the perpetuation of the group. Second, the strong presence of agnates within a house is caused not by patrilineal descent but by a cumulative past of patrification.

### Kinship Idioms of Flesh and Bone

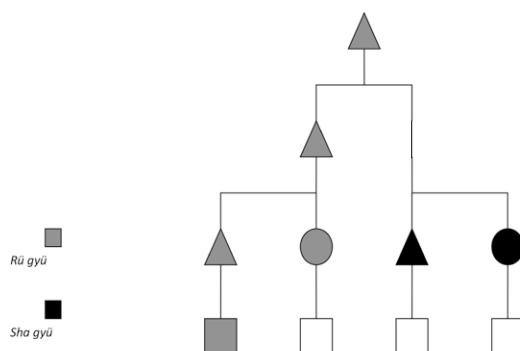
Fundamental to the description of relatedness in Tibetan societies are the two elements in the folk theory of procreation, namely *rü* (bone) and *sha* (flesh). Of these, *rü* is considered most important, both in terms of the biological constitution of the body, as well as the social implications of the sharing of bones. *Rü* is a polysemantic concept that refers not only to the physical bones but also to patrilineal kindred and in some cases hereditary status.

#### *Male Connections*

It is difficult to find an English equivalent to the concept of *rü*, but the various levels of meaning could be fruitfully explained in terms of kinship and in particular patri-biases in Tibetan notions of relatedness. In an article

from 1981, Levine discusses the interrelations between the various meanings of *rü*, pointing to the multilayered character of the term. Her descriptions from Nyin in Nepal share many similarities with how villagers in Panam explain the fundamental meanings of the concept. As Levine notes, the root concept is ‘bone’ (of humans and animals), and, through the local theory of procreation, the bones form the basis for the other meanings of the term (ibid.: 55). The bones are transferred via the sperm from the father during intercourse and are manifested in the bones of the conceived child’s body. This is also described in the second chapter of the Explanatory Tantra, one of the four tantras of Tibetan medicine: the father’s reproductive fluids (*khuwa*) produce the bones (and a major part of the brain (*rüpa lé*)).<sup>2</sup> This implies that *rü* is transferred directly from one generation to the next. The whiteness of the sperm is identified with the white bones and is transferred from father’s father to father to children – that is, defining the patrilineage as constituted by those with the common *rü* (*rüpa*, ‘bone people’), *rü chikpa*, ‘one bone’), *rü gyü* ‘bone lineage’) or combinations of these).

*Rü* and its opposite *sha* have metonymic significance for the kinship categories for Tibetans. While Levine and others find the *rü gyü* to denote the patrilineage and in many cases named clans in various Tibetan communities in the Himalayas (Levine 1981; Fürer-Haimendorf 1964; Ramble 2008), this is misleading in Central Tibet. When talking to people in Panam, they did hold that *rü gyü* was exactly what it says, the lineage (*gyü*) of the bones – that is, patrilineage. In daily life, the terms *rü gyü* and *rü chikpa* and *pa pün* (father’s relatives) were used interchangeably, and in the very few (ritual) cases where agnates gathered as a group, they did so as the generic *pa pün* – that is, as the patrilineal kin. Hence, while the *rü gyü* is both constitutive of personhood and an important organisational element in other Tibetan



**Figure 2.1.** The bone (*rü*) and flesh (*sha*) ‘lineage’ (*gyü*). © Heidi Fjeld

communities, its organisational force was very limited in the Panam case. The bones constitute the matrix of a person's body, and is foundational for a person's physical and mental abilities. Hence, the sharing of bones implies an expectation of similarity both in the physical features and in personality. This similarity is also central to the arrangement and organisation of fraternal polyandry.

### *Female Connections*

While bones make up the matrix of a person's body, flesh (*sha*) is less constitutive of both personhood and social relations. The solidarity and emotional closeness that is expected among those sharing bones is less relevant when sharing flesh. Moreover, while those of common bones can inform group formation, although it does so in very few situations, common flesh does not.

The links formed through *sha* are less clear, and therefore, perhaps explanations of female connections are more diverse and divergent. The *sha*<sup>3</sup> is the manifestation of the (red) menstrual blood of the mother in the child's body, which is also clearly described in the same chapter of the Explanatory Tantra: the mother's reproductive substances (*datsen*) produce flesh and blood (*sha trak*) and the vital and vessel organs. However, while a child receives the bones from the father and the soft substances from the mother, in Panam, the notions of transfer differ. These differences have organisational implications, and it was in the context of discussion of kin groups that the issue of transfer came up. In this understanding, bones are transferred in a direct line through the male links, but the flesh is transferred only indirectly: the menstrual blood of the mother is a manifestation of the bones that she received from her father. In this perspective, flesh is transmuted *rü* from the mother's father, via the mother's menstrual blood, and thus her menstrual blood does not originate from her mother's flesh. This understanding differs from theory of conception in Tibetan medicine, as seen in the Explanatory Tantra, where a woman's menstrual blood is clearly described as coming from her mother's menstrual blood and should be seen as a local lay interpretation.

The indirect transfer of bones through *sha* can help us understand the *sha gyü* and its potential organisational aspect. The *sha gyü* does not have lineal character and should be understood as denoting laterality only. In the case of an indirect transfer of flesh through the menstrual blood of the mother from the mother's father, the *sha gyü* cannot continue after the third generation. If we take one individual as the starting point and trace those of common flesh, we find a very limited distribution of people: namely siblings and siblings of the mother. These all share the transmuted *rü* from the mother's father.

If each woman indirectly transfers her father's *rü*, the *sha* will from the next generation come from elsewhere (from a new father's *rü*), and the common *sha* can thus not continue. Therefore, although *gyü* translates as 'lineage', the *sha gyü* should not be understood as a descent lineage as conventionally used in anthropology.<sup>4</sup>

When asking people in Sharlung about the meaning and relevance of the *sha gyü*, I often received vague answers. One woman told me that just as the *sha* does not inform the character of a person in a strong way, the *sha gyü* is also not very important to a social life of that person. The local notion of women's limited contribution to a child's body and its identity in terms of descent should not, however, lead us to overemphasise the importance of patrilineal groups. Tibetan kinship categories are patri-dominated in the emphasis put on *rü*, but the women, too, transfer *rü* by providing the flesh. Regardless, traditional principles of substance composition of the body should not be taken as evidence of agnatic organisation. Rather, this patrilineal emphasis is an indication of a significant distinction made between relatedness as constitutive of personhood, on the one side, and relatedness as informative to social organisation, on the other. While *rü* predominated in the notion of personhood, it did not generate significant group formation in Panam.

The *rü gyü* and the *sha gyü* are thus of different character, as the *rü gyü* can be termed a descent lineage in anthropological terms, while *sha gyü* cannot. They are, however, equally important to keep track of. While agnates often are of immediate relevance to each other in daily life, those belonging to the same *sha gyü* are not. There are several obvious reasons for this; first *sha gyü* consists of very few people, who are often separated by significant distances due to post-marital residence patterns, and second the emphasis put on the internal strength of the group that shares residence in the house. Because a woman usually moves in with her husband(s), she joins a group of house members (*nangmi* (family, insiders)) who are siblings of the same mother(s) and father(s) (*pachik machik*). Polyandrous marriages therefore increase the number of people related by patrilineal descent in a house.

I came across very little concern with pedigrees and genealogies among people in Panam, beyond lateral relations. Patrilineal descent was used as an expression of continuity and a legitimisation, in the sense that an influential house should ideally manifest an unbroken patrilineage. The consequences of lineal ruptures were few, if any. The lineal implications of a *makpa* marriage can serve as an example. While in some Tibetan-speaking communities in the Nepal Himalayas, such as among Sherpas, the lineage of the household into which *makpa* marries changes upon his arrival (so that his children share his patrilineage), this was irrelevant in Sharlung. Rather than descent, then, residence – the fact of sharing a house – forms close relations, not only

in the everyday but also in questions of filiation, inheritance, rights and duties. Trajectories to house membership enlighten these connections and consequences.

### Membership by Virtue of Filiation

Independent of sex, all those born into a house gained formal membership and had the right to remain in that house for life. When asking about rules, I was told that those born into a house should ideally share the same bones (*rü*), through patrification. However, patrilineal descent was not the only decisive factor for membership, and there were many exceptions to this ideal pattern. Matrification and other bilateral kinship relations were easily accepted as a legitimate source of membership, and both sons and daughters could remain as members so long as they were not incorporated into another house. In fact, being the offspring of a house member automatically granted membership.

Again, normatively, a house should consist of an unbroken patrilineage where at least one son had remained in his natal home and produced male heirs. However, membership by virtue of bilateral filiation included not only the male heir but also his unmarried sisters and their children. This pattern was evident in all generations; so that (from a male ego) the father's unmarried sisters and children might also be full members in his house, despite not sharing the bones (*rü*) with their co-house members and belonging to a different patrilineage. These relations were not seen to be problematic. Because a woman indirectly transfers the bones of her patrilineage through her menstrual blood, transmuted into the soft substances (*sha*) of her child's body, her child is (indirectly) connected to the patrilineage and, as such, also to the house. Nevertheless, when asked about the membership of an unmarried woman's children in her natal house, people in Sharlung told me that these children's membership depended not on the *sha* connection to *rü* but was rather by virtue of being born by a member (man or woman) of the house, again highlighting the value of bilateral filiation over lineage.<sup>5</sup>

Daughters of a house gained membership by birth, and they remained members until they married out. High incidents of polyandry logically imply a surplus of unmarried women in a specific area of study. This was also the case in Sharlung and its neighbouring villages, where the majority of houses hosted an unmarried daughter. I was not able to get sufficient data to provide figures of unmarried women in Sharlung, but Ben Jiao found that in the township centre, '30.6 % of the women aged 30 years or older were unmarried and 21% of these were never married' (2001: 121), and Childs, Goldstein and Wangdui reported that when they surveyed three villages in

Panam in 2006, 27% of women aged 25–39 were unmarried (2011: 7). By contrast, Ben Jiao notes that only three men had not married by the age of thirty: one celibate monk, one man with a disability and ‘one man that never married’ (2001: 121).<sup>6</sup> In Sharlung, there were three main categories of unmarried women: spinsters residing in their natal home, nuns ordained in the local nunnery and single women (widows, divorcees or never-married) that lived in a household alone with or without their children.

As a source of house membership, filiation is not differentiated according to gender, and women transfer rights to their children. Matrilineation is effectuated not only in situations when there is no male heir but also in cases where a sister shares residence with her brothers and their family.<sup>7</sup> Spinsters residing in their natal home often complicated household dynamics, and although they remained external to the reproductive core of a house, they often held an authoritative position by maintaining close relations with natal kin, particularly mother, sometimes leading to conflict with the sister-in-law, the *nama* in the house. Some of the unmarried women residing at home in Sharlung were nuns, ordained in the local nunnery but living at home. The word for nun, *ani*, is also the word for father’s sister, indicating a long history of overlap between these two categories of unmarried women. In 2002, fifteen out of the 44 households in Sharlung hosted an ordained nun. This is a high number, also compared with the neighbouring villages, and reflects the rebuilding of the local nunnery. After ordination, all the nuns in Sharlung remained as members of their natal houses, independent of degree of participation in household activities or their actual place of living.

For Panam, then, filiation both describes more accurately the process of recruitment into the local corporate groups and indicates the relation between descent and these corporate groups. The idea of filiation, rather than descent, as an organising principle is a long-term concern in anthropological kinship studies; however, it has not solved the challenges of describing an organisation over time.<sup>8</sup> Already in the 1950s, Fortes pointed out that filiation denotes merely the ‘relationship created by the fact of being a legitimate child of one’s parents’ (1959: 206), while descent is the ideological rule that ‘states which of the two elementary forms of filiation and what serial combination of forms of filiation shall be utilized in establishing pedigrees recognized for social purposes’ (ibid.: 207). This distinction is still useful. In Panam, house membership was defined by virtue of bilateral filiation, and in the case of patrilineation this was also expressed as patrilineal descent. However, while filiation describes the process of membership, it cannot properly explain the development of an organisational pattern in which the corporate groups perpetuate themselves. In similar ways to what Barnes (1962) suggested in his classic study of the patri-dominated groups in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, also in Panam people stated a cultural preference for the father’s

group, and at the same time, a cumulative past of affiliations (what Barnes called ‘cumulative patrification’) have resulted in the co-residence of agnates. There was an emphasis on the importance of father’s group (*pa pün*) also in Panam, and in addition, patrification had been strengthened in recent history. The increasing emphasis and preference for patrification informs and is informed by the re-emergence of polyandry, leading to a process of cumulative patrification, which again implicates the co-residence of individuals belonging to the same patrilineage. At the same time, the surplus of unmarried women in a community with a high percentage of polyandry also affects the composition of the residence groups, as these (unmarried) women occasionally give birth to children (belonging to a different patrilineage) who also become members of their mother’s house. These parallel processes indicate an analytical perspective that goes beyond descent and cumulative patrification to a more holistic perspective that encompasses the various aspects of kinship and group formation. A remaining important question is the relation between descent and residence in Panam. If we take the value of the patrilineage to be primarily ideological to the continuation of the house, the role of unmarried daughters is peripheral. Yet, when recruiting new members and considering the household composition of a house, descent is given some importance beyond the issue of belonging. These new members are primarily incorporated through marriage, or in some cases, by adoption.

### Membership by Virtue of Marriage

Independent of the type of marriage arranged, the new partner became a formal member of her or his new house. Although personal relations persisted after marriage – including the continued offering to the natal deity (*kye lha*) – the relocating partners renounced their previous house membership. Membership by marriage involved participation in both production and reproduction and was, as such, an important way to secure the perpetuation of the house and to maintain and develop the estates connected to the household. As elsewhere in Tibet and its borderlands, all three post-marital residence options were practised in Sharlung. Patrilocal, matrilineal or neolocal norms can be ascribed upon a marriage arrangement; it depends on the motivation for marriage, the people involved, and from whom the marriage initiative has come. People in Sharlung described that patrilocal residence was the most common, whereby the woman becomes a member and takes the name and identity of her husband(s)’ house. Hence, when Yangchen, a young woman from another village in Panam valley, married into the Kyiling house, she was from then on referred to as Kyiling Yangchen (or Kyiling *nama*), and Potri, marrying into Norkhang house, was referred to as



Norkhang Potri, etc. Other practices exist, people said, but these were ad hoc solutions to unfortunate situations, such as lack of a male heir (resulting in matrilocal residence) or a young couple that has fallen in love and initiated their own marriage (which most often resulted in neolocal residence). In spite of the sense of exception that people expressed concerning matrilocal and neolocal residences, these were nevertheless traditional practices fully valid and constitutive of legitimate marriages and households. In Sharlung village, of the 51 marriages registered, 55 per cent were residing patrilocally, while 15 per cent matrilocally and 30 per cent neolocally. These figures indicate that although patrilocal residence was the ideal, it was still only describing little more than half of the cases. However, these numbers do not reflect the original arrangement of the marriage, as many of the neolocally residing couples had moved away as a result from conflicts in a former patrilocal marriage.

When, then, is matrilocality practised? *Makpa* marriages are very common the Tibetan ethnographic region. In some border areas, such as Gyethang in Yunnan, post-marital matrilocal residence is normative (Corlin 1978), but in Tibet, *makpa* marriages are most often arranged in cases where a family has no sons, or, occasionally, when parents decide to transfer the land to a daughter and her husband. While an in-marrying wife (*nama*) marries one or several men who reside with their parents and who are the legitimate heirs to the house estate, a *makpa* marries a woman with no resident brothers, and he becomes the legitimate heir to his wife's house estate. Although not the ideal, *makpa* marriages were an unproblematic event for established houses in Sharlung. A *makpa* did not in any ways weaken the (sense of) continuity of a house. In fact, while the introduction of a new patrilineage has some consequences for internal house dynamics, it does not in any substantial way influence social standing, reputation or external inter-house relations.

A *makpa*, like a *nama*, became the legitimate heir to household leadership in his generation. For *makpas*, there are usually no other men of his generation present in the house, and as such the power relations differ greatly from those experienced by *namas*. The *makpa* is invited to become the new household leader, and once included into the house, his origin as an outsider is seldom made relevant. A *makpa* is often referred to in the literature as an 'adopted bridegroom'.<sup>9</sup> In Sharlung, however, a *makpa* was not described as 'adopted' (*butsap*), and there were no attempts to conceal his different patrilineal origin. Rather, as in the case of the *nama*, his natal house was a source of potentially valuable reciprocal relations. Moreover, with unaltered lineage status, sexual relations with his patrilineal and matrilineal kin remained incestuous also after his inclusion into a new house. However, the name of the house into which he marries became his upon inclusion, in similar ways as a *nama*.

Ideally, gender is crucial to the continuity of an estate in the sense that only men hold the right to inherit land. The various marriage alternatives reflect the drive to find a male heir to the house, which can be done by filiation, inviting a *makpa* or, as we shall see, by adoption. Generally speaking, men inherit houses, women do not.

### Membership by Virtue of Adoption

As in many societies, replacement of children, either for fostering or adoption, is a common and accepted practice in Tibet. The word *butsap* refers to those children who have permanently relocated to non-biological parents and who, upon inclusion into a new house, have gained full inheritance rights. *Bu* translates as ‘child’ and ‘boy’ and *tshab* as ‘replacement’ or ‘substitute’ (Goldstein 2001: 876), which indicates the secondary or solutinal character of the arrangement. Earlier sources indicate that pre-1950 adoption was particularly common among the upper classes – that is, the aristocracy and the landholders (Peteich 1973) as well as within the families of monk officials (Goldstein 1989: 8–9). In Sharlung, adoption was often found in the poorer households. While succession, and the continuity of the house lineage, was an important motivation for adoption among the upper classes pre-1950, in Sharlung people talked about adoption as a way to change household composition, and as a source of labour and care.

While fostering conventionally involves parents looking after someone else’s child, adoption in addition involves ‘kinning’ of the child into the fostering parents’ kin network (Howell 2006). Adoption as practised in Central Tibet is an in-between category that involves incorporation into a social group but kinning only to a limited extent. More precisely, upon adoption in Sharlung a person became a full member of a house – that is, he or she gained formal, unlimited inheritance rights. However, this inclusion did not obscure the biological origin of the adoptee, and relations were not expressed in kinship idioms.<sup>10</sup> Howell defines adoption to be ‘the practice whereby children, for various reasons, are brought up by adults other than their biological parents and are treated as full members of the family amongst whom they live’ (Howell 2006: 52). This definition is broad and only differs from fostering in the latter point of the children being ‘treated as full members of the family amongst whom they live’. Membership, and the process of becoming a formal member, is of crucial importance for understanding adoption, and Howell suggests elsewhere that such a study would fruitfully focus on what she calls ‘kinning’ (2003b). She defines ‘kinning’ as ‘the process by which a foetus or new-born child (or a previously unconnected person) is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people

that is expressed in a kin idiom' (2003: 465). 'Kinning', Howell argues, is a universal process that ensures intersubjective relatedness. Central to this is what she calls transubstantiation – that is, 'the substance (biological body) remains; the social essence (being, self) is changed' (ibid.: 470). By such transubstantiation, she argues, an adoptee is kinned, and their relation is expressed in an idiom of kinship.

In Panam, there were adoptees in several households, the majority of whom were adopted at the beginning of the 1960s. This reflects the political events of that time whereby the local monasteries and nunneries were forced to close and many monks and nuns were subsequently adopted into households of relatives. Adoption was then a way to secure household membership while being able to refrain from marriage, and hence not break their monastic vows.<sup>11</sup> Later, these former monks, and particularly nuns, formed their own small satellite households (*khangchung*) within the house that they were adopted into. In order to form a viable household while at the same time continuing celibacy, many preferred adoptions as a solution to the need for household expansion. These cases point to the value of adoption as a strategy to increase labour capacity and care, in addition to the more well-known motivation of securing an estate by succession. In the more recent cases of adoption, arranged after 1980, these motivations worked together. The Magnub house in Sharlung can serve as an example.

### *Managing Poverty*

Magnub was a very small household, consisting of one monogamously married couple with little land. The woman, Drolkar, had been a *yokpo* before the Chinese invasion, working for different landholders in the village. Around 1960, she married Dawa, a former monk of Sachung monastery who was forced to disrobe during the first reforms in 1959. Dawa was a relative of Dagpo, the *genpo* house that Drolkar had worked most for. This was the period of the Democratic Reforms redistribution, and the couple received a small house in the western part of the village (called Magnub) and some arable land from the local government (that was shortly after reorganised into collectives). Years passed and Drolkar did not become pregnant, and because they needed assistance for agricultural and domestic work, they decided to try to adopt a child. To give away a child was seen to be a loss, and a gift, and should therefore ideally be a transfer between people of close (*nyebo*) relations. In practice, a relocation of a child primarily happened between relatives. Drolkar had few relatives, and the only ones she felt she could ask had three sons but were not willing to relocate any of them. Thus, the only option they had was to ask Dagpo, Dawa's matrilineal relatives and Drolkar's former employer, who had twelve children (five sons and seven daughters).

To ask for a child, Drolkar and Dawa brought *chang*, tea bricks and *kathak* (white ceremonial scarfs) to the leader of Dagpo. According to Drolkar, the process went smoothly, and Dagpo agreed that they could have Tendöl, his twenty-year-old unmarried daughter. Tendöl, bringing only some new clothes provided by her parents, moved into Magnub shortly after. She stayed with them for several years and was also recognised as part of the household during the Household Responsibility System, a reform that then provided Magnub with fields for three persons. Because they needed cash income at that time, Drolkar and Dawa decided to send Tendöl to find work in Lhasa. While in Lhasa, she met a man, they married, and she settled in the city. With Tendöl disconnected from Drolkar and Dawa, they found themselves in need of labour and help in the house again. The two were getting older and concerned about their health, so they decided to ask Dagpo to adopt another girl. The leader of Dagpo, having six unmarried daughters still living at home, agreed to the relocation of Sedön, one of his younger daughters, to Magnub. They were very happy about this, Drolkar told us, as Dawa's health was declining, and Sedön was a kind and caring person.

After two years, Dawa unfortunately passed away, and Sedön remained with Drolkar. Drolkar wanted to arrange a marriage for her, but because they were poor, they could not afford to invite a *makpa*. At this particular time, Drolkar's relatives, who had already arranged a polyandrous marriage for their three sons, went through some difficulties. The youngest husband, Tsering, was unhappy and wanted to split from the marriage. Drolkar suggested to her relatives that she could adopt him, and, if they liked each other, he could marry Sedön. They agreed, and Tsering moved in with them in Magnub. Although marriage was intended, they defined him as an adoptee (*bustap*) rather than *makpa*. A year later, however, Tsering and Sedön did marry, and they later had three children.

Two purposes for adoption can be accentuated in this case: that of labour and care (Sedön) and that of marriage and succession (Tsering). While the first type was common, the latter was less so. As already described, the 'adoption' of a husband (*makpa*) to marry a home-residing daughter was both a widespread and well-established practice, but there is a nuance of difference between a *makpa* and a *bustap* who later becomes a *makpa*.<sup>12</sup> The distinction lies in the intention, in the structural implication of the relocation, and in the exchange of gifts involved. In the process of negotiation and relocation, the type of relation manifests, either as affines or adoptees. While affines have a formal and agreed upon relation informed by a morality of mutuality (by gifts and structures of assistance), adoption involves a time-specific and one-directional relation – that is, the biological parents transfer the child, and the giving and receiving part has very limited formal obligations. The inherent

power structures of a wife-giver and wife-taker relation, on the one side, and of the biological and adoptive parents, on the other, significantly differ. Marriage is arranged among (ideally, and often in practice) houses of equal rank, but in Sharlung adoption was often a transfer from an affluent to a poor house. The example of Magnub and Dagpo illustrates social inequality between those adopting and those providing an adoptee – also an aspect of the local rationale of the monomartial principle and economic diversification. In a social organisation informed by these principles, certain individuals are structurally peripheral (unmarried women and excess sons outside the core marriage of the house, for instance, as I will return to in Chapters 3 and 4), and for these, adoption can be one strategy for house membership. In Sharlung, houses with a large group of children tended to be wealthier, as a large household enables economically diverse strategies for income. Occasionally, and in times of crisis, the resource-poor adopters could ask the natal house of the adoptees for help, however, they were not obliged to respond, and in many cases they did not. As such, inviting a *makpa* and asking for an adoptee was different in the temporal and formal aspect of the relation between giver and receiver. While an affinal relation was formal and long-term, and included expectations of mutual assistance, an adoption relation was not. Yet, as a one-time transfer, adoption was formal and recognised by both families involved and by the village leadership.

### *The Limits of Adoption*

*Butsap* was clearly a means to balance labour. An adoptee was recognised as a full member of the house into which he or she moved, including the entitlement to inheritance. Adoption was also socially and culturally accepted. However, adoption in Sharlung involved limited efforts to kin the adoptee into a network of relatives of the adoptive parents, and their relations are not clearly expressed in kin idioms. Tendöl and Sedön were not kinned, in Howell's terms; Sedön and Drolkar did not use daughter-mother terms to address each other, and in the same way, Tsering did not call Drolkar mother; they both used the term for 'elderly woman' (*achi*), in the same way outsiders would. Being included into the social group through kinning (into the kin network) involved, in the case of Sedön and Tsering, a process of what we can perhaps call 'housing' – that is, of being incorporated into the house (and the house network). As house membership is exclusive, Sedön and Tsering were formal members in Magnub only, and as such, the past memberships of their natal houses were no longer of significance. Upon inclusion, the new members are 'housed' in the sense that their natal belonging is made irrelevant for the present identification with a local group. When Tendöl, Sedön and Tsering moved into Magnub, this became the name by which

they identified themselves and were identified by others. Upon inclusion, and with time, the new members (and particularly Tsering) came to represent the house in external affairs, such as the village meetings, participation in mutual aid networks, and in labour exchange. Indeed, they became formal house members.

Adoption potentially represents a challenge to the epistemology of relatedness in Tibet, as the idiom of kinship is grounded in a biological connectedness of shared substance (bones, and to a lesser degree, flesh). However, this biocentric idiom of kinship does not exclude other forms for incorporation into a house, and kinship understood as filiation is only one of several sources of formal membership. Cohabitation formed their group identity and sense of belonging, and it is interesting that so little effort was made to kin their relations through language; the process of kinning but did not involve an effort to make an adopted relation resemble a relation of bones (shared substance). Although they were fully incorporated into the Magnub, the fact that Tendöl and Tsering did not violate the incest taboo by marrying each other illustrates the limited degree of kinning in the incorporation process. Lack of emphasis on biological resemblance, or transubstantiation, is another indication that inconsistent lineage relations are unproblematic for kinship epistemology and practice. In the *butsap* process, this biological connectedness was never challenged, and no ritual activities were performed to mark the transfer of parenthood.

There was no negative stigma associated with adoption. Yet, there were significant efforts to incorporate the adoptee into the house. The daily activities of a common economic endeavour – co-residence (including nurture and participation in ritual activities of the house), inclusion into a network of kin (for mutual assistance and other houses) and, most importantly, the defining of the adoptee to be the legitimate heir to the house – are all signifiers in terms of a kinning process. Although not expressed in a kinship idiom (such as mother/daughter/son), those residing together, the adoptee and the adopters, shared a house name, which served as the most important marker of identity and belonging. Moreover, the post-adoption position was permanent and identical to that of being an heir by virtue of filiation, and their individual rights (most importantly inheritance) were not contested; neither within the household nor outside. As Howell has pointed out: ‘adoption is what adoption does’ (2006: 77), and in the case of Panam, *butsap* enables the transfer of rights and obligations associated with a formal membership to a previously unconnected person. By doing so, *butsap* is juxtaposed with filiation and marriage as a trajectory to house membership.

## Sources of Membership and Structural Positions

The source of membership is contextually relevant in the intra-house organisation and must be understood as closely connected to the structural position of the individual, gender and relative age. Social organisation in agricultural Tsang is ideologically patri-dominated, but filiation provides the structurally central positions within a house in Sharlung – that is, sons of the male household leader are entitled to the house by succession. This is particularly true for communities with a high incident of fraternal polyandry, where the cultural rationale is that of maximising male labour within the established unit by limiting the centripetal effects of new household establishments in each generation. Further, fraternal polyandry keeps a group of brothers together, a highly valued concern that reflects local perceptions of consubstantial relatedness. At the same time, marriage and adoption can also provide structurally central positions for the individual. Depending upon life phases, women and younger brothers share the fate of being in potentially peripheral positions and thus depend more upon personal attributes and abilities to make alliances with influential house members. Hence, the positions of members from all sources are vulnerable in some periods, albeit to varying extent. In the two chapters that follows, we move into polyandrous marriages and look at how relative age and gender is crucial in the individual negotiation and consolidation of positions in these rather complex ways of life.

## Notes

1. See Samuels (2021) for a critical discussion on incest taboos and negative marriage rules in Tibetan history.
2. I am grateful to Tawni Tidwell for the references to, and comments about, the stanzas on bone and flesh in the Gyüshi.
3. In some Tibetan-speaking communities, such as Nyinba, identify the substance from the mother's body to be blood (*trak*) (see Levine 1981). In Panam, *trak* has no metonymic significance in terms of kinship recognition.
4. See Levine (1981); Diemberger (1993) for more details.
5. Membership by bilateral filiation was also expressed in the post-birth treatment of the placenta. The placenta of all children born by members of the house is buried into a hole in the courtyard; as such, each child was anchored to the house and physically connected to their same-house relatives – that is, to the 'insiders' (*nangmi*) (see also Carsten 2004: 44).
6. In her study of Chumik in the Nepal Himalaya, Schuler (1987) argued that the high percentage (44 per cent) of unmarried women cannot be explained only as an implication of polyandry. In Chumik, a surplus of unmarried women was also an implication of patrilineality and primogeniture, various forms of endogamy and the categories of legitimate and illegitimate birth, rendering women as peripheral in the social and economic contexts.

7. When an unmarried woman became pregnant, she commonly established a new household with the child's father. Because most men were married in a polyandrous organisation, in such a situation he thus left his brothers and wife in order to start a new household.
8. See, for instance, Barnes (1962).
9. See Bell (1928) and Stein (1972) for early examples. Among Sherpas in Khumbu, the in-marrying man is called 'adopted groom', *makpa butsap* (Diemberger, personal communication, Montreal, 2011).
10. In addition, fostering also occurred, although for shorter periods, but because it did not involve membership, I leave out the topic here.
11. According to one former monk in Sachung, the vows must be 'returned' (through a particular ritual) upon disrobing, in order to avoid the multiplication of the effects that the robes provide. This was particularly important when breaking the vows, as the negative effects of this sinful behaviour would be increased if done with the vows. Returning the vows was not allowed in the 1960s; thus, many of the former monks and nuns refused to engage in sexual activities. In Panam, some of the former Sachung monks collectively returned their old vows in the mid-1980s.
12. In *The Navel of the Demoness*, Ramble describes similar, yet different, blurred lines between adoption and marriage in Te village in highland Nepal. In Te, due to a concern about the lack of availability of marriage partners in the future, it was common to arrange 'child marriage', a process in which the child also relocated to her/his future partner's parents' house. The child, Ramble notes, 'will be brought up as a member of the family, and a relationship between playmates will evolve into a marital union'. 'Child marriage (more accurately, perhaps, child betrothal involving a change of residence)', he continues, 'is a means of ensuring that a household has heirs who will themselves produce heirs' (2008: 115).