“CRUMBLING HOUSES – THE TRANSFORMATION OF LADAKHI ELDERHOOD”

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Anthropology of Development

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Ladakhi landscape. View from the Khardung-La pass, 5100 m. above sea level, and the highest motorable road in the world.

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PREFACE

Note on orthography and names

The Ladakhi language, or *Bodyig* as Ladakhis themselves term it, is a branch of Tibetan, based on the Tibetan transcription and alphabet, but with dissimilar words and pronunciation. There are several dialects with differing pronunciation in the various regions in Ladakh.

In my thesis I have, in order for readers unfamiliar with Whylie's transliteration of Tibetan (the system most common to foreign students of Tibetan), and due to Ladakhi not being identical to Tibetan, referred to Ladakhi words the way I heard them. This, I believe, gives the reader a closer picture of the actual pronunciation of the word since Whylie's system includes in the transliteration aspired and silent letters.

Whenever I employ words that are originally from the Tibetan cultural world and that are regarded as commonly used and understood in academia, I use the word as it is transcribed in this literature. When I introduce a new Ladakhi word in the text, I show it in *italics* and with translation. When the word reappears in the text, it will still be in italics, but will have no translation. At the end of my thesis, I have included a list of vocabulary, with translations and explanations of the words introduced in the text. Other foreign words or expressions will follow the same system as the Ladakhi words. They will be introduced showed in italics and with an explanation; thereafter they will only show in italics. These will also be included in the vocabulary at the end.

Names of translators and informants have been changed in order to protect their privacy. Names of villages and places are however kept.

Note on the Tibetan cultural area treated as a culturally coherent entity

Several researchers in Ladakh have tended to use examples and comparative material from the Tibetan Plateau and the Trans-Himalayan area, often referred to as the Tibetan cultural area, an area where Tibetan Buddhism has a strong foothold. The reasons for this is that in these

areas, religion is all-encompassing, influencing every aspect of life and imbued in people's way of thinking, speaking and acting. Due to this, many researchers compare social aspects observed in Ladakh with similar aspects observed in other parts of the huge Himalayan area which may be far away in actual distance, but very close in practice.

However, it must be mentioned that across this huge region referred to as the Tibetan cultural area, there are several climatic zones requiring different forms of human adaptation, as well as a number of local variants of Tibetan Buddhism. Additionally, there is a well of different styles of architecture, dress, customs and food in the region, but *grosso modo* one can say that the area is one cultural area. However, criticism directed at some researchers, claim that comparisons across such distances are farfetched and that the cultural uniformity is not as great as portrayed. In addition, it is important to note that the Tibetan Buddhists are not the only religious group in the region. Both Hindus, Christians and Muslims live in the region and must not be ignored, as the different groups have mutual influence on each other. However, my focus is on Ladakhi Buddhists and so I have allowed myself to use examples and comparisons from other areas of the Himalayan Buddhist region, as I judge the similarities many and large enough to constitute more than a coincidence.

It is vital to remember however, that every village, even the ones consisting of only a dozen households, do have their own specificities and local adaptations, hence generalizations should only be interpreted as suggestive. It is clear that it is in anthropology's interest to discern the many local varieties and the numerous adaptations and practices within a society, but since I have only lived for any length of time with two families, and have conducted my interviews in several homes and villages all over Leh district, basing my writing on the observations from one family or village would not present the whole and true picture of my experiences. Therefore, my study is of a more general character, looking at aspects that are similar across the region. Of course, this puts me in the position of risking to generalize too much or to even overlook certain aspects or local variants, but considering the time limits for my research, it would be impossible to go in depth in all the villages visited.

1 INTRODUCING LADAKH, ITS PEOPLE AND MY RESEARCH

Abstract

In this thesis I discuss the Ladakhi house and the elderly in the Ladakhi society, who have traditionally been taken care of within the family confines and within the walls of the large family house. With a changing societal landscape in Ladakh, the physical and architectural landscape is also changing, and with it, changes happen within the household. I will guide the reader through the Ladakhi landscape, focusing on the old and new "bodies" that the houses constitute, before I enter these houses and look at the Ladakhi family composition. The elderly population is the vehicle I shall employ to scrutinize some of the changes taking place within the houses. As building patterns and housing constellations change, family relations also change. We shall see that the elderly, who formerly played a central role in the family and household, are made more and more superfluous. Their authority is challenged, and they are physically marginalized at the periphery of the household or even forced to leave it entirely.

Introduction

Ladakh and the Himalayan region have by many been pictured as a "Shangri-La"[1], a paradise on earth where people live well into their hundreds and in perfect harmony with nature. Nevertheless this mythified region, exotified and romanticized in several travel accounts and by spiritual searchers, is far from being only a paradise. The beauty of nature hits you as hard as the thin air and the cold nights. Ladakh is hidden in between the high mountain ranges of the Himalayas and Karakorams with its green valleys scantily scattered along the huge glacial rivers of the Indus, Zanskar and the Shayok, in a barren, dry and dusty land. The climate is extreme, with temperatures ranging from – 40 degrees Celsius in the winter to + 30 in the summer. Night and day temperatures also vary greatly. Ladakh is described as an "arctic desert", and survival in the region has always been dependent on steady water supply. Without the Himalayan glaciers, being the only water source for Ladakh's agriculture (also referred to as the "water tower" of all South Asia), Ladakh would be uninhabitable.

[1] The term "Shangri-La" is said first to have appeared in James Hilton's novel "Lost Horizon" from 1933. "Shangri-La" has come to mean a heaven on earth where people do not age. Hilton's book describes a mythic place in Tibet where people live in peace, happiness and eternity.

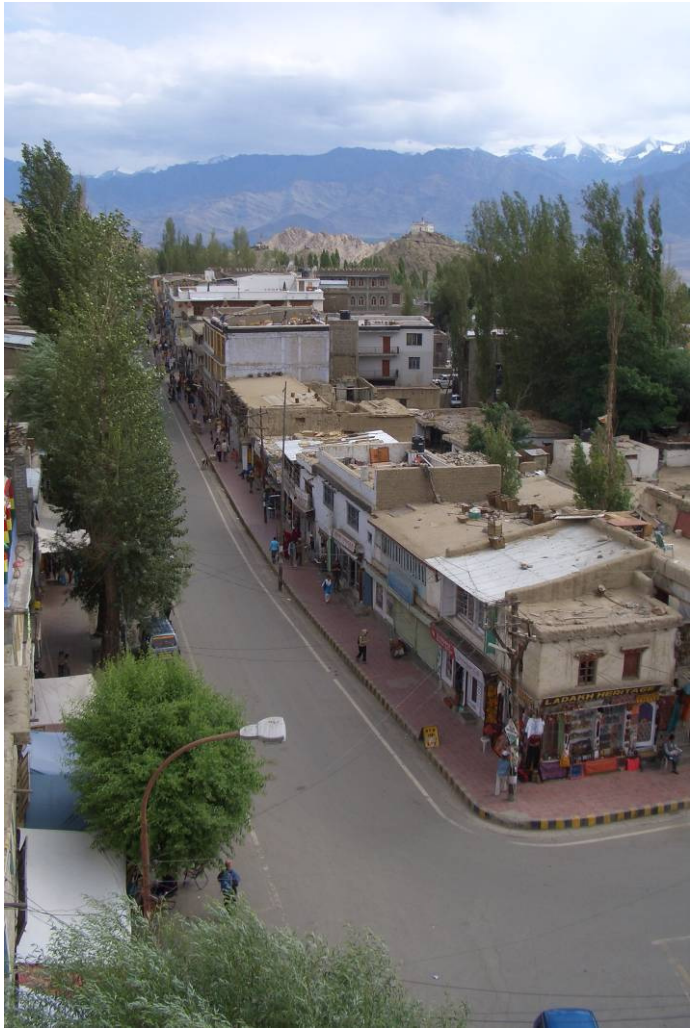
The Indus river in the distance, nurturing the fields and villages on the river banks. The mountains behind are dry and barren.

Ladakh is the largest district of the North West Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, covering more than half the area of the state (of which it is the eastern part). Nevertheless, Ladakh is one of the least populated districts of India. It is also the northernmost district, as well as the one situated at the highest altitude (Leh capital being at 3500m). Ladakh is composed by the two districts of Leh and Kargil, each district housing the two principal cities in Ladakh with the same names. My fieldwork has been carried out in Leh district. Kargil district is predominantly a Shia Muslim district, while in Leh district the majority is Tibetan Buddhist (Rizvi 2004 [1996]; Thsangspa 2000). The population of Ladakh counts around 270.000, and in the capital of Leh there are about 27.000 inhabitants (Census of India 2001). Ladakh was once an independent Buddhist kingdom, but the region was annexed to Jammu and Kashmir in the mid 19th century (Rizvi 2004 [1996]). There is still a king and queen in Ladakh belonging to the Namgyal dynasty, but today they have limited formal power. However, they are highly respected and revered in the social life.

The access to Ladakh has always been and continues to be very limited, as the only two roads leading into the region are closed for 8 months of the year due to bad weather conditions on the high passes. During these 8 months, airplane is the only way in and out of Ladakh, and flights are only allowed when the weather conditions are stable. Yet many outsiders have

found their way to the “Top of the World”, a name in line with the extreme altitudes of the region. The trekking and cultural tourism together with NGOs and development agencies rushing to Ladakh the last decades, are far from being the first foreigners or outsiders to arrive in Ladakh. In spite of the region being closed to outside influence for 27 years following Independence and Partition in 1947, the insurmountable passes of Ladakh were already in early centuries defied by numerous adventurers, missionaries and trade caravans en route to Tibet and Central Asia (Rizvi 2001 [1999]). And as a land of a thousand names, Ladakh received its name “Crossroads of Asia” from this constant turnover of people in search of different goals.

Ladakh was a natural mid stop along important trade routes between the Middle East and Central Asia. Leh’s “Main Bazaar” and market place were daily frequented by merchants from far away countries carrying silk, copper and brass utensils, porcelain, dyestuffs, carpets, tea and spices and other goods, and who would stock up in Leh before further travelling (Rizvi 2001 [1999]: 3-21). The Ladakhis were in constant contact with people from different cultures as they traded and travelled with the caravans, often hired as guides and horsemen to lead the caravans safely to their destinations through the challenging and life-threatening landscape. The Ladakhis themselves would also trade with Tibet in products that were not available there, in exchange for products needed in Ladakh. They travelled by foot with *yaks* (the traditional “beast of burden” on the Tibetan Plateau) or mules carrying apricots, walnuts and foodgrains which were exchanged for pashmina wool, butter and salt. With the closure of the borders with Tibet, as a consequence of the Chinese “iron grip” on Tibet, the trade was considerably limited.



Leh's "Main Bazaar" of today. In the past trade caravans would stop here and stock up before further travelling to Tibet and Central Asia.

For me Ladakh started with a postcard bought on a previous visit to Dharamsala (India), where Dalai Lama has been living in exile since 1959, after China's "Cultural Revolution" in Tibet. Today there is a big Tibetan settlement both in Dharamsala as well as in Ladakh. The Tibetans have, like the many other passers through, had a strong influence on the Ladakhi culture. When a large number of the *gompas* (Tibetan Buddhist monasteries) in Tibet were destroyed, Ladakh became the most important area left in the world for viewing these impressive whitewashed constructions, perched on cliffs and mountain crags, and Ladakh hence received its name "Little Tibet".

Likir *gompa*

Likir *gompa*

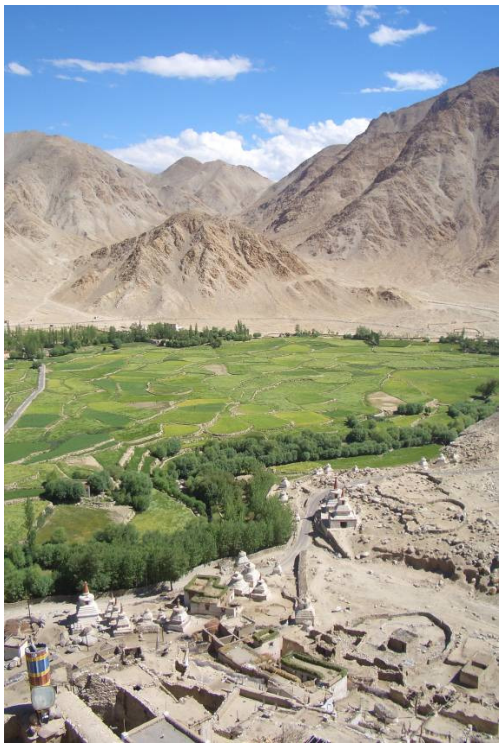
The postcard that opened my eyes to Ladakh portrayed an old man crossing a high barren plateau with his horse. He is alone with nature, the mountains around are grey and inhospitable, yet the man continues his travel, seemingly untouched by the dramatic scenery

around him. This postcard summarized for me a region of serene and untouched nature, yet surprisingly so domesticated and inhabited. I was surprised to see this man, well into old age, moving seemingly unaffected through the extreme landscape. It made me think of Ladakh as a place on earth where human and nature were not in conflict, but fully aware of each other's powers and therefore had developed a form of interaction: Adaptation to each other would be the only way to survive. The Ladakhi inhabitant is aware that nature is powerful, knowing he has to try to tame it to survive in it, yet aware that he is ultimately subsumed under it and that he has to adapt to its capricious moods.

A *yak* and the view over Likir village

After a couple of weeks in Ladakh, on my way for an interview in Basgo village, my translator and I were driving along the Indus river, passing the point where it meets the Zanskar. Ladakhi roads are narrow, bumpy, windy and literally clinging onto the steep mountain sides. When I finally managed to sit back and not worry about the road, I could appreciate the nuances and details in the scenery which until then had seemed very "moon-like" and colourless. The mountain sides were coming alive and I discovered different shades of green, grey, purple, pink, blue, violet, red, white and yellow in the landscape. It was late summer and the glacial streams and rivers flowed aggressively, supplying water to all the

small villages along the riverbanks, which were surprisingly green. In between each high and barren mountain pass, there was a little patch of green valley floor. With the help of water from the rivers, it came clear to me that Ladakhis had transformed a harsh and marginal environment into a fertile and productive land with their crops of barley, peas, wheat, turnips, walnuts and apricots. I soon was to find out that religion too, played an important role in the transformation and taming of the landscape. Religion is all-encompassing, and the entrance to any Ladakhi village is lined by *chortens* (or *stupa*, a reliquary, which one has to pass on the left), and *mani walls* (long walls composed by stones with religious engravings, also passed on the left) protecting the village. The large and seemingly fortified houses, with colourful prayer flags swaying in the wind, protect the inhabitants against the ferocious nature. Outside the houses, along the eastern wall, elderly people were sitting spinning their prayer wheels and counting their *mani beads* ("prayer beads"), repeating the mantra "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" ("Hail the Jewel in the Lotus") over and over again. Throughout the centuries, Ladakhis have developed fine attuned knowledge about how to survive in this harsh and extreme region, with a fragile ecobalance. They have adjusted ploughing and soughing, seeding and weeding, harvesting, irrigation, animal husbandry and building techniques and materials to the demands of nature, tending their fields with love and care, performing religious rituals for the crops to yield well.



A patch of green valley floor surrounded by grey and dusty mountains.

Fertile valley floors as a starch contrast to the inhospitable and barren mountains behind.

The wind spreading the mantras of the prayer flags out in the landscape. Behind we see the old Royal Palace of Leh.

With the above descriptions of Ladakhi nature and people, I risk being put in the same category as the many "Westerners" who portray Ladakh as a "Shangri-La", a peaceful haven where "timelessness" prevails, and Tibetan Buddhism as naturally environmental friendly, implying that Ladakhis live in harmony and bliss with nature. The practice of *polyandry* (when a woman marries several husbands to keep pressure on land low and to avoid the division of family property into smaller parcels) in Ladakh supports this vision of their fine tuned ecological balance and sustainability. Yet when walking through a Ladakhi village, one sees that the perceived interaction between Ladakhis and nature is not always an easy and peaceful affair. Nature can be ferocious, and the taming and domestication of it is essential. Both houses, cultivation, channelling of water, village boundary markers and the rituals performed, serve to tame the nature and protect the inhabitants against misfortune. The elderly have in this scenario been important actors and holders of knowledge on how to survive in this region and on how to tame and domesticate it through rituals, construction of houses and settlements and through agriculture.

In every village I visited, what first caught my attention were the tall and proud "house-bodies", whose bright whiteness contrasted with the green fields around and the brown greyish landscape of the mountains behind. The houses looked like fortresses or castles, with few windows and constructed on plateaus, or in the hillsides. They seemed immensely big, beautiful and impressive.

My interest in architecture, developed when studying history of art in Paris, was probably the background for my curiosity about the Ladakhi houses. They were enigmatic and attractive, and my desire to penetrate their sturdy and seemingly fortified and impermeable walls grew as I strolled through a number of villages and realized that many houses were identical, yet having their own specificities and characteristics. However, I could not help noticing the smaller house bodies dispersed in the landscape. They were obviously newer and quite unlike the old houses, which with their interesting details, drawings, beautifully carved wooden doors and window frames, flags and scarves swaying in the wind and symbols that I did not understand, seemed as living entities. Their cracks, rouhgness and unevenness told stories of long and adventurous lives, and made the new houses look sterile, straight, and mass produced.

My interest in architecture and history of art made me inquisitive about the Ladakhi houses. And combined with my anthropological background, I saw the houses not only as physical constructions with material and architectural specificities and characteristics, but also as containers of meaning. An urge to see beyond the merely material qualities and into their social, intimate and symbolic realms was triggered. The inhabitants are often strongly linked to their own house, and the materialization of it is often constitutive for the inhabitants' identity. Houses are often passed on from father to son, hence they bind together several generations and crystallize the unity of the inhabitants against other houses, families and households (Carsten 2003). It was this crossroads between the house as a physical and aesthetic construction on the one side, and the inhabitants and the intimate realms being played out inside these constructions on the other, that caught my attention.

The villagers had since my first days in Ladakh also drawn me towards them. Like the land itself (and even the houses), they were rugged, wrinkled and strong, marked by the intense sun and by the thin and dry air. But in huge contrast to the inhospitability of the landscape, they were a warm, generous and welcoming people. During my first weeks in Ladakh, while trekking through some of the more remote areas only reachable by foot, people would come running after us calling "*Jullay, jullay*" (meaning both "Hello", "Goodbye", "Welcome", and "Thank you"!) and they would ask "*Karu skyodat-le*" ("Where are you going?") which I later understood is the standard question whenever people meet. And then they would ask us in, serving us *soldja khante* (the characteristic salty butter tea served all over the Tibetan plateau and contiguous areas which is drunk in huge daily quantities, 40 cups being an expected amount for a guest to consume!) and *chang* (the locally brewed barley beer) with constant resprinkling of *tsampa* (roasted barley flour) on top. These small "samples" of Ladakhi homes and family life furthered my curiosity about the on-goings inside the large houses.

I wanted to know what life inside these tall, white and seemingly fortified constructions was like. I wanted to learn how Ladakhi organized their lives, how their houses looked on the inside and how they cared for their elderly. The elderly population had caught my attention because they seemed to be active participants in the society. They were highly visible in the village "public" life, as they were working in the fields, playing with the children, and enjoying the respect of the young, who would greet them respectfully when they passed. This seemed to me quite unique and different from the general perception of elderly in the "West", where they are frequently perceived as a burden and a social problem, which the state and not

the individual family should solve, therefore often "invisible" and tucked away in institutions. On the other hand, it was obvious that Ladakh was changing and in transition – and for the elderly, not necessarily for the better.

Since the opening up of the region to outside influence, tourists have poured in, and Ladakh being a part of Jammu and Kashmir has been included in India's extensive development program (Rizvi 2004 [1996]:173-202). The Indian Army has a heavy presence in the region, due to the strategic geographic position of Ladakh bordered both by China (Tibet) and Pakistan. The continuous border disputes between these three countries have led to the outbreak of several wars over the years. Both the presence of the army, the tourists and the development programs and organizations has led to considerable changes in Ladakh (ibid: 173-202; Norberg-Hodge 1991: 141-166) [2]. From being a predominantly agricultural region with the majority of the population living in the rural areas, Ladakh is nowadays experiencing rapid urbanization. This results in the dissolution of the extended family, which has been the traditional family composition for centuries. Farming is left in favour of tourism, and where people earlier did mutual communal work, today more and more labourers are hired. Many of the changes also affect the Ladakhi architecture, with new and smaller houses springing up around Leh to accommodate the growing group of urban migrants. The increasing urbanization also affects the family and the household. With a focus on the "house bodies", traditionally accommodating Ladakhi extended families, I use the elderly as a group through which one sees exemplified some of the consequences of the changes taking place in Ladakh today.

After crossing the thresholds of several Ladakhi houses, and living with Ladakhi families, I realized that the elderly had traditionally held a high social position with considerable decision making powers and influence over the younger. They constituted an important segment of the population, being the ones with embodied knowledge about survival and sustainable livelihood in the extreme region, and feeling responsible for passing all this wisdom on to following generations. They were the ones holding knowledge of the traditional building patterns and architecture, about religion and agriculture. Yet I realized that they were

[2] K. Larsen comments upon the influence of tourism in Zanzibar. She contends that "tourism is about people travelling in order to expand their experiential, imaginary and ideological landscapes" (Larsen 2000: 199). But tourism is also about the effects this form of travelling has on the landscapes of the communities receiving the travellers. She continues, "Given the exchange of perspectives that is involved in these multifaceted encounters, tourism can be analyzed as an interaction of landscapes" (ibid).

progressively being made superfluous and regarded as a burden due to the changes taking place in the region. As an extension to this, I will at the end of the thesis present a case study of the first and only old age home in Ladakh. The institution has arisen as a response to the fragmenting Ladakhi house and family patterns.

Often in anthropology, when studying the impact of modernity and development, the main focus has been with the young, those in the first phase of the life cycle, since they are perceived as most strongly touched by societal changes. Here I want to focus on those in the last phase of their lives, precisely because I see the changes taking place in Ladakh as having particular impact on the elderly. During my fieldwork, I saw signs of a totally new role and construction of the Ladakhi elderly and elderhood. They have moved from holding an important role in the family and society, to one of physical and mental marginalization.

Challenge and research in Ladakh

When I think back, fieldwork constitutes an ambivalent period of my life with many wonderful experiences and new friendships as well as deceptions, challenges and loneliness. The first obstacle in my work was getting a translator. I arrived in Leh at the peak of the tourist season (which extends from mid June to mid September), and I soon discovered that as long as there are tourists in Ladakh, any fieldwork apart from observation and some participation is impossible. The male sector of the population is fully involved with the tourist business, which is an ever increasing niche in Ladakh, and many families today run family guest houses accommodating tourists in their big traditional Ladakhi houses. Young boys and men set up their own travel agencies, they work as monastery guides, trekking guides, horse men, cooks and drivers for the waves of tourists rushing in on buses on the open roads or on overbooked flights. In addition to this, the summer is the season for farming and harvesting. Those not involved in tourism, these days mostly children, women (although more and more are also involved in the running of guest houses) and elders, are left in charge of ploughing and soughing, irrigation, harvesting and threshing. In addition, young people, both boys and girls, tend to be sent away for education to “hill stations” in some of the Indian states south of Ladakh. So although many Ladakhis today attend English medium schools and hence might have functioned as interpreters, these schools do not have holidays in June or July and the pupils are therefore not in Ladakh during the summer months. All these factors together made it difficult for me to get hold of a translator in the initial phase of my work in Ladakh.

It was not until well into September that tourism and farming slowed down. Interestingly, the summer season and the long winter season are like day and night, and luckily for my slow start, the winter is the total opposite of the summer. Once the tourists are gone, together with the seasonal restaurateurs who travel down to Goa for the winter season, peace seems to reinstall itself. The fields are harvested, the wheat and barley threshed and ground into flour, and the vegetables stored underground or on the roofs, for the long and cold winter months when there is no supply from the outside. People can finally sit back and relax or get together and feast. Late autumn is the time for religious festivals and social arrangements; almost all marriages take place in this period, as well as the celebrations of the newborn. The fruits of the fields are enjoyed, and people have again time for each other and more time for religion. And some people also have time for the occasional anthropologist having chosen to stay through the winter, ignoring people's and guide books' warnings against the inhumane winters in Ladakh. I remember reading in one guide book that "those staying in Ladakh in the winter are nothing but mad people". This statement, along with others, made my initial decision on whether to go to Ladakh for my fieldwork or not, a difficult one. Ladakh was as mentioned a long-dreamt-of destination, but due to a tight scheduled master program, my fieldwork had to be conducted in the autumn/winter, placing me in the category with the mad ones. However I soon realized I had taken the right decision about spending the winter in Ladakh. Because of people's enormous activity in summer, and the fact that almost all social, religious and festive events take place during the winter- and these are events that are vital for any researcher to take part in, to begin to understand the Ladakhi people and society - winter turned out to be the only possible time of the year to do a proper fieldwork, anyway.

But I still faced the problem of getting a translator. I finally managed to get in touch with a young Ladakhi boy willing to help me get in touch with interviewees as well as helping me with translation of the interviews. Thupstan Angchuk who is 31, works for an organization in the summer as a contact person between Ladakhi families and foreigners wanting to come to Ladakh as volunteers, staying with a family and in exchange helping them with farm work. Thus he had an extensive network of families in both Leh and in the villages surrounding Leh, which he willingly shared with me. He also provided me with extremely helpful information on day to day issues and on how not to make too many mistakes.

Thupstan Angchuk soon became more than a translator to me, he became a good friend and an important source of knowledge on everything I did not understand in Ladakh or on things I

needed to have specified. He had a car in which he took me to all the villages where we went for interviews, and in the villages he also was my untiring translator. Through him I was also introduced to my second translator, Tsering Dolma, a 25 year old girl, working for the same organization as Thupstan Angchuk. With her, I would do my interviews in Leh and with Thupstan Angchuk, thanks to his car, I travelled to the villages around Leh. Tsering Dolma had divorced parents, but she was not living with any of them. She stayed with her grandparents, taking care of them. She is a silent and sweet but tough girl, and she was immensely patient and persevering when we were doing interviews on street corners and pavements in the bitter November cold.

As my Ladakhi only attained a basic level, during interviews I was dependent on my translators with whom I worked interchangeably. Their slightly dissimilar working techniques and their natural access in different spheres opened my eyes to a number of aspects I would not so easily have seen without having worked with two persons of opposite sex, but also from unequal backgrounds and with different networks and acquaintances. However, I am aware of the disadvantages of working with a translator, since many details and nuances are lost in the process of translating. On the other side, learning the language to be able to purport my research satisfyingly in Ladakhi, would have required at least triple the time scope I was granted for my fieldwork. Hence the time limits obliged me to work with translators. Another limitation to the use of translators were the daily conversations and on-goings at "home" where I lived. Since I could only see my translators at appointed hours, and since I did not live with them, the translations would be of a more formal character when interviewing people, while I was restricted to my own observations and partaking and basic understanding of Ladakhi when at "home". I spent four and a half months in Ladakh, from mid July to the end of November. And I did a follow-up fieldwork of a month's duration in April, the following spring. In addition to using Thupstan Angchuk as my translator, this time I was also helped by Padma Angmo, the daughter of the family with which I stayed, who was studying near Delhi, but had come home for holidays.

My main group of study has been the Ladakhi Buddhists. They are the majority in Leh district where I have done my fieldwork. I lived with two Buddhist families interchangeably, one in Leh (most of the time) and one in the village of Likir (when I went for interviews to the villages outside Leh), two hours west of Leh. Hence my focus on the Ladakhi Buddhists was naturally shaped by my surroundings and the circles into which I got access. Ladakh has by

many scholars been pictured as a completely Buddhist region. This is not a correct picture, and I rest aware of that fact in spite of my own focus on Buddhist Ladakhis. It may be true that the Buddhist culture is the most visible and also more emphasized vis-à-vis tourists in Ladakh than for example the Muslim one; nevertheless it is important to have in mind that there are other groups with their own characteristics and customs. I am also aware of the criticism other scholars have received for focusing too narrowly on the Buddhists. However, in a thesis of this length, I have had to limit my scope and as I had far better access in Buddhist circles, it was a natural choice for me to focus on them. Hence, throughout this thesis when I talk about the house, the family, the elderly, and so on, I refer to the Ladakhi Buddhist population.

Interviews on cold corners and the warmth of family life

The focus of my work was the Ladakhi house and family, with particular emphasis on the elderly. I also looked at how the changes taking place were affecting the elderly, their relationship with the other family members and their position in the household. Most of my interviewees were middle aged or elderly people[3]. However, I also carried out some extensive interviews with younger informants. I carried out most interviews in Leh itself, but also in the nearby villages around Leh. In Leh, interviews were carried out informally wherever I could locate interviewees, namely in shops, and on street corners, and at times in people's homes. In the villages, interviews were carried out in or around people's homes. My elderly informants in Leh were mainly vegetable, apricot, cheese and nut sellers (farmers) or owners of cloth, souvenir or religious artefacts shops, while in the villages, they were mostly farmers. But I also talked to some bronze blacksmiths, traditional doctors (*amchi*) and retired army personnel. My young informants were acquaintances and friends that I met during my stay. The proportion of men and women interviewed was next to equal. In total, I carried out 70 interviews of an average duration of 1 hour each. Questions asked were similar to all interviewees (around 70 questions in total), with certain modifications, elaborations and adaptations to the specific informant in consideration. Carrying out interviews in people's homes allowed me to see a great number of kitchens and the on-goings of kitchens and

[3] Because of extreme climatic conditions, people's age is often difficult to establish, due to wrinkles and physical signs of old age at an early stage. My interviews with old and aging people have been carried out with people ranging between 45 and 95 years of age. The age reported to me is also in many cases slightly imprecise, since Ladakhis reckon their age in cycles of twelve years. Eg. "I am six times twelve years old". This way a few years may be left out or added when old people estimate their age.

hearths. It was invaluable for my study to be able to observe family life closely, both at "home" and in all the homes I visited, in addition to collecting people's verbal statements and stories about family life and the changes. Living with two Ladakhi families also provided me with valuable insight on family life and care for the elderly. It was also of great emotional support to me. As Leh in the winter is like a closed city, it was priceless to have someone, two large families of three generations, with whom to prepare and share my meals, watch TV, or simply chat, play, laugh and relax. Being in such an inhospitable and cold desert region, it was wonderful to have a family with whom to gather around the fire at night, before creeping into my three feather sleeping bags and several layers of woollen clothes and blankets in bed.

I used photography as an important method of documenting the material culture and lives of my informants. Therefore, throughout my thesis, I lean extensively upon the use of photos to establish contexts and for the backing and communication of my arguments and analyses.

Frustrations, uncertainties and joys

I am sure I encountered many of the classical fieldwork challenges and problems, but I also think that one has to try and fail to finally find a way to conduct a fieldwork that is your own. I struggled as mentioned above with finding a translator, which again gave my fieldwork a slow start, and often I would ask myself if I was on the right track of something useful, or if what I was doing was in vain or totally on a sidetrack. I was often unsure whether my approach towards my informants was correct, or whether I introduced myself and my work in a proper way that they could understand. I wondered how much technical equipment to bring into the interview situations, and fell down on paper and pencil being the less intrusive and alienating elements. I had times when I was terribly frustrated over the limitations of translation, feeling that what was presented to me was just a brief summary of what was really said. I repeated over and over again that everything that was said was of great importance to me, even if the informant simply kept repeating himself, or if they were just talking about the weather. I felt practical matters such as taking a shower or washing my clothes "stole" my time, since all such daily chores required a lot more preparation and time than at home, having to fetch water and heat it, or leave it in the sun for it not to be freezing. And very often I had bad conscience about all the time spent doing other things than "work" during a day. But after a while, I realized that all the small daily (seemingly unimportant) chores also

constituted a very important part of my work and helped paving the way towards a closer understanding of Ladakhi life.

Although gender differences in Ladakh are not as emphasized as in the rest of India, where I have travelled extensively, I also realized that I had to be cautious with my behaviour and appearance. For example, it was not common for girls and boys to hang out as friends. This caused me some trouble as my (male) translator also became my best friend. People who would see us together in the street, would not necessarily know that we worked together, and they could easily have thought that I was a tourist having a short relationship with a local man. I had to modify my "Western" behaviour, while at the same time not putting too many strains on myself so that my apparition seemed unnatural. I dressed in *salwaar kameez* (the most common dress for women in all India, consisting of very baggy pants covered with a knee-long dress) most of the time, and I was always trying to be as respectful and correct as possible. I tried to balance my anthropological curiosity and my respect for people's privacy, being sensitive to the personal limits people might have at talking about their own private lives. Luckily I seldom felt intrusive, and people seemed willing and happy to share.

I was also hesitant at having my boyfriend visiting me, but as we never displayed affection in public and I did all my interviews alone, I think bringing him into the picture was not a great obstacle. Of course I might have been more efficient without him there, but I also think that having him there was an emotional comfort and good for the progress of my work, since he tended to push me if I felt things were slow or not going my way. Ultimately, I found it difficult to establish my own space at "home" where I could work, think and be on my own. I had my own room, which was light and spacious and with a wonderful view, but once I had been included in the family's life, it was difficult to then draw a line at how much participation in daily activities and work I could do before I had to go and write or read or just be by myself. I was a paying guest; however I showed great interest in part-taking and learning. This may have created a confusing image of me, both for me in terms of defining my role, but also to them. Some months into my fieldwork I discovered a small tea kitchen in the city where I would go alone and chat with the girls running it. There I could be myself, laugh and joke, pick up some Ladakhi and to a large extent leave aside worries and reflections around my appearance and my role as anthropologist and researcher.

In spite of this long list of practical challenges and difficulties, presenting fieldwork as being an emotionally challenging period of my life, the many joys and the welcoming and generous people I met wherever I went in Ladakh definitely made fieldwork a wonderful experience, although with many lessons learned and thoughts about things I would do differently if I ever go for a second fieldwork.

The most challenging of the whole process has actually been the analysis of data. Translating my experience into words has felt like a reduction of very complex and dynamic relationships and processes into a linear format that obscures the chaos and impalpable nature of reality. Many questions and doubts have arisen on the way. I have asked myself how I could mention one issue in isolation without mentioning its impact on a series of other factors, resulting in a feeling of despair as everything seems to be so closely tied together. I have also offered a lot of thought to how I can avoid doing Ladakh and its people injustice, and how not to present an oversimplified picture or an essentializing story of them. I have certainly wondered how I could, within the space permitted, transfer five and a half months of experience into a little over hundred pages!

However, what has kept my motivation up is the thought of all my wonderful friends, my host families and informants in Ladakh, who willingly shared their lives and memories with me, and ultimately, the thought of returning to Ladakh.

Leh, as seen from above in April. Notice the dramatic difference in the landscape between spring and summer.

Leh, seen from above in July.

Outline of the thesis

In this introductory chapter I have introduced Ladakh, the landscape, the houses and its people. I have discussed my research in Ladakh, the way it was purported, as well as some of the challenges encountered on the way. In the next chapter I will give the reader an insight into the traditional Ladakhi architecture as well as presenting some of the changes taking place on the architectural level, hence altering the visual impression of the Ladakhi landscape. I will also introduce some of the protective measures and mechanisms that the Ladakhis activate to protect themselves and their house against pollution and misfortune. In chapter 3 I will cross the threshold of the (traditional) Ladakhi house, look at the interior, the family composition and relations created and maintained within the walls of the house. In chapter 4 I look at the strong and mutual bonds between grandparents and grandchildren. In chapter 5 we will see that the changes taking place on the physical level, in terms of changed architecture, also influence and change the relations inside the house, in particular those between parents and children. Tensions often arise between family members in periods of transition and change, and we see that particularly the elderly are victims of the changes. In chapter 6 I introduce hospitality, which is a vital part of Ladakhi sociality. I show how hospitable acts serve to relieve or avoid conflict and tension and keep the social order and ties extending beyond the household. In chapter 7 I introduce the Mahabodhi old age home, a new housing constellation for the elderly, a new physical structure in the landscape. The old age home is substituting the disintegrating joint family which traditionally functioned as the main caretaker of the elderly.

2 HOUSE AND SPACE

Introduction

In this chapter I will describe the traditional Ladakhi house, and elaborate on the symbolism and associations connected to the tripartite division of the traditional house. We will see how the traditional architecture is not only imbued with symbolism, but also well adapted to the harsh climate, and that there are several practical considerations behind the plan of the house, too. I will also describe some notions of space common to large parts of the Himalayan area, and I will show how taming of space is vital in a "desert-" and "moon-like" region like Ladakh. In the end of the chapter we shall see that there are new trends in architecture embodied in the "housing colonies" springing up around Leh.

The terraced settlement of Likir. The fields are left barren over the winter and are waiting for the irrigation to start.

The village of Chilling, example of a house with small windows, practical in keeping the cold out in the winter, and the heat out during the summer.

When wandering through a Ladakhi village, one is hit by the massive white houses that stick out in the terraced landscape like fortresses overlooking the village. Smaller offshoot houses and shelters often complement the "mother house" and are spread out on the property. The "mother", or main house (*khangchen*), has traditionally been a three-storeyed structure (Day 1989: 74-75; Phylactou 1989: 65), a plan followed by many Ladakhi families at the hour of construction. It houses not only a large joint family, but also their livestock. This traditional house is built by the family members and neighbours, and materials are extracted from the family's property. The house is very often built on the same spot as the family's former house, which may have crumbled to pieces. Parts of the old house are frequently integrated in the new house, and materials from the old house are reused. The traditional Ladakhi house is however no longer the only type of house structure to be observed in the Ladakhi landscape. As modernization and development have reached Ladakh, there is a trend among the Ladakhis towards moving from the village into the urban centre of Leh to benefit from the increased economic activity and opportunities there. The urbanization leads to a number of changes in Ladakh. On the physical or visible level, one can observe modern or "westernized"

architecture springing up in and around Leh, as an attempt to accommodate the waves of people coming to fulfil their dreams. These modern houses are small, clustered together and often have only one or two storeys. There is no room for the livestock, and for many, moving into the "housing colonies" also means a disruption of the joint family, since the new houses do not lodge as many members as the old houses. The new houses are organized entities constructed with the help of engineering and building skills as well as materials imported from outside Ladakh. As a consequence of the urbanization, the senior generation is often the only one to remain in the village, tending the house, the fields and the farm, while the young grasp the opportunities in the city.

Houses as "fortresses" and "bodies"

The traditional house in Ladakh has a flat roof where vegetables, cheese and fruits are laid out in the summer to dry and to be stored for the winter when supply is short and fields are unproductive. Alfalfa and hay as fodder for the livestock is also stored on the roof during the winter, thus providing an extra layer of insulation for the house. Due to the very dry climate and the strong sun, yet cold nights, the produce laid out on the roofs is well preserved and does not rot. Colourful Buddhist prayer flags sway in the wind on the roofs spreading the prayers out in the landscape, ensuring the longevity and prosperity of the household. The windows of a traditional home are deep and small, so the rooms behind are rather dark and sparsely lit. The small windows were traditionally meant to keep the little heat produced in winter by fires and stoves inside the house and to keep the bitter cold out of the house, and in the heat of the summer, the heat would be kept out too. These days it is more common with larger windows which give more light and heat during the day, but through which more heat also escapes during cold nights.

The traditional Ladakhi house is an impressive building both in size and height, the way its silhouette stands out bright white and imposing in the otherwise brown greyish landscape. Further, it is interesting to note, that at the base of the house, the walls are extremely thick (in the past they were up to four metres thick at the base) and the windows are sparse, small and traditionally unglazed. The small window frame is deep and allows a minimum of light and cold breezes to enter into the cells of the animals and other store rooms in the lower part of the house. Large parts of the vast Ladakhi house are consecrated to storage, since nothing

grows in the fields for six to eight months, due to the long and cold winters. Hence what is cultivated and harvested during the summer months has to be stored and last the whole winter.

An old man cutting open the apricots to be put on the roof to dry. The kernels are used for making apricot oil.

Tomatoes drying on the roof in early autumn.

Traditional houses below Leh palace. The flat roofs are lined with animal fodder. The prayer room alone often constitutes the third floor of many houses, as seen in the centre of the picture.

The ground floor, in addition to holding the animal cells, has many store rooms for dung, fuel-wood, storing of pots of fermenting *chang*, garden tools and so on. The mid floor of the house has thinner walls, explaining the slightly imposing and cone-like impression of the house. This storey has bigger windows, and the window frames are made of carved wooden beams, whereas the ground floor only has black painted frames. On top of the building, often on the actual roof, the family prayer room (*chotkhang*) is situated. Fodder is never stored on top of the prayer room since the "communication channel" with the gods should be unhindered, while the grain store of a house is often situated directly below the *chotkhang*, the prayer room thus "protecting" the grain. In the more modernized traditional houses, the top floor also often holds a spacious room (*shelkhang*), a "window room"/"glass room". On this floor the windows are large, often a full wall is composed of windows, and the wooden frames are beautifully carved and more embellished and ornate than at the base. The large windows, often facing east and south, allow for the rooms behind to attain a comfortable temperature during the day, when the sun at this extreme altitude is terribly strong. But the problem is of course, more heat also escapes during the night through the vast expanses of glass.

Villages seen from above, showing how they cling onto mountain sides, terraces and plateaus.

The *gompa* in Karsha. Especially *gompa*s virtually hang onto the hillside. They have the same fortress-like construction, and the several smaller buildings of the complex are often modelled the same way as the traditional village houses.

The massive impression of the traditional Ladakhi house, with small and sparse windows, led many travellers and researchers to describe them as fortress-like constructions, with a defensive outbuilding (Day 1989: 74; Gutschow and Gutschow 2003: 112; Gutschow and Ramble 2003: 145-146; Norberg-Hodge 1991: 32). The tall, whitewashed traditional Ladakhi house with thick uneven brick and clay walls and flat roofs, may indeed give an imposing impression, as it is often situated on a slope, a terrace or a plateau overlooking the landscape. The house does not only shelter the many members of a Ladakhi polyandrous or extended family. The *khanpa* (house) indeed constitutes an entire "microcosm", reflected in the three storeys of most Ladakhi houses. The many family members also share their dwelling with their domestic animals. Below the kitchen and sleeping quarters situated on the mid floor, the *yaks*, *dzos*, cows and sheep reside. This way the heat from the animals seeps through to the living quarters, contributing to the difficultly maintained comfort temperature during the cold and harsh winters. With a spatial division of the house into three "layers", with the animals at the bottom, the inhabitants of the house on the mid floor, and with the prayer room on the roof, as a third floor, thus constituting the abode of the gods, the Ladakhis see their traditional

house as a small replica of the world, hence the term "microcosm"[4]. The comparison of the house, dwelling or compound with the cosmos, seeing it as a microcosm of the world is also noted among the Turkana and the Berber amongst others (Bourdieu 1996: 14; Broch-Due 1993: 77; Broch-Due 2000: 175; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, Joyce and Gillespie 2000).

Ladakhis conceptualize the house in terms that are clearly analogous to the human or female body. This is seen in a number of societies, where the body is used as an axis of orientation and applied to the house, the village or the cosmos (Bourdieu 1996: 15; Broch-Due 1993: 66, 79; Broch-Due 2000: 175; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Moore 1996: 57). In Ladakh, the body is used as a template for imagining both the house and the village. A village often has a lower, middle and upper part, the same way the house has it (Herdick 2003: 84). If we apply the template of the body to the house, also used by Stein on the Tibetan house (Stein 1972: 204), we see that the lower part of the house is associated with the dark stables, the earthen floor, the natural, the animals, the impure, and human and animal waste, but also animal and human fertility and reproduction. This part of the house equals the lower part and feet of a body. The feet are often the dirtiest part of a body, but at the same time it is the part on which the rest of the body depends for standing upright. The ground floor and the feet thus constitute the roots or fundament of the structure or body. The mid floor, where the social activities of the family go on, the cooking and preparing of meals on the hearth, hospitality, reproduction of the family (also associated with the ground floor), intergenerational care and respect, equals the upper body, the stomach or even the heart of the body. Or if imagining a female body, the mid floor represents a uterus or a swelling womb (Bourdieu 1996: 15; Broch-Due 2000: 171, 175; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Delaney 1991: 233; Gutschow and Ramble 2003: 144), as the ultimate refuge, providing protection against outside dangers as well as nurturance and comfort, like the foetus is protected in the mother's womb. Furthermore, the mid floor compares to a mother's breasts giving milk and nurturing the family. The upper floor of the house, where ritual activities are performed, where special guests may be attended[5] and where the house is at its most embellished and ornate, clean, light and pure, is thus compared to the head of a human body, the thoughts and intellect. We see here also a

[4] For further descriptions of the tripartite division of Ladakhi, Tibetan and Himalayan houses, see Day 1989: 74-75, Dollfus 1989: 129-181, Dollfus and Fiore 1985: 39-46, Gutschow et al. 2003, Herdick 2003: 67-85, Jest and Stein 1981: 297-303, Levine 1988: 89-143, Kaplanian 1981, Maréchaux 1991: 224, Murdoch 1991: 225-242, Norberg-Hodge 1991: 32-34 and Phylactou 1989: 65-81.

[5] Hospitality is normally associated with the mid floor of the Ladakhi house, but the high status of a guest, and the fact that many houses today have glass rooms which are warm and comfortable during the day on the roof or top floor, means that the domain of hospitality is sometimes extended to including parts of this upper floor, too.

division of the house into light and dark domains. The same is noted in the Berber Kabyle house described by Bourdieu. Although only divided into two levels, in the Kabyle house too, the dark is associated with the low, with the animals, the natural domain, the wet and moist, fertility and birth, but also death, while the high parts of the house are, like in Ladakh, associated with light, the holy, and the hearth (Bourdieu 1996: 9). The different floors of a Ladakhi house are thus the object of several associations, and in the same way that the Ladakhi house is a "microcosm" of the world, it is a "macrocosm" of the body (Bourdieu 1996; Broch-Due 2000; Stein 1972: 204).

From conversations with Ladakhis, it thus became clear to me that the tripartite division of the house was also associated with the life cycle. The ground floor is related to fertility, birth and becoming of new human and animal life, since these processes are regarded as closely tied to nature, but also as potentially polluting, and the ground floor is associated most clearly with the natural and the impure. The human and animal manure is used as fertilizer for the fields, it is dirty, yet it stands for fertility. The ambiguity of the manure makes it a potent symbol, its power lying in the opposites of the dirty/polluting and the life-giving. Much of this ties in with the description of the Kabyle house lower level. The Ladakhi mid floor is associated with marriage, culture, hospitality and sociality, due to this floor holding the hearth, the kitchen, rooms where guests are attended and the sleeping quarters. The Ladakhi top floor, however, is linked with death, ancestors and spirituality, being the domain of the clean, pure, light and celestial (Herdick 2003: 70; Michaels 2003: 13-18). This association with death of the top floor of the Ladakhi house clearly parts from the associations tied to the Kabyle house, where the lower level stands for both life and death (Bourdieu 1996: 9). The comparison of the Ladakhi house with the life cycle is also reflected in the fact that Ladakhis have traditionally buried the placenta posterior to parturition in the basement (Phylactou 1989: 78), wedding ceremonies are performed in the kitchen, and the dead are taken to the top floor of the house to be prepared for cremation. Here, a monk reads out the *Bardo Thodrol* text (popularly known as the "Tibetan Book of the Dead" (Rinpoche 2000)), preparing the deceased person for the up to 49 days of journey through the liminal state of *bardo*, the state preceding death but before rebirth as a new human or animal. All of this supports the association of the three levels of the house with the life cycle, and hence also the sedimentation of the generations within the walls of the house.

Housing and notions of space in the Himalaya

In a large number of Buddhist societies across the Tibetan plateau and in great parts of the Himalayan region, there are many commonalities and similarities in terms of the architecture and symbolic organization of the house (Jest and Stein 1981: 96-303). Social relationships and religious conceptions are expressed in the architecture of the Himalayan area. Turning houses into sign posts, they can be seen to express core values and practices. Houses are very often oriented east-west with the entrance facing east (Jest 1991: 203), this will be discussed further below. However, construction techniques and materials vary largely, due to the dramatically different climatic zones represented in the region. Construction is to a great extent dependent on the natural resources available in the specific area. Climatic conditions also play an important part in determining the physical outlook of the house, for example whether it is constructed on poles, has a flat roof or not, thick walls or not, small or big windows and so on (Toffin 1991: 7-9).

In Ladakh new houses are often built on top of other run down houses and frequently the materials from the old house are reused together with materials from the owner's property, such as timber and clay. In this way the generations and the passing of the generations are built into the walls of the house. The inhabitants of the house are tied to the ancestors, the house itself and ultimately the land from where the materials are extracted and into which the house fundament is firmly planted. The house becomes a reference to the past, thus lengthening the temporal span of the inhabitants' individual identities, offering them a kind of immortality through the identification with a specific house. We see a similar idea among the Sa'dan Toraja of Indonesia, studied by Waterson. Material constructions represent permanence and continuity, and hence "…endow a metaphorically immortality on the social groups who identify with them and who ensure their perpetuity by continually rebuilding them…" (Waterson 2000: 177).

The Ladakhi houses are constructed with sun-dried clay bricks made by the family. The bricks are said to last for centuries, and although a house may have crumbled, the bricks may be intact and will be transferred to the new house, thus furthering the "soul" of the old house, by including it in the new one. Interestingly, and in spite of similar ideas about space and symbolism of houses in different Buddhist communities across the Himalaya, the Dolpo are meticulous about constructing their houses where no other houses have previously been raised

(Jest 1991: 195). A new Ladakhi house is built with great concern for the spirits of the earth (*lhu*). A high *lama* (Buddhist monk) will come to bless the land so as not to disturb the spirits and cause their harm. Norberg-Hodge notes how the *lama* uses a mirror to reflect all the surroundings around the house plot, thus capturing the earth spirits in the mirror and hence protecting them from harm during construction. The mirror is placed in a box, and when the house is completed, there is a ceremony in which the *lama* opens the box and sets the spirits free (Norberg-Hodge 1991: 32). The main pillar of a new house is often one of the first elements to be raised, symbolizing the vital force of the house (Phylactou 1989: 74).

Going back to climatic considerations at the time of construction, it is evident that a house in the hilly, wet, humid and densely forested areas in parts of Nepal or Bhutan would maybe be constructed on poles or with a pitched roof, while the construction of a Ladakhi house takes into consideration the arctic, dry desert climate with only minimal precipitation but, at times, heavy winds. Hence the walls are thick and sturdy, and windows have traditionally been kept to a minimum to keep the cold outside and the heat inside. Due to little precipitation, the roof has been constructed flat and in this way served a practical purpose being used for drying of hay, vegetables and fruit. The building materials in Ladakh also reflect the fact that the region is very scarcely forested, hence the use of mainly clay when constructing, reserving the use of wooden beams and pillars only for window frames, roof support and for the "skeleton" of the house.

Old traditional houses. Notice the uneven surface of the walls, the small window openings, and the prayer flags on the roof.

Similar to the Buddhist architecture in the Himalayan region, Buddhist notions of space in the region also have many commonalities (Michaels 2003: 13-18). Studies conducted in the area in places separated by several hundred kilometres, show that connotations tied to for example light versus dark and height versus low are to a large extent similar. Light and height are associated with the pure, celestial, auspicious, sacred, beautiful, spacious and clean, while the dark and low are often associated with the impure, inauspicious, closed and potentially polluting, but also with fertility and nature (ibid; Phylactou 1989: 55-58; Vanquaille and Vets 2003: 85-94). These distinctions and associations are found in a large number of societies the world over, among these are the Berber studied by Bourdieu (1996).

This continuum between dark and light and high and low is being reproduced in the Ladakhi tripartite division of the house. The dark basement has earthen floors, with which the animal waste mixes. The human waste from the Ladakhi compost toilet on the mid floor gathers in a separate room in the basement, into which there is a door from the outside of the house in order to take advantage of the compost for fertilizing the fields. The animal cells and the store rooms in the base of the house are, as mentioned, dark with only very small windows or no windows at all. We understand why Ladakhis associate the lower part of the house with the dark, moist, gloomy and dirty. The top of the house, with the temple and the "glass room", with large expanses of windows, views over the landscape and village, hence represents and reproduces the spacious, light, ornate and clean. The way Ladakhis share their domestic space with their livestock says something about the close intimacy between humans and animals, but it could also be interpreted as saying something about how relations are set up between humans, as well as indicating that boundaries and separations are important. They share their dwelling with the animals, but they are situated on different levels within the house; the humans above the animals. To descend to the cells of the animals on the ground floor from the mid floor of the kitchen and living quarters, in many houses one has to actually step out of the house, often by a staircase or ladder, and since many houses are situated on a slope, go around the corner where an entrance to the ground floor is situated. We see that in spite of the inhabitants' close relations with their animals, there are clear boundaries and separations between them. Even the animal dung and the human excreta are not mixed; they are kept in separate cells on the ground floor, and the human manure used as fertilizer for the fields, is accessed by a separate door from the outside of the house.

In many parts of the Himalayas, east (*shar choks*) is regarded to be an auspicious direction. This is seen in a wide range of societies all over the world and doubtlessly has a connection with the sun. The sun rises in the east, and thus the first rays of sun in the morning come from the east. This explains why in many parts of the world people construct their houses and dwellings on an east-west axis, with the entrance to the dwelling to the east, allowing the inhabitants to greet the sun in the morning when they step out of their home. Again one sees a link to the positive connotations tied to light and hence also the sun. It seems obvious that the entrance faces east due to the symbolism connected with the sun. Bourdieu's description of the Berber Kabyle house shows a similar auspiciousness tied to the east. The main entrance of the house faces east, hence when one steps out of the house, one walks in the eastern direction, the best way to choose, and also connected with the upward, the light, the good and the right (Bourdieu 1996: 20). Broch-Due, in line with this, notes on the Turkana of Kenya how east is regarded as the direction of "'goodness' and herding - the site of coolness, the rising sun, rain and fertility". She continues by stating that the east is associated with human and animal creation acts and the beginning of life cycles. Herds are taken towards the east for grazing, and visitors should approach the compound from this direction if they come with good intentions (Broch-Due 2000: 175).

In Ladakh, most houses are constructed on the above described east-west axis, with the entrance facing east. Light is seen as auspicious and the east gate allows Ladakhis to greet the sun early in the morning when they step out of the house to fetch water or to milk the cattle. In addition to the symbolism tied to the sun and therefore an east facing entrance, there are practical reasons for the entrance facing this direction, too. In a cold desert climate, the warmth of the sun is an invaluable source of heating. With large houses it is difficult to heat the whole house, and therefore the kitchen is normally the only room where the fire runs all day, while the rest of the house is cold, especially in the morning, after a long and cold night. Then the eastern wall of the house is a favoured place for the performance of daily activities such as washing of hair, body and clothes, cutting of vegetables, spinning or, like the elderly, just sitting and keeping warm.

Activity along the eastern wall. Tomatoes are cut to be put on the roof to dry in the strong sun.

An elderly man with his prayer wheel and beads sitting in the warmth of the sun outside the eastern wall of his house.

Ladakhi houses are frequently raised on a slope or a small hill or terrace, making for a good overview over the village and landscape. Again it seems probable to link this housing pattern with the auspiciousness tied to height. A village is always situated by a stream or watershed,

water being a critical resource of livelihood in this desert and the lynchpin in the settlement process. In the summer, when glaciers melt, rivers run high and water is abundant, the landscape is green and lush, while the winter and early spring are contrastingly dry, dusty and grey. Well-run irrigation systems are a prerequisite for life in Ladakh, and forms part of the taming of the nature. The settlements in this region have developed terribly complex irrigation systems which are well organized and controlled. Many of the high alpine peaks (*khangri*) and mountain chains are considered holy by the Ladakhi, and when surmounting a mountain pass, prayer flags are hung up. The holy character of the mountains can again be thought of in line with height as auspicious, and the water originating from these mountains - being the main criterion for settlement in Ladakh - is highly valued and frequently also attains a holy status. Water and wetness is equalled to life. Water is offered daily to the gods in seven silver bowls in every *gompa* and every family prayer room. In general, everything that comes from high up or above is regarded auspicious in Ladakh. Both rain and the melting water from the glaciers and snow capped peaks come from above. The pastures to which the animals are led in summer are high up above the village, and the gods and a range of local spirits inhabit the high mountains and the sky. All together, what comes from above is not only regarded auspicious or holy, it is also in great part a prerequisite for fertility and prosperity.

The positive connotations tied to height are also reproduced in the greeting patterns of the Ladakhis. When saying "*Jullay*", they lift their right hand several times touching their forehead, as a show of respect. Sometimes people lift their hand only up to their chin or to mouth level, while when greeting a highly ordained monk for example, they would be meticulous about lifting the hand all the way to the forehead, sometimes even joining both palms in front of the forehead. I have again shown how height is regarded auspicious and tied up with positive connotations, and we have seen how the mountains and the high domains of the world are portrayed as having quintessential life-giving forces. However, I will below show that the space beyond the village, the high and untamed mountains, can also hold life-threatening forces and potentialities.

Taming space and protecting the house

Throughout the history, the taming of nature and landscape in Ladakh has been essential. Nature has constituted a threat to settlements, people, crops and animals. Through the construction of houses and settlements, the cultivation of fields, the domestication of animals and the channelling of water, nature is domesticated and tamed. This taming is necessary for the inhabitants' protection against a ferocious nature and natural disasters. In this scenario, religion and rituals have also become all-encompassing coping mechanisms for people trying to create order and meaning in their lives[6].

The houses in most Ladakhi villages lay spread out in the spacious terrain and are surrounded by terraces and fields, while houses in the urban centre of Leh are more tightly clustered together. In the villages, neighbours are separated by several fields, terraces and canals, and smaller shelters and houses belonging to the "mother house" are spread out on the property. The water links the fields and the grain, and also links the households together through the irrigation canals, forming a fluid yet relatively bounded village space.

Chortens in Changspa.

[6] Yeh notes how in Tibetan history "taming" has been central. Buddhism was seen to tame both the egos of people as well as the landscape (Yeh 2003: 51).

The irrigation canals, stones, fences, natural cavities or elevations, *chortens*, *mani walls*, footpaths and animal tracks demarcate clearly the village boundaries and protect the ordered and organized village against the wild and untamed. Outside, the ferocious glacial rivers reign. Nature is whimsical and throws violent floods as well as draughts, avalanches, aggressive cold and snow storms upon the villagers and their fields. Animals like the wolf and snow leopard linger in the wild, together with an array of local spirits and ghosts which may throw misfortune upon the village if angered. With dangers and threats on so many levels, spatial organization and control and the transformation of the natural environment are vital.

A similar notion of the house and the village regarded as ”full”, or as I choose to name it, tamed or domesticated, is noted among the Berber. The belt inhabited by people stands in opposition to the empty and infertile lands beyond the village (Bourdieu 1996: 16). Bourdieu also notes that the inhabitants of one village believed that settling and constructing their houses beyond the village boundaries was equivalent to letting the family line die out (ibid: 16). We see here that what is high above or outside the village - which in previous pages has been stated as auspicious and life-giving - can also be potentially life-threatening, and hence the taming of space is essential. Building is taming: Through building, demons and ghosts and malevolent spirits are forced to stay at a place, they are immobilized, and space is domesticated. By altering the landscape, creating rupture in the powerful desert- and moon-like environment, the “fortified” structures enter in competition with the potentially dangerous forces over the authority of the land.

When walking through a Ladakhi village, at first one does not realize the many guardians - protective rings, zones and levels, paintings, sculptures, structures, thresholds, natural and artificially made boundary markers, elevations, stone fences, walls and shrines - that are present to demarcate the village space. They ward off evil, protect the houses, the inhabitants, the crops, the water and the village. Also, through the cultivation of fields and gardens, the taming of water in the irrigation canals, the fencing and division of property and fields and through the domestication of animals, space is tamed[7].

[7] Schrempf also notes how the “mask dances” performed in the *gompas* at festival time are part in the taming of the earth. With the horrifying masks worn by the dancing monks, evil forces are believed to be expulsed, and the observers of the dance as well as the environment around, are purified (Schrempf 1999: 198-200).

However, even within the village and house boundaries there are dangers and threats against which the inhabitants try to protect themselves. Certain zones, people, houses, periods of the year or of the life cycle are more vulnerable and exposed to pollution, misfortune or disaster than others. People may also be potentially polluting or the cause of misfortune to others. Therefore, there are several layers of protection also within the village. First there are structures marking the boundaries and protection of the village, secondly there are the protective zones and circles of the house, like garden fences, the walls of the house themselves, and the threshold. Ultimately there are boundaries and levels within the house itself. Each of these levels and boundaries causes a constant renegotiation of what and who is inside and outside, of inclusion and exclusion.

Given that Ladakhis construct bodies and houses as comparable entities, the house becomes more than a physical structure. Like the people they contain, houses are dynamic entities which are often thought to be born, mature, grow old and die. Hence, by equalling the house to a living entity, it is perceived as moving through the life cycle. As is the case with real human bodies that are vulnerable to external forces and the ill-intentional acts of others and thus in need of protection, the "house-body" too may become sick or polluted, and consequently in need of protection and care, fortification and safeguarding. We see then that the house and the inhabitants are mutually dependent on each other, and hence the inhabitants' protection of the house ultimately ensures their own safe environment. By protecting the house, they indirectly also protect themselves from the potentially dangerous and chaotic outside. Inside the house, space is ordered. Seating is fixed and hierarchical. Houses all across Ladakh are constructed following more or less the same plan and tripartite division, factors showing that the house is a planned, organized, ordered and fixed space.

Recalling the tripartite division of the house, we see the same division reflected in the local spiritual world: Also here one finds three levels; the underworld (*yoklhu*) creatures or deities (*lhu*), the (*tsan*) of the middle world (*bartsan*), and (*lha*), the deities of the heavenly world (*stanglha*). The *lhu* are associated with animals found in and around the village, and all of them are regarded and worshipped as deities, but they can all also be potentially harmful, hence it is of utmost importance to avoid causing their wrath. These deities and creatures protect both individual bodies, houses and villages and hence, people's offences (ritually polluting actions (*drib*)) can cause disorders and misfortune on all three levels. Similarly, one can purify both the body, house and the village from potential pollution by engaging in

purifying rites, like fumigation of juniper (*sang*), ritual ablution (*trus*), prostrations and circumambulation (Gutschow and Gutschow 2003: 136).

There are several actions and incidents that may cause the wrath of the deities which again causes them to throw misfortune, illness or pollution upon the inhabitants, their house or village. The *lhu*, the underworld creatures, also referred to as water spirits, are seen as the guardians of wealth and the source of human, animal and agricultural fertility, and are therefore crucial aspects of the elaboration of household and agricultural life. One can cause the harm of such spirits by urinating near their "homes" (local springs), or by digging up the soil without careful ritual precautions. In the spring, when the agricultural season starts with preparation and ploughing of the fields, and in the autumn, when the agricultural season comes to an end, rituals are performed in every household to welcome the *lhu* and to ask for forgiveness for the many insects killed and for disturbing the *lhu* during a long season of ploughing, digging and hacking the soil and the fields. Consequently, monks do not engage in agricultural activity in order to avoid killing creatures like snakes, worms and insects representing the *lhu*.

The other levels of spiritual creatures and beings are treated with the same respect. For example, the *tsan* look like humans in front, but that is just a deceptive image. If one sees them from behind they are terrifying, as they have no back, hence all their inside is displayed. The *tsan* are said to be afraid of fire and of the colour red (Phylactou 1989: 62). Therefore, on most Ladakhi houses there are drawings in red painted on the mid level of the house, since the *tsan* are believed to inhabit the middle world, the world of the humans, corresponding with the mid floor of the house. The drawings can be simple, or more elaborate. Some only have a line around the house, dots, and swastikas with triangles in the corners, others have figures of humans, animals and weapons, but they are always in red.

Yangchen Dolma milking the *dzomo* (female *dzo*). Notice the red paintings on the walls, to ward off the *tsan*.

On the roof, above the prayer room the *lhato* is situated. This is a recipient filled with willow branches entwining a wooden arrow, around which ceremonial white silk scarves (*khataks*) are knit. The vessel also contains grains, water and precious metals. The *lhato* is for the protective deity of the house or the household line deity (*phalha*). The *lhato* is changed every Tibetan New Year to assure continued prosperity of the household. There are also *lhatos* on mountain tops or at the entrance of villages; these are for the *lha* residing high above or outside the village, protecting it[8]. They may be similar vessels to the one found on the house, or they may be composed of piles of stones or piles of ibex horns. Similar to all the deities, the *lha* have to be treated with utmost respect and care. If not, they may become angry and throw pollution or misfortune upon the village, the house or the inhabitants.

[8] Similar to the *lha*, who have to be treated with utmost respect in order not to cause their wrath, the mountainous people of Hunza in Pakistan believe in supernatural beings (*pari*) residing on the snowy peaks and alpine meadows, high above the villages. These too, like the Ladakhi local deities are seen as having both life-giving and life-threatening attributes (Sidky 1994: 73). The *pari* can wreak vengeance on transgressors, but they also bring good fortune, health and prosperity to those who know how to honour them and avoid offending them (ibid: 73).

A *lhato* at the entrance of a village.

Another threat within the village boundaries is constituted by the inhabitants themselves. The "evil eye" is a notion well known in South Asia, and it confers an idea of people being able to throw misfortune upon others by looking at them with envy, or with the "evil eye" (Daniel 1984; Dollfus 1989: 37). Typically a new and well-built house can cause envy in others, hence it needs to be protected against the "evil eye" of neighbours and by-passers. Dollfus and Day note that in order to distract the vicious gaze of envious people, a wooden penis is hung on the outside of the house (Day 1989: 74, Dollfus 1989: 136-139). Especially since women are regarded as more predisposed for mental disturbances than men, and for being jealous, envious and slightly irrational, the sight of the penis will shock them, make them embarrassed and ultimately make them look away from the house. Hence their "evil eye" will not be able to cause any harm to the house and its dwellers. This is one among many ways of safeguarding the inhabitants of the house, freeing them from illness, death and misfortune, providing wealth and well-being. A similar strategy is noted in some areas of Tibet; erotic and explicit images are painted on the walls of a newly constructed house, in order to embarrass those who look at it with envy (Dollfus 1989:136-139).

Houses and "betterment"

Above we have seen how there is great symbolism imbued in the traditional house construction, but also that the house has inherent many practical considerations and is well suited to the harsh arctic desert climate. The new houses mushrooming in and around Leh, not only constitute a disturbing image for the eye, as they are often quite aesthetically ill-fitted in the landscape, seeming sterile and "soul-less", without the embellishment of the traditional ones, and since they are often left unfinished (explained to me to be a trick to avoid paying taxes) with metal spears sticking out of the partially finished walls. They also seem to embody the erosion of old Buddhist and family values as well as traditional religious symbolism. However, many people seem to prefer these new housing structures, in spite of them being much smaller, housing less family members, often not allowing for a proper room for the house temple, providing less privacy as one lives wall to wall with the neighbours, being more expensive, and being emptied of the many symbolic purposes seen in the old house. One reason for people moving to the "housing colonies" is of course mere need. Many young people have education these days, and most jobs are encountered in and around the urban centre of Leh. Here they rent an apartment, but go home to their village as often as possible, for harvest, religious festivals or marriages. Others may have experienced little luck with farming in the village and have come to try their luck in the city. Yet others leave well functioning large estates in the village for a small city shelter and regard their new dwelling as a symbol of progress and modernity, while their former house is seen as backward, primitive, old fashioned and impractical with its many dark rooms, uneven walls and windows, storerooms and staircases, earthen floors, animals, drying vegetables, dung and firewood "all over", creating "chaos". Here we see how a dichotomization between city and village emerges. Many of the city dwellers speak of the villages as places where development has not yet arrived, and hence of places that lag behind materially. The villagers often portray the urban dwellers as busy, individualistic, only interested in maximizing own profit, leaving aside important Buddhist and family values and having no peace of mind.

The city of Leh is rapidly expanding into the dry and barren hillsides.

As demonstrated in the pictures above and below, the landscape around Leh allows for the city and the "housing colonies" to eat in on the hilly terrain. A lot of construction work is done without supervision of an engineer, and the materials and the structure of the buildings may be unfamiliar to the carpenters. Hence it is said that some of these new houses do not hold necessary safety requirements. Others claim that cement buildings poorly maintain the heat in the winter and a cool inside temperature in the summer. Their large windows and thin cement walls are said to be highly unsuitable in the Ladakhi climate, whereas the traditional houses are well adapted to the climate through past generations' trial and failure and finally settling for the existent traditional house structure with thick clay and brick walls, sparse windows, and with animals on the ground floor to contribute to the heat of the living quarters. In the new houses there are often also water closets instead of the traditional compost toilets. The compost toilet providing fertilizer for the fields will not be missed, since those moving from the village to the city will have neither animals, nor fields in or around their new dwellings. But the water closets constitute a great threat on the Ladakhi fragile environment, since a well-developed sewage system is yet not implemented, and the waste goes directly

into the glacial rivers of which people are dependent for drinking water, washing and irrigation.

New concrete constructions in Leh, claimed to be highly unsuitable in the harsh desert climate.

Interestingly, if Ladakhis themselves do not prefer the water closet, many believe that foreigners in Ladakh will only accept to use a "Western" one. This leads to local tea stall and restaurant owners saying that they do not have a toilet, when a foreign visitor asks for the toilet. Instead of showing them to the dark compost toilet, which is in fact much less smelly and dirty than the water closets I observed, they simply say that they have no toilet, out of an imagined consideration for the needy tourist. One day in a *dhaba* (small, simple restaurant) serving "Indian" food[9], I entered into a conversation with two girls from Delhi. They were working for a governmental development agency in Delhi, and were sent to Leh to do a survey about the sanitation in Leh. The overall aim for the organization sending them was to start a process replacing the traditional compost toilet with the water closet. The girls had never been to Ladakh before and were spending a week in total in the whole region (the largest district of all Indian states), turning back to Delhi after this time with their reports and recommendations. I was amazed at how little they were informed about the local conditions, and at how determined they seemed that water closets were the only appropriate thing in

[9] It was terribly interesting to note how Ladakhis speak of India as a foreign country. Even though Ladakh is part of an Indian state, India is referred to as something quite different and far away from Ladakh. I would hear people saying "When I was in India.." or "No, that man over there is Indian".

Ladakh, regarding the compost toilet as dirty and unhygienic, and not taking into consideration the suitability of the compost toilet in such a dry region. Neither did they seem to acknowledge the fact that there is no appropriate sewage system in Ladakh, and that the human waste flushed from the toilets ends up in the very same rivers that Ladakhis depend on for their survival. This example typically illustrates a top-down planning that does not take into consideration the local conditions before implementing schemes of "betterment and sanitation". This "colonizing" of people's hygiene can also be seen as a means of controlling people, even controlling people's most intimate sphere. The ideals of hygiene brought in from outside, also inculcate in people a feeling of being primitive and dirty.

In many places of the colonized world these are recurrent themes. "Native societies" were to reach "social advancement" through reform and regulation. Meticulously written reports and regulations decided where houses could be built, where rubbish or animals or the human waste could be kept and how many people were appropriate of a household (Carsten 2003: 51-55). Particularly through "improving" hygiene and sanitation, like bathrooms and toilets, people were also more easily surveiled and controlled. One could say that the new houses embody the above described goals, making people more surveiable and controllable, by the mere fact that they are "blueprint" houses; all look the same not only on the outside, but on the inside too. The houses can keep no secrets to the outside world. The planned and standardized houses, of precise dimensions and engineering skills, can thus be read as a text, and subject to statistical report (Mitchell 1988: 42-48).

Similarly to the incident described above, I one day, as I was in the village of Likir, met two Ladakhi girls, one Muslim and one Buddhist, doing surveys in several villages surrounding Leh. They were tracing facts such as how much milk people's cattle provided, how many animals they had, how much land, what they consumed, where they kept their animals and so on. They were hired by TATA, a development organization run from Delhi in cooperation with a local Ladakhi development organization. Again this meticulous registering could be seen as a way to control, colonize or surveil the people, since their village houses in themselves are not as easily controlled as the city ones. This way of surveiling people through meticulous surveys and surprise inspection is a topic treated by Guha in Uttar Pradesh. He describes "The Integrated Child Development Services Program" as not only a set of services of supplementary nutrition for pregnant women and young children, of education and immunization, but also of control and regulation (Gupta 2003).

We see similar “civilizing projects” in Tibet, performed by the Chinese government. New neighbourhoods are constructed in Lhasa, and traditional ones torn down. The inhabitants are evicted from their homes with a promise of a new and “better” one. Often these very inhabitants have to buy back their property, or the new house on the spot of their old house at a highly inflated price (Tibet Information Network 2003: 85-98). What seems like a modernization of a neighbourhood - through tearing the very neighbourhood down - justified by the “unsafe structures” of the old Tibetan houses, also serves as a means of controlling the inhabitants. Many are migrants from the villages who have settled illegally in the city. Through the opening up of their houses, by actually tearing them down, the Chinese government has also had a chance to surveil the families, as the houses were suddenly turned inside out, and the families left on the street, before reacommodated in a house they would have to buy back.

Although state surveillance and control of people is probably less the case in Ladakh than in Tibet, the “sanitization project” and the meticulous surveys are nevertheless control mechanisms. We have seen how housing is central in governments’ or development agencies’ attempts to control a population. The aforementioned concern among the Ladakhi for taming the nature, is here replaced by the state development discourse seeking to “tame” people. But houses can also in many cases represent resistance against outside pressure and change in that people, by sticking to the traditional architecture and plan of the house, resist the modern influences. In Ladakh it is particularly telling to associate the traditional house with “resistance”, keeping in mind the fortified aspect of it with the thick walls and few windows, allowing for limited penetration. However, the house may also be seen as an arena of adaptation, it is a visible means of communicating the changes of a society. As we have seen, the new houses springing up in Ladakh are an architectural visualization of the development and changes. The modern Ladakhi house, often situated in or around the urban centre of Leh, is thus turned into an embodiment of the changes.

Although control of people may not be the main priority of the organizations, organs and ministries propagating “development” in Ladakh, the new houses and development agencies’ ideals of sanitization and betterment of housing may have an influence on local people’s own ideals and ideas. Hence an explicit preference for “Western ways” may inculcate in people a

feeling of inferiority if they do not have or live up to the modern standards[10]. Doubtlessly, these new housing patterns, and many people's preference for the modern and new also lead to changes in the intimate relations inside the houses, as we will see in chapter 5.

The expanding city of Leh. The houses in the hillside are examples of the new type of housing.

An overview picture of Leh seen from the South end.

[10] Yeh notes how the preference for "modern" methods, knowledge and technology also makes people turn away from their "natural" and traditional agricultural methods for the crops to yield well (religious rituals, human and animal excreta as fertilizers), towards chemical pesticides and thinking that the old rituals were mere superstition. (Yeh 2003: 490-499)

3 THE INTERIOR OF THE HOUSE AND FAMILY COMPOSITION

Introduction

Precisely because the house is the meeting place of some of the most vital threads of social life, like life itself, death, sex, love, intergenerational care, politics and economics, it has become a favoured arena for studying kinship and everyday life. With increased scholarly interest in everyday life, the door to previously closed and private domains was opened. This happened to a great extent with feminist scholarship giving an impetus to studies that turned attention to the lives of women and to domestic processes (Carsten 2003; Moore 2000 [1988]). With the opening up of the domestic and private, domains perceived as female, doors to the domain of infants and elderly were also opened. As the anthropological gaze was allowed into the house, a shift in the study of, and thought around kinship, also emerged. A "processual" rather than a classificatory approach to kinship, focusing on the practices and understandings by which relationships are constructed in everyday social life, rather than on abstract or idealized rules, was seen as a more useful approach to studying kin, as well as being more resonant with the local ideas and understandings of kinship (Carsten 2000: 1-34). One such approach specifically examines how, in certain societies, people conceive and enact kin or "kin-like" relationships as a group by virtue of their joint localization to a "house". The focus on the house as constitutive of kinship relations was coined by Clause Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss 1982, 1984 1987, 1991).

The anthropology of the house is regarded to be a much more dynamic intake to the study of kinship, overcoming to a great extent the abstraction and reductionism once typical of kinship studies. Due to the anthropologists' recognition that kinship could be culturally constructed from other sources and substances than blood or genes, there has been a shift from a narrow analysis of pedigrees to a more inclusive understanding of intimate relations where shared residence and consumption also figure. The term "relatedness" instead of kinship has been introduced since it signals a greater inclusiveness towards indigenous idioms of being related. Instead of assuming what kinship is in a general sense, in every society studied by the anthropologist, the local notions of relatedness should be investigated (Carsten 2000: 1-34). Consequently anthropologists have found that many of these societies see "those individuals

sharing the same roof or residence" or "those sharing their meals" regardless of their biological relation, as related. Broch-Due notes that among the Turkana, "the enveloping … motif of kinship is not sex, but eating: Flesh is made from food. Those who eat together on an everyday basis share the same flesh in quite literal sense: they are made of the same stuff - its source being the milk, butter, blood and meat of the livestock of the camp and clan" (Broch-Due 2000: 171).

Inside and around the microcosm that the house constitutes, the daily activities of the household take place. The *khanpa* is not only a protective shelter, this is also where most of the family's activities are carried out, either inside the living quarters or in the fields surrounding the house. The centre of the house is the kitchen and the hearth. The family gathers around the hearth (*thapka*) for meals, leisure and work. Traditionally the house and the household have constituted a productive unit, but it is also here that the primary needs of the individuals are covered. Each member forms part of a bigger whole, they all perform different and specifically designated chores and cooperate to ensure the smooth running of the family. Cooperation, solidarity, reciprocity and mutual care are principles traditionally held high in the Ladakhi society, and especially within the household. The Ladakhi household has been an authority structure which socializes and nourishes the young and the aged in the absence of other welfare institutions. Elders are cared for by their children and grandchildren the way they once cared for their own infants. The Buddhist principle of compassion towards weaker ones ensures the elders and infants great care and consideration in the Ladakhi family, and the bonds between these two age cohorts are often strong and constantly nurtured. Great respect is traditionally also paid to the elders, particularly male elders, due to their role as decision makers, holders of traditional knowledge and heads of the household.

The Ladakhi extended family was traditionally often polyandrous, but I have also come across polygynous families, where one man has several wives (often sisters). They counted numerous family members and in many cases four generations. Today, polyandry is declining, but many still live in extended households, although they too tend to be declining. The large traditional house not only looks as a fortress, it also serves the purpose of a fortress; sheltering and protecting the Ladakhi family against harsh weather conditions as well as against exterior dangers or potential enemies. It serves as their protective cell towards the surrounding and sometimes threatening world, thus also strengthening the close bonds between the family members within the walls as well as between the family, the house and the ancestors.

The heart of the house

Inside, the Ladakhi house is sparsely decorated, furnished, lit and heated. The kitchen (*chansa*) is the largest room in the house and it "hosts" the hearth. It is the most decorated and furnished of the rooms and this is also where the inhabitants of the house stay during the day to keep warm in the heat of the hearth. The hearth is the symbolic heart of the house and it is also the heart around which most indoor activity takes place. Close to the hearth, the main pillar of the house is situated. Both the hearth and the pillar are auspicious objects in the kitchen, and each of them is associated with a proper god who has to be fed and offered to in order to maintain good relations. The hearth god is female, while the pillar god is male, probably derived from the woman's close connection with the hearth and cooking, and the man's connection with the pillar, both because it may be seen as a symbol of virility and maleness, as a phallus, but also since the male family members and guests will be seated near it. The Kabyle house described by Bourdieu holds similar notions of the hearth as the navel of the house and associated with the mother's womb, and the mother being in command of the cooking and every activity related to it. Similarly, the Ladakhi house mother will normally eat her meals close to the hearth. However, in the Kabyle house, the central pillar of the house is associated with the woman, while the supporting and central beam is related to the man (Bourdieu 1996: 12).

A typical Ladakhi kitchen, with the *bukhari* in front and the traditional stove in the background. Notice the main pillar of the kitchen to the right in the picture, and the display of the family heirlooms in the open cupboards. The Lumdung family is a polyandrous family of four generations.

Preparing tea on a traditional stove in a kitchen with pots and pans in brass and copper.

Churning butter the traditional way, whisks tied around the main pillar. Today many use an electric churner. Behind, the *thap* and the brassware.

The kitchen is the warm room of the house and positioned at its centre, so that the heat produced there seeps through to the sleeping quarters. In the kitchen the family heirlooms and kitchen utensils are displayed in open cupboards covering one or two of the kitchen walls. In most homes the heirlooms and kitchen ware consist of big copper pots, porcelain and fine china[11], as well as of small handle-less cups for butter tea, brass pots and spoons and the typical churn (*gur gur*) for butter tea. These items are also tied to the woman, as the bride, when marrying, will bring into her new household the "bride string" consisting of movable wealth such as kitchen utensils in addition to jewellery and fine textiles and clothes. In the same way as the bonds between inhabitants and house are reinforced through the protective measures that the house dwellers engage in to ensure longevity and prosperity for the house, thus indirectly ensuring longevity and prosperity for themselves, material objects and especially heirlooms may represent a collective memory of the past, of origins that also form a strong bond uniting house members with each other as well as with their house. These objects serve as a material bridge between ancestral spirits of the past and their descendants in

[11] Said to be a remnant after the trade along the Silk Route which passed through Ladakh. Ladakhis would exchange their agricultural produce with the traders for porcelain, copper pots and pans as well as other luxury articles like tea and spices (Rizvi 2001 [1999]: 14).

the present. Under the windows in the kitchen, there are low benches covered with carpets (special carpets pulled out for special guests) fronted by low tables (*chogtse*) with religious and mythical motives painted in vivid colours. In the winter cold, the family often sleeps together on these benches close to the hearth in order to keep warm.

Tsewang Yangsis in her bridal costume, passed on from mother to daughter. Behind, some of the kitchen utensils a woman brings into her new household upon marriage. At the bottom right of the picture, we see the hearth to which the woman is tightly knit.

In many places in the world, similarly to Ladakh, the symbolic focus of the house is the kitchen, the hearth, the place of cooking. The most important activities that go on in these houses are those which emanate from there. Cooking and eating, the sharing of everyday meals, are in some ways the most obvious markers of what those living together have in common. The hearth may even frequently stand for the entire house, and eating together is often the most emphasized of social activities in the house. Some see kinship as *made* in houses through the intimate sharing of space, food and nurturance that go on within the domestic space. Anthropologists have come to realize that the hearth especially, where raw substances are transformed into cooked food and around which the family members are socialized and nurtured, is central to their notions of kinship and relatedness (Broch-Due

2000; Carsten 1997, Stafford 2000: 37-53). Bloch's study among the Zafimaniry of Madagascar reveals that a house with a hearth is a metonym for marriage. He builds on Lévi-Strauss' notion of house-based societies where houses and marriage unions define kinship rather than blood ties, thus placing marriage at the core of the house unit (Bloch 1995: 69-83; Lévi-Strauss 1982; Lévi-Strauss 1987). This relational way of regarding kin is more and more common within anthropology. In early anthropology, houses were rarely seen as loci of kinship, and there was little interest in the on-goings inside the house. With the ethnographic gaze directed into the domestic domain, a new sphere within anthropology was opened up and kinship studies attained a new dimension as houses were placed at the centre as constitutive for kin relations (Carsten 1997; Carsten 2000; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Joyce and Gillespie 2000).

In Ladakh, the hearth, in addition to being the centre of the household, also sublimely reflects and reproduces social, gendered and age-based hierarchies. Typically, elderly people, male family members and special guests are seated nearby the fire as a show of utmost respect. In the Kabyle house of the Berber, it is the weave that serves this purpose; honoured guests are seated near it as a display of respect (Bourdieu 1996: 9). Due to the importance of the hearth for the Ladakhi family's social activities and the reproduction of intergenerational care, respect and relations, I have decided to describe the hearth in some closer detail.

The traditional Ladakhi stove was large and made of hard-packed clay, and the fire was kept alive using a goat bellow. In recent decades the traditional stoves (*thap*) are made in steel with rich ornaments and brass-work[12]. The old clay stoves[13] are only seen these days in very old houses. And today the traditional steel stoves are again replaced by the simpler *bukhari*; a small, mobile stove with heating potential for only one or two pans. Most people still have their ornate, traditional stove, but they normally use the *bukhari* for heating and kerosene or gas for cooking.

[12] Ladakh is famous for its brass- and metal-work, an art introduced when the Ladakhi king several centuries ago invited Nepali brass-workers to the royal palace in Shey to make a huge Buddha statue. The story has it that the king was so happy with their work that he invited them to stay in Ladakh. Today, the village of Chilling is regarded as the centre of the craftsmanship, and the few manual brass-workers left today supply gompas and lay persons from all Ladakh with their work (Rizvi 2004 [1996]: 160).

[13] See Clarke for a discussion of what he terms the "Europeanisation" of Ladakhi clay stoves, or a "Tibetanisation" of European steel stoves (Clarke 1997: 58-71).

Some decades ago, many kitchens in Ladakh would have open fires, or no chimney from the stove, and a small hole in the roof allowed for the smoke to escape. In the villages outside Leh, you still see open fires in some kitchens; the walls are blackened, the hole in the roof is the only light source and the room is full of smoke. For all kinds of stoves and fires the most common fuel source is animal dung (*yak*, *dzo*, cow and in some cases horse) which is collected by women in big baskets carried on the back and then dried in the sun. Due to the very sparse forestation in Ladakh, trees, mostly willow and poplar, are used strictly for building purposes as roof coverage, pillars and lintels. Mountain shrubs are collected and used as fuel-wood in addition to dung.

Puntsok Motup's kitchen. He had had an open fire in his small kitchen until recently, hence the blackened walls behind him. The hole in the roof where the smoke used to escape, is still the only light-source in his kitchen. Here he prepares tea for Thupstan Angchuk and me on his new *bukhari*.

With the symbolic focus of the house embodied in the kitchen, the hearth, and the place of cooking, we can imagine how the activities springing out from the hearth are reinforcing intimate and intergenerational family ties. The hearth symbolizes the unity of those who live there. Food cooked in the household hearth is central in providing the "force" or "strength" of the workers of the house, enabling them to engage with the land and to produce the food that guarantees the viability and productivity of the house. In many parts of Asia, rice is a "medium" which ties houses together with people and the soil (Carsten 2003: 40). In Ladakh, it is *tsampa*, that serves this purpose; it is used for every meal, being transformed into bread,

dumplings, noodles, steamed bread, porridge, soups, and the characteristic *paba*, *kholak* and *pemar* which are dough-like meals eaten alone or with vegetable dishes and curries. In earlier times, people would eat nothing but *tsampa* dishes. *Tsampa* also plays a vital role in rituals: One offers *tsampa* to the deities and the *chotpa* (dough figures symbolizing the gods and goddesses put monthly in the family prayer room), are also made of *tsampa*. In marriages *tsampa* itself, and barley beer (*chang*) play vital roles in the negotiation process leading up to the marriage, as well as in the celebration of the union. In addition to being auspicious and the main ingredient in a great number of the traditional Ladakhi dishes, *tsampa* is sprinkled on top of beer and tea or a handful is taken straight from the *tsampa* bowl sitting on every Ladakhi table.

Janet Carsten, during her fieldwork among the Malay, was constantly told that houses never have more than one hearth (Carsten 2003: 40). This is probably true for a number of cultures, given the central role of the hearth, as mentioned above. It is seen as the chore and the centre of the house, as the place from which all activities emanate, the place that binds family members together, and where intergenerational relationships are maintained and renewed, providing them with strength and nurturance. In line with these thoughts, I find it interesting to note that in Ladakh, where the hearth has had an undoubtedly practical importance (considering the extreme and cold winters and the very large houses allowing only for heating of the kitchen), but also a symbolic and ritual importance, the traditional stove, which was beautifully ornamented and which served all the above purposes and many more, is more and more frequently replaced by a gas stove or a *bukhari* or in most cases by both. When either the traditional clay or steel oven were the only ones used, they allowed for the family to be together while cooking, praying, reading, talking, spinning or just keeping warm. With the separation of the purpose of the oven, with the gas stove for cooking and the *bukhari* to keep warm and to gather and eat around, one sees a separation of cooking and eating arrangements, leading to a division of those who should be close, those who share a living space, especially when, as in many households, the gas stove is kept in a separate room for cooking, isolated by a door or curtain. I wonder whether the division of the centre of the house and the domestic activities may play a role in changing relations inside the household, dissolving some of the unity produced by the hearth as a centre of the household.

A Zanskari (from the remote Zanskar region) lady collecting dung for fuel.

Having a mid day break from the fields in the Temol family's kitchen. *Khambir* (flat, round barley bread) and biscuits are served with the butter tea. Behind, the *thap*, the brassware and the china and right in the picture, the *tsampa* bowl.

A kitchen with an open fire in a nomad lady's summer hut.

Polyandry and family flexibility

As noted already, the typical Ladakhi family is an extended family of several generations and until relatively recently it was also often polyandrous, meaning that one woman married several brothers. The eldest brother was the primary husband, to whom the house and property also belonged, but by marrying him, the woman also automatically married all his younger brothers, and this way they were given "usufruct rights" not only in the fields, but also in the wife. This system was common across the Tibetan plateau, and mainly economic explanations have been given to its existence and preponderance in the region:

"One reason given for this most odious custom is the sterility of the soil, and the small amount of land that can be cultivated owing to the lack of water. The crops may suffice if the brothers all live together, but if they form separate families they would be reduced to beggary" - Filippo de Filippi (Levine 1988: 265).

As described earlier, Ladakh has a desert climate, and is highly dependent on irrigation for the crops. Only small portions of the land are arable, and winters are extremely cold, hence preventing any growth or cultivation for large parts of the year. Due to this scarcity in cultivable land, and the difficulties with which crops are cultivated, the polyandrous marriage was perceived beneficial to the region since it kept pressure on the land low. Not only did polyandry prevent the division of land and fields, since the members of a polyandrous family would share the same house and hence cultivate the family fields in their entirety, thus ensuring a more efficient and sustainable agriculture. The system also ensured low population growth, due to the fact that a woman married to several brothers could only be pregnant with one of them at the time, which again kept the pressure on the land and crops low. Families with many children often sent a son or a daughter away to the *gompa* or nunnery to be given a religious education, thus relieving themselves of one more mouth to feed. Polyandry, in much academic literature is explained primarily in economic terms, and hence it continues to be seen as an "exotic and rare adaptation to uncommonly difficult environmental circumstances" (Levine 1988: 265). Levine tries to address this tendency and further states: "The problem is this: treating marriage and kinship systems as artefacts of economic or demographic exigencies and individual marital relationships as governed by material calculations impoverishes our understandings of these as social and cultural phenomena" (ibid: 266).

However, I wonder whether people's ability to adapt to the harsh environment, extreme weather conditions and scarcity of cultivable land nevertheless has prepared them for and

made them apt for other sorts of adaptations and adjustments where required. When I looked into the family constellations and the members of a household, I would often find that their affiliation was not necessarily a blood relation or that of marriage, and I sensed that the family was a bounded yet flexible group. Not only does the system of polyandry require a great deal of flexibility from all parts involved, since they share house and space as well as each other, quite literally. In a number of cases, I also met family members who were either adopted or resided in the house for a period of time, again suggesting a sort of open-mindedness in terms of who is regarded a family member and who is not. The interesting contradiction here is the way the house itself, as a physical structure, is clearly bounded and "fortified", surrounding and protecting its inhabitants, while the family inside it seems to be a flexible and adaptive unit.

Drawing a parallel to Carsten's study in Langkawi, Malaysia, could be fruitful. She extracted the notion of "incorporation" as important to how kin was regarded or created. One was not necessarily born kin, but might become so through a process of incorporation. Kinship was seen as a process of becoming, not a fixed state. Houses are then not just regarded as domestic units; they are the actual sites of the incorporative process described above, hence the perceived importance of the house for the understanding of kinship (Carsten 1997: 20).

In Ladakh, too, as described above, kin (*nyemo*-close, near; *nyen*- relative) seems to be a flexible term, as those sharing a house, living together, eating together and working as a cooperative unit see each other as kin regardless of biology and blood affiliation. In line with this, it is interesting to note that in polyandrous marriages the actual genitor of each child is not kept track of. When asked, several women admitted to knowing or having a strong feeling that one particular child was the son or daughter of one particular father, but biological paternity was never mentioned or referred to. To the contrary; the eldest brother (the one to whom the woman was initially wed) is regarded the father of all the children and consequently is called "big father", while the other "fathers" are called "little father" even if they are the biological father(s).

Turning back to Carsten's idea about "incorporation" as an important term to how kin is regarded in Langkawi, she claims that "rather than sharply distinguishing kin from non-kin, what is stressed in Langkawi is that people may become kin to each other through living and eating together, even if they start out unrelated. Kinship itself is always being created and

transformed" (Carsten 1997: 27). Carsten claims kinship to be a process, not a state; kinship is hence "made" through the incorporation and assimilation of newcomers facilitated by the everyday activities of women in and between households.

The flexibility of family relations becomes particularly visible in relation to housing of the elderly. It is originally the eldest son's duty to care for his parents as he is the constant element of a house and family line, inheriting house and land, and since daughters leave their family home to settle in a new home and household, at the point of marriage. However, some daughters remain unmarried in order to care for their aging parents until their death, and then, often as middle aged women, they will enter into the care of their brothers. Younger brothers who do not marry polyandrously, may marry as *magpa* grooms, implying marrying the eldest daughter of a family with only daughters. In *magpa* marriages, the women are the heiresses and heads of household, and the men achieve the status that inmarrying women normally have. With the dissolution of the joint family, and the more equal distribution of land between the sons[14], an elderly person or couple may also choose to stay with a younger son and his family, or even shift between the households of several sons. A younger son may also be the only caretaker of the parents, hence inheriting the family house and property.

Caring well for aging parents is a principle and ideal held high in Ladakh and also lies inherent in the Buddhist principles of compassion. Several metaphors and parables are referred to, describing how important the return of care for one's parents is. One should fulfil one's filial obligations; one should execute one's part of the "intergenerational contract". For example, one should care for one's aging parents the way Buddha cleaned the puss of sick people's infected wounds with his tongue. The aging parents once brought their sons and daughters into this world, cared for and nurtured them when they were innocent and defenceless. They fed them and cleaned their bowel movements when they were not able to do it themselves, now it is their duty to return this love and care. Childless couples in Ladakh often "borrow" or "adopt" a young couple - either distant relatives or neighbours - to care for them in old age. The young couple thus becomes the heirs of the aging couple. As mentioned above, in addition to polyandry, even polygynous marriages are seen. These two systems in addition to the growing rate of monogamous marriages, testify that a range of unions between men and women exist, again reflecting the importance of careful adaptation to scarce

[14] Attained with the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, ensuring equal rights in the family property for all sons. In spite of the name, the Hindu Succession Act touched all religious groups of India, and not only the Hindu.

resources. By keeping family relationships so flexible, the relationship to the land can remain optimal. In other words, from one generation to another, a family has the freedom to choose the ideal marriage option suited for them.

Blood and bone

Having presented the house and the hearth as constitutive for those who regard each other as kin, I find it worthwhile, as an extension to this, to comment upon a principle of descent found many places across the Tibetan plateau; referred to as *ruspa* ("bone"). It is contended that a child is made up of a father's *ruspa* and a mother's *khrag* ("menstrual blood")[15]. *Ruspa* passes from father to child through the medium of sperm, and mixes with the menstrual blood of the mother (Childs 2004: 142; Dollfus 1989: 212; Levine 1988: 38-39; Maiden and Farwell 1997: 31-33). This is a common way to explain procreation and descent all across the Tibetan cultural area, and many would agree to this descent model being more locally appropriate and useful than "Western" or academic descent terminology (Dollfus 1989; Levine 1988; Maiden and Farwell 1997.)

The way of viewing descent in terms of *ruspa* is well represented in the most important textbooks of Tibetan medicine (*amchi* medicine); the health system also traditionally adhered to in Ladakh before the introduction of allopathic medicine (Dollfus 1989: 212). Dr. Dhonden, a well-known Tibetan doctor who was formerly the chief physician for the Dalai Lama, describes the criteria for conception and the successful formation of the foetus in these words: "The first requirement is the sperm, and the second, of course, the ova. Third is the consciousness of a being wandering in the *bardo* whose time is ripe for rebirth. Fourth is the conglomeration of the five elements - earth, fire, water, air, and space. And fifth is the *karmic* relationship (see *karma*) between the being seeking rebirth and the parents" (Maiden and Farwell 1997: 32). "The Ambrosia Heart Tantra", written by Dr. Donden, states that " the father's sperm forms the bones, brains and spinal cord, and the mother's blood forms the flesh, blood, solid organs and hollow organs" (Dhonden 1977: 39).

Delaney's study in Turkey describes a similar principle to *ruspa*. Here *kök* ("root"/"origin") is the primary term used to discuss descent. This principle has some commonalities with the above described view of procreation and descent, however the community described by Delaney seems to particularly emphasize the male ancestors and the male's predominant role

[15] For similar notions outside the Himalayan region, see Broch-Due 1993 and Carsten 2003: 40.

in reproduction while seeing women as having a secondary role. Delaney refers to an image given of the man as a central pole from which the tent is spread, making allusion to the male importance for the reproduction and continuity of the family. Delaney adds that this image also holds a reference to Muslim erotic literature, where the male's penis is in a constant state of erection, hence holding out his robe as a pole holds up a tent (Delaney 1991: 150). This image of the male as ever-virile and responsible for the reproduction of the family and the community, places him in a privileged position. Females are included in the reproductive process, but descent is through males. "Women are like the leaves of the tree; when they die, that is the end. They are the end of the house, the terminus of the line. Neither descent, nor the *sülale* (a notion of reproductive semen) continues through them" (Delaney 1991: 150). To a certain degree one could see the *ruspa* system in a similar way, since *ruspa* refers to the descent principle in itself as well as to the bone, passed on through the male sperm.
In contrast to the community studied by Delaney, Carsten's study of kinship among the Langkawi shows how women are the ones regarded as most vital for the reproduction of the household and of the community itself, through their domestic activities (Carsten 1997: 18). Again the importance of the house for the ideas of kinship stands out. Lévi-Strauss claims that anthropologists, when analysing social organization and kinship have tended to apply rigid analytical categories, such as "lineage", rather than trying to understand them in indigenous terms. Lévi-Strauss introduced the term "house society", intending to draw attention to the house as an important "native" category organizing social life, instead of principles of descent (Lévi-Strauss 1982). As a prolongation of the introduction of the house to the study of kinship and the revealing of its importance for constituting kin, females too, are by Carsten interpreted as being imperative for the reproduction of the household, both in biological and symbolic terms, since they are the ones mainly in charge of the domestic arena and its related activities.

The seed and the soil

As seen above in the discussion of descent, the link between the seed and the male is often referred to, both in Ladakh and in other societies. When the male is associated with the seed, the female is often associated with the field, the soil and the ground, alluding to sexual procreativity, where the man provides the seed and the woman the fertile field for the seed to grow and mature into a foetus. We see these notions pointing back to the *kök* and *ruspa* principles. Probably due to the men being associated with the seed, and the woman with the

fertile field, sowing is a male activity in Ladakh, since the men through controlling the seeds, also control fertility and reproductivity. Similarly, archery, which is a popular sport, is only engaged in by men, due to the same connotations. The arrow is compared to the reproductive seed or even the male sexual organ, penetrating the earth or female sexual organ, hence archery is also an activity controlled by men. The slaughter of animals is also an exclusively male activity. In the same way as men are seen as controlling fertility and reproductivity, hence being seen as the ultimate givers of life, they are also the ones allowed to control and deal with the taking of lives or with death. At the occurrence of a death, men are responsible for carrying the dead body to the cremation ground and cremating it. Similarly it is men (monks) who read the sacred texts for the deceased in the days after death. Ploughing and cutting trees have also been referred to as exclusively male domains (Hay 1997: 109). Once again we see the sexual allusion or the control of life and death, the plough penetrating the fertile soil like a penis the vagina, while the cutting of a tree can be likened to taking life.

Picking potatoes, all family members take part as well as neighbours and relatives. The plough is controlled by a male family member.

Men in an archery competition in Likir. No women participate in these competitions.

When making *gonchas*, (the traditional maroon woollen coat worn by men and women alike, although slightly differently shaped for men and for women) which many Ladakhis still make from wool cut from their own sheep, which they wash, card and dye in natural colour baths, or when making carpets, the labour division is also quite clearly demarcated. The thickness and roughness of the wool determines whether it is made by men or by women. The thick and rough wool from *yaks* and goats is spun by the men, and is used for rugs, carpets and rougher textiles, while the thin and fine wool from sheep is spun by women and used for *gonchas* and finer textiles. Sewing is similarly to sowing, archery and ploughing a male activity, due to the penetration of the textile, associated with sexual penetration.

Puntsok Motup spinning rough wool for carpets

The notion of men as hunters and gatherers and providers of raw materials and ingredients, civilized, socialized and transformed by the women at the hearth, is a well-known one. The woman, in many Asian societies, is associated with the preparation and transformation of staple food and raw materials like the boiling of rice or in Ladakh, the transformation of *tsampa* and the making of bread. This association also places the Ladakhi woman in a close relationship with the hearth and the kitchen and the activities that emanate from there (Ortner 1974). Here we see that not only activities are gendered, but also certain domains or objects within a house. But since the kitchen also is the place where guests are attended and most social exchange takes place, activities often associated with the men of a society, the kitchen is seen as both a male and a female domain. If we think for a moment with the categories "private" or "domestic" versus "public", although they may be slightly essentializing and simplifying, overlooking nuances and grey zones, we could say that the kitchen has both a private and a public domain. The demarcation line separating these two domains is not visible, but still they are clearly demarcated in people's minds. The hearth and the kitchen ware and utensils tend to be placed in one part of the kitchen, the female part, while directly opposite are the benches and tables where guests are seated and attended by the men, the male part. One visible element separating these two domains is in some kitchens the main pillar. However, as many houses today diverge slightly from the traditional house plan, the position

of the main pillar may vary from house to house. Yet, the female and male domains are to a certain degree respected, as guests entering the kitchen will move along a specific axis, hence avoiding entering the domain of the female house head[16]. The area around the main pillar is the centre of events at marriage celebrations, thus forming the nexus between male and female domains while, as we have now seen, clearly keeping them apart.

We have in this section seen how gender distinctions are closely tied up with the house and division of space, as well as of division of labour. Houses and the activities going on in and around them are often obvious places to begin to look at how distinctions of gender are inculcated, lived and reproduced. We have also seen how sexual or reproductive images are associated with much of the household and agricultural activities, thus pointing back to my discussion of notions of descent and human reproductivity. By joining these two sections, we see how the man associated with the seed and in control of life and death, and the woman associated with the soil and with transformative abilities, become powerful images: They indicate that the woman in the reproductive process plays a role as a facilitator, a receptor, or medium for creation, whose contribution to the procreative process is seen as merely supportive, while the male role can be regarded as generative, as the prerequisite of descent. Delaney takes these associations further and suggests that they justify an equation between the image of the father as God and of the Mother as Earth (Delaney 1991: 8-11).

The above discussion suggests that the Ladakhi woman holds a secondary role, being closely associated with the "private" and "domestic" domains. This ties in well with stereotypical gender roles. But one should not ignore the fact that the Ladakhi woman has a great deal of authority, being the one in charge of the store rooms, the produce from the fields and animals and the family's day to day expenditures. Throughout the year women also work far more than the men, who during the winter (if still living exclusively as farmers), when agriculture comes to a halt, are less active.

[16] For a further discussion of the gendered division of the Ladakhi house, see Dollfus and Fiore 1985. However, since the study dates from the 1980s, some of the clearly demarcated gendered domains outlined in this study are today considerably blurred.

4 INFANTS AND ELDERS AT THE CENTRE OF THE HOUSE

Introduction

Elders are, due to their traditional role as family heads, village heads, decision makers and holders of practical and religious knowledge, respected highly in the Ladakhi family and society. When they are no longer active members of the family, handing over the responsibilities for the house, family and fields to one of the sons (often the eldest) or daughters in the case of no sons, they engage in religious pursuit and distance themselves a bit from the on-goings and decision making processes of the household. Some move out in a small house on the property (*khangbu*), as a manifestation of their "retirement", others simply withdraw from the centre of the household activities. Broch-Due notes about the Turkana how "changes in a person's body through life are mirrored in their movements within the 'body' of the compound" (Broch-Due 2000: 170). Similarly in Ladakh, a person shifts "position", both physically in the house, and also in the family hierarchy, as he goes through the different stages in life. An elderly woman handing over the responsibility for cooking and preparing the family meals to her daughter or daughter-in-law, is another act of withdrawal, moving from the centre to the periphery of the household or household affairs. Elderly parents often withdraw contiguous with the deteriorating of their health, when their physique prevents them from continuing as productive family members.

Most Ladakhis are still farmers (80%), hence retirement does not happen at a specific age, but when the elderly person simply is not capable of working the land anymore. I was constantly reminded by the people I spoke to, that "a farmer never rests". When physically prevented from working the fields, the elderly often take over small tasks in and around the household in addition to practicing religion. Although, at this point, they are less active and productive contributors to the household economy and running, the elderly family members have traditionally been very well cared for and respected highly. Their advice is still listened to in decision making processes after their "retirement", they are dressed in warm clothes, given healthy and warm food, they are told about the on-goings in the village, taken out to sit in the warm sun during the day and seated by the fire in the night. Retirement, or the stepping down

from the position as heads of the household, may as mentioned happen when their health is declining, but it may also well happen at the time of birth of the first grandchild. This varies from household to household. Although the elderly now become more peripheral members of the household, relations with grandchildren are often maintained and nurtured.

Grandparents caring for their grandchildren.

Above and below: Grandmothers and grandchildren working and playing together.

Babies as newborn elders

There are several reasons to the strong bonds and special relationship between elderly and their grandchildren. The elderly, who are generally addressed in a proper honorific language also used for monks and highly respected persons, often have a more relaxed and joking relationship with their grandchildren than with other members of the family. Grandparents are frequently the ones looking after their grandchildren while the parents are out in the fields or away in the city working. They are often their closest playmates, and grandchildren come to their grandparents for support or comfort. The elderly, when physically prevented from engaging in the work in the fields, are as mentioned often responsible for the physically more easy tasks in the household, frequently related to the hearth. Because of aching hips, knees and joints or sore backs and necks from a long life in a harsh climate and extreme cold, they are often in immediate proximity to the hearth to keep warm and to prevent their bodies from aching. Here they keep the fire alive throughout the day. On the benches below the windows, near the fire, the infants sleep during the day. The elderly make sure that they are warm and comfortable. When they wake up, they feed them and play with them. The elderly women often cook lunch and perform other easy household tasks, like milking the cattle. The elderly also often perform the religious tasks of a household, for the benefit and prosperity of the household as a whole.

In Ladakh infants are equally well cared for as the elderly. They are a centre of attention in the family, and the similar care and protection granted to elderly and infants tie these two age cohorts at the very two ends of the life cycle together. In addition to being closely connected through the actual care and companionship grandparents give their grandchildren, and the care both groups receive from the rest of the family, the physical similarities in their very different stages in life also tie them together. In all the world, elderly often go through the same processes as the infants, only in the inversed direction. As infants start getting teeth and hair, elders start loosing their teeth and hair. A baby is starting to crawl and then walk, first without much balance, then erect and stable. The elderly inversely have been physically strong and sturdy, moving around freely, until their bones and muscles get weaker and they start walking more crookedly, without much balance, often with the support of a walking stick. In the end, they may be impaired from moving around at all, being carried around. They are dependent on others for such personal tasks as dressing, eating, washing and going to the toilet, just like babies. Although elders are highly revered in Ladakh, you sometimes hear

people refer to an elderly person saying that “he has become like a child”. This refers to the person’s physical state which is similar to that of the child, but this expression is also used about elderly who have developed senility[17], hence being more childish.

Abi-le (grandmother) caring for “Baby Dolma”.

[17] Senility was however referred to me as being a rare affliction. My observations agree with this contention.

Further, elderly and infants are strongly connected by the mere fact that the elderly are moving closer to the end of life, namely death, while the infants have just started life, they have just been born. Birth and death are closely embedded in Ladakhi Buddhist thought, since they are firm believers of rebirth. This life is only one in a row of other lives, and the babies being born today are reincarnations of people who have lived before. Sometimes these people may be ancestors, villagers or at least someone you know of, other times one does not know the past incarnation of a baby.

The Beng of West Africa studied by Gottlieb regard their babies as newly arrived from a world called *wrugbe*; they too are regarded as reincarnations of a deceased person (Gottlieb 2004: 67, 80-83, 312-313). Babies, before gaining life inside a woman's womb, are believed to emerge not from a void, but from a rich, social existence, namely *wrugbe*. Gottlieb translates this state into the English term "afterlife". We see a similar notion in Ladakh: Babies are reincarnations of people who have lived in the past, and parents speak in a matter of fact way about their children being an incarnation of a neighbour's grandfather, of the Mogol family of this and this village and so on. *Wrugbe* can easily be compared to the liminal state of *bardo* that dead Ladakhi pass through before taking rebirth. The Beng see this life as a site of transit, as something ephemeral, this too ties in with the Ladakhi way of seeing life and everything that surround us as ephemeral and impermanent, as one life in a row of several. This way Ladakhis and Tibetan Buddhists are believed to deal more easily with illness, misfortune and death, without the same grief, fear and worry that we see in many "Western" countries[18]. It is their afterlife that concern them; preparing for their rebirth through attaining merit and good *karma*, through doing good deeds, meritorious acts and through living correctly. Since the Beng regard their babies as newly arrived from the abode of the ancestors, they are seen as highly spiritual. The younger the child, the more thoroughly spiritual their existence is said to be. One talks not only of an afterlife, but of a "beforelife", too. The closeness of the newborn to the ancestral world makes them more spiritual in Beng eyes (Gottlieb 2004: 79-84).

Babies are seen as replacing someone dead, everyone is seen as an incarnation of an ancestor, therefore a baby can also be seen as someone coming to take the place of an elderly person

[18] However, Ortner claims that the way death and affliction seems not to be grieved among the Sherpa, often termed as "oriental fatalism", does not mean that they don't grieve over their dead. They simply have a different approach, and the crying and wailing of the mourners is also believed to make the dead person's journey through *bardo* longer and more difficult (Ortner 2002 [2000]: 138-140).

still alive. Given that every baby is seen as a reincarnation of someone who was recently living in *wrugbe*, a baby born with a tooth demonstrates that he is in a hurry, and even "hungry" to take over the place of an elder who is still living in this life. Due to this, some Beng parents in the past saw this threat of an elderly family member as particularly imminent and therefore after weighing the aging person's life against the newborn's, decided that the child had to be killed in order to protect the elderly person[19]. The teeth were seen as the "somatic locus" of a mystical relationship between babies and elders.

It is also interesting to note that Beng babies are punished if they start walking before reaching one year of age. They should not mature too quickly since then again they will be perceived as a threat to living elderly (ibid: 230). This is in striking contrast to many Western countries where parents feel it like a failure if their children are slow to start moving. However, the irony is that a Beng child must not start walking too late either. The movement away from *wrugbe* should not be hasty, it should be slow and prolonged, but not too long either (ibid: 231). Some young parents nevertheless allow their children to start walking before they reach a year, ignoring the elders' contention that they should not do so, as the parents consider the early development of the child as a hallmark of modernity (ibid: 231). A sexual taboo is placed upon parents until the baby is weaned and starts walking. Resuming sexual activity before this and conceiving a new child can cause harm to the baby already born, and he may suffer from the "split leg" syndrome, implying that he will never learn to walk (ibid: 231).

Babies in Ladakh are born with knowledge. This we see in a number of other societies too. The Dervish, and old Yiddish traditions see babies as arriving to this world with knowledge about their past life (Fonrobert and Jaffee 2007; Steinsaltz and Galai 2004). The babies should however be induced to forget this knowledge upon birth. An unnamed angel described in the Talmud is said to strike each child below its nose at the time of birth, to cause him to forget his former life in "paradise" (ibid). Ladakhi babies' knowledge is most elaborate at the moment of birth too, and then after a couple of years, as they grow into toddlers, they forget more and more of their past lives. But up until this point many babies talk of their past lives or

[19] Although this custom is not practiced anymore except in very rare or clandestine cases, it shows a very different approach to the newborn than we are used to in the "West", where babies are seen as innocent and defenceless.

their behaviour reveals where they come from[20]. Their stories are often the best source for parents to learn not only about their infant's past lives, but also who their babies are incarnations of. Sometimes, the *onpo* (astrologer) also helps the family expecting a baby, with revealing where she comes from or who she is an incarnation of. If the *onpo* can not pinpoint precisely the past life of the baby, he will at least be able to determine more or less the area where the baby originates from, whether from the west, from the plains of Changtang or from the Nubra valley in the north. Several of my informants recounted their children's stories of past lives, and they seemed surprisingly precise. A boy at the age of 3 had told his parents that he wanted to go home, that this was not his village; he was from Taru where he had his family, his house and his tools. He was the blacksmith of the village, and was insisting to go home, his family and work were waiting. He described in particular one tool that was important to him. Quite correctly, in the village of Taru, in which the child had never been in this life, the blacksmith had died a couple of years before, and the tool described by the child had been very valuable and important to the deceased blacksmith. The inventive babbling of babies is thus not seen only as rich fantasy, but as stories of their past lives. But as time passes, the child forgets more and more of his past life. The knowledge of babies, even before developing verbal faculties, also suggests that they could be seen and respected as a fellow human being, who recently led a full life elsewhere. The Beng try to remind themselves of this fact. When their babies cry or seem uncomfortable, seeming helpless and unable to communicate, they say to themselves that the baby should be respected as a fellow person who misses his previous home rather than viewing him as a "suffering, wordless creature" (Gottlieb 2004: 88).

"Washing" the baby into this world

Turning back to the links between the Ladakhi elderly and infants, these two cohorts also constitute the most vulnerable members of the family, hence requiring extra care. In the past, when houses, clothes, food and medicine were not as high quality as today, the winter was a threat to the life of elders and babies. A cold or flu could be fatal. If they survived the winter, they had in effect survived another year. Due to this, people tended to wash less frequently in the winter[21]. Since many newborn babies in the past died during their first months, newborn

[20] See Gottlieb 2004: 89-93 for Beng explanations of their babies' past lives and origins.
[21] Whenever an elderly woman told me of a child who had died during the first few years of life, they had invariably died in the winter.

babies today are seldom washed during the winter as an extra precaution. Instead they are "dry-cleaned" to prevent them from catching a fatal cold. Today, there are hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and medicines in Ladakh and both clothing and housing are better conditioned for the winter, but the practice of "dry-cleaning" the newborn persists. This is done by kneading a dough of wheat (*pagphey*), water and oil or butter. Instead of washing the baby, the dough is pressed and rolled against the baby's skin and in that way removing dirt and dead skin cells.

I once watched this "dry-cleaning" in the 1st anniversary of a wedding party (the real wedding party passes in relative silence, while the 1st anniversary is celebrated with lots of guests for several days). All the female relatives of both bride and groom were gathered in the glass room in the big house of the bride's parents for after-noon tea, which is often the one time during the day when sweet milk tea is consumed instead of butter tea. The sun was strong this October day and the glass room was unbearably warm. Some of the old ladies wearing double layers of wool under their heavy *gonchas* (to support the cold in the large wedding tents where the real party goes on for days), were dozing off helped by the warm sweet tea. The conversation went on freely and with interludes of laughter, only interrupted by new servings of tea. In the middle of all the women and the cushions and the heavy traditional wedding costumes, lay a little newborn girl, the bride's sister's baby. It was time for her bath and it was done there on top of one of the low tables in between biscuits and the best china taken out for the occasion. In the heat of the after-noon sun in the glass-room and with the buzz of the women's voices, the baby was dry-cleaned without protest both by her grandmother, her mother and some more distant aunts and relatives.

Performing this dry-cleaning in a wedding, may say something about the importance of fertility in such a setting, of wishing the newly wed couple fertility and happiness. The baby is cleaned by several women in addition to the mother; hence it becomes an act of socialization. The fact that it takes place at a marriage party where new connections, unions and relations are established, may say something about the importance of fertility, reproduction and the furthering of generations. The baby is brought out into a wider social context and given a place in a social group, but also forms part of a wedding ritual. Fertility is seen as imminent in Ladakh since it is connected to the production and basis of existence of the family in a harsh region. Taking into consideration that Ladakh lies barren, sterile and frozen, and is brought to a standstill for large parts of the year, general fertility, not only that of humans, is a great concern.

Broch-Due relates how the newborn among the Turkana are kept with their mother in the mother's hut, protected from the outside world for some days after parturition. During this time, the baby continues to wear the coagulated "protective coat" of the flow of bloody water in which he was washed into this world. While waiting for the umbilical stump to fall off, the baby is fed with milk from both the mother and cattle. This forms a connection between the baby, the mother and the animals of which the Turkana depend for their existence. The seclusion of the baby and the mother, while feeding the baby substances from outside the mother house, make for a careful and slow act of socialization. Through drinking the vital fluids from both animals and mother, the baby is seen as starting the process of being filled with knowledge, knowledge of being a Turkana person (Broch-Due 1993: 69-70). Here we see a different concept to that of the Beng and Ladakhi, where infants are seen as born with knowledge which slowly diminishes. The washing of the Turkana child, after emerging from the mother hut, is seen as an important ritual. The baby until this stage has been an androgynous figure, and by washing away the "coat of birth", the baby acquires not only its "social skin", but also a "gendered skin or coat". Posterior to the first washing, the baby is given decorative and protective amulets and beads, thus furthering the process of socialization of the new clan member (Broch-Due 2000: 70).

The seclusion of a Ladakhi newborn is also important. After birth, the mother and the infant are seen as particularly vulnerable to pollution, due to their proximity to the water deities (*lhu*). Since birth and reproduction are associated with wetness and the world of these creatures, the underworld, they can more easily disturb these deities if they move around freely, and the deities may throw misfortune upon mother and baby. When kept in the home, with restrictions on the visitors allowed into the home, they are allowed to gain and regain their "closeness" to humans before moving out in the world of the *lhu*, namely the water, streams, earth and fields. The *lhu* are seen as corresponding to the lower floor of the Ladakhi house, the one associated with fertility, reproduction and wetness. Due to the association of the *lhu* with water, a mother should not step over a water source until a month has past after the birth, since she may then also anger the *lhu*. On the seventh day, neighbours and friends are usually allowed into the home to see the newborn. They bring flour and butter. After two or three months, the baby is taken to the *gompa* to which the family belongs, to be blessed and to receive a name from the *rinpoche* (high *lama*) of the *gompa*. Ladakhis have two names, both are considered first names. Last names the way we think of them do not exist. A person

is referred to by the name of his house, a clear indication of the deep and lasting connection people have with their house and land. The house name is often either descriptive of where the house is positioned, whether near a big tree, a river, in the upper village or lower part, or it says something about the rank, position or "profession" of the inhabitants. A Ladakhi person is frequently seen as a metonym for the whole household. The house is in this way an important constitutor for people's identity.

Soft, wet and warm babies and hard, dry and cool elders

Ladakhi babies are protected against danger and evil in a number of ways. To protect them against the "evil eye" of neighbours and outsiders, they have their forehead smeared with butter and ashes as a dot or a line between the eyebrows. The connection to the kitchen, the hearth and the main pillar is evident. The hearth is the centre of the house. The ashes derive from the hearth which is constantly and throughout the day kept alive with dry bushes and cow dung. The butter is, when produced the traditional way, closely connected with the main pillar, and the smearing of butter on the baby's forehead then ties the baby and the main pillar together. If we take up the thread of the physical movement inside the household compound during the different life stages, the baby can be seen as being particularly close to the hearth and the house centre due to its proximity to the heat for most parts of the day and night. The middle aged family members who also engage in work in the fields and gardens, in spite of being the ones responsible for cooking and entertaining in the kitchen, can be said to have a less close relationship to the centre of the household. The elderly as decision makers and heads of household can be perceived as central in the home on a psychological level, and when becoming less mobile, and their health deteriorates, they are physically also in the proximity of the hearth and the centre of the household. Then they may distance themselves from the worldly concerns and the heat of the hearth to take "the religious path", only to return for a brief while when their health requires constant warmth from the fire, like the infants, before they die.

The family often sleeps together on the low benches in the kitchen during the winter. They spread their bed linen on the low benches where guests are received and meals shared in the daytime. When the baby is some months of age and does not sleep close to her mother, she often sleeps with her father or grandmother. This way a baby is given a unique closeness to the bodies of most of the family members, something which is rarely seen in the "Western"

world where babies from the very start have their own bed and after a short while often also their own room. The proximity to the mother's or other family members' bodies continues throughout the day as the baby is tied onto the back of the mother or other person in a large woollen shawl. Here she rests warm and close to her mother, while at the same time leaving the mother's hands free to work.

Carrying "Baby Dolma" when everyone was busy with the threshing of the barley.

As seen among the Turkana, Ladakhis also have close ties to the animal world. The baby, instead of diapers, traditionally had a bag containing pulverized cow dung heated on the fire, put up until the waist tied as a closed skirt which absorbed the urine. This way the baby was kept warm and dry at the same time. This practice seems to be both a symbolic act, strengthening the relations between humans (the baby) and animals, as well as being a clearly practical one. These days the bag is replaced by either diapers or in many places still by simply undressing the baby and holding her over the floor while imitating a peeing sound until the baby pees on the kitchen floor. This last practice nevertheless requires a very frequent changing of the babies pants as the baby does not only pee when told to.

The furnishing of the Ladakhi house is as we have seen low and hence at the infant's level. Both tables and benches are low. Kneading of dough, cutting of vegetables and preparation of meals is often done in a squatting position right on the floor. This allows for the infants to observe and take part in the on-goings of the household. Gottlieb notes how "Western" homes and kitchens are constructed in a way so that babies have to look up or climb to see what is going on. She notes how this constitutes a risk of the babies tipping things over, burning themselves and spilling things, since they can not see what is "up there" and therefore do not have an overview of the "kitchen world" (Gottlieb 2004: 231). With the low kitchen furniture and activity of the Ladakhi house, the infant is allowed to take more part and explore the world at their own level and height, but I would argue that also here the infant risks burning himself, spilling liquids or tearing things down. Having said this, it is amazing to observe the relative freedom the Ladakhi infant is granted in the kitchen space. He learns by doing and by failing, the mother is busy with the preparing of a meal and has a relaxed way of tending to her child.

Showing how the kitchen on-going are at the infant's level. A family preparing *mok-mok*, a traditional dish of steamed dumplings filled with meat or vegetables.

A baby asleep in the midst of a religious festival, noticing nothing of the on-goings around him.

In her work, Broch-Due draws attention to the ways in which the changing physicalities of bodies throughout the life-cycle, is often a symbolic elaboration. Infants are wet and soft, being born in a flow of water and blood, again being the product of the wet and vital substances of their parents, while elders are dry and hard with their bodily substances drying up (Broch-Due 1993; 2000). A girl experiences menstruation, a promise of life and fertility, which is wet, and young boys experience sexually laden or "wet" dreams, alluding to the same fertility. The move through life can also be seen as a hardening process. The baby when born is soft, and wrinkled, almost curled up around himself, then, bones grow and harden, teeth appear and the baby's cranium which has thus far been soft on the top grows together and hardens too. When slowly starting to crawl and after some time stretching towards the sky and taking his first uneven steps, the child has hardened; he stands up right and erect. Life is then seen as a drying and hardening process, a person moves from soft to hard and from wet to dry. Wetness and water have above been noted as being life-giving and auspicious in Ladakh, as the criterion for life and fertility. We see here, similar to the Turkana, how the beginning of the life cycle is a state of wetness, while the further a person moves towards death, the more dryness becomes all-pervading. The old person is regarded to dry out, he becomes wrinkled, and his body crooked. Broch-Due further notes that wisdom is perceived

as accumulating in dryness. The older a person is, the dryer he or she is and consequently; the more wisdom he holds (Broch-Due 1993: 72; Broch-Due 2000: 170).

The Ladakhi elderly, by inhabiting the periphery of the household and by distancing themselves from the family and the hearth, can also be seen as entering a cooling process. Lamb notes similar notions to the above described among the people of Mangaldihi where women were seen as "hotter" and "wetter" when they were at the height of their reproductive capacities, going through menstruations and childbirths, and having sexual desires. With age, menopause, and a less active sexual life, they were seen as cooling and drying (Lamb 2000: 14-15, 124-126). Desjarlais notes among the Yolmo elderly of Nepal, that aging was like a fire dying out, when young and vital, there is fire and flames, and as one ages, the fire grows dimmer and dimmer and finally extinguishes, then death occurs (Desjarlais 2002a: 159). Ladakhis also described age as their skin or memory becoming loose, implying the physical and mental decay experienced. In Mangaldihi, aging was also seen as a process of the body (particularly the female body) moving from openness to boundedness, again making reference to sexual activity, menstruation and childbirth which "open" the female body and which are processes that disappear with age (Lamb 2000: 14-15). Hindus sometimes compare age and cessation of activity with "the end of the body", and Yolmo think of age as the period of life when your body falters, and only your speech, mind and wishes remain (Desjarlais 2002a: 316).

We can again connect the above description of the life cycle with the three levels of the Ladakhi house. The basement which is dark, damp and wet is associated with life-giving forces and human and animal vital substances. The top floor which is light, where the warm sun shines bright, is connected with death. The dead in Ladakh are cremated and the ashes gathered after the cremation, are dry, again tying in with the perceived dryness of elderly. The agricultural cycle could also be included in this discussion, as it is a constant cycle and recycling of the wet and fertile late spring and summer moving over into the dry and barren late autumn and winter. This endless cycle between the state of wetness and dryness in the nature and landscape also relates to the constant cycle of birth, death and rebirth that Ladakhi Buddhists experience.

5 TENSIONS WITHIN THE HOUSE - CHALLENGING THE AUTHORITY OF THE ELDERLY

Introduction

In the previous chapters we have seen how the house provides an arena for sustaining and nurturing intimate family relations and intergenerational ties, while also organizing hierarchies based on age and gender. Here we will see that the house also is an arena with great potential for conflict or tension when these hierarchies are challenged or reconfigured. The adjustments brought about on the physical level of the house, described in chapter 2, also engender reconfigurations on the psychological level between the inhabitants of the house. And at times, due to these very changes in what seems to be a harmonious microcosm, where everything is well ordered and defined, tensions arise. While the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is usually a strong and close one, the one between parents and children can sometimes be a strained one, especially in times of change. But the gap between grandparents and grandchildren may also increase, due to growing divergence in education level, types of knowledge and interests. However, relations reconfigured by changes do not necessarily bring about only negative consequences. Relations may become "thinner", more strained or fragile on one level, while being reinforced on another level. Marriage will also be demonstrated as a potential stress factor on filial ties, as men are the stable elements of houses, while women shift residence when marrying, leaving their house, family and hearth behind in order to establish new bonds to a new family, house and hearth.

The presence and relatively high activity level of the elderly in family daily life was what hit me as interesting when I first arrived in Ladakh. The elderly seemed both physically and mentally fit. And I asked myself whether the fact that they work physically until well into their old age, together with the fact that they are included and challenged mentally through the constant interaction and contact with the younger family members, contributed to keeping them "young" at mind, healthy and physically fit. I found these issues particularly interesting because the scene presented to me in Ladakh seemed so radically different from the picture we have of the aged in my country and our part of the world. Here elders often cause pity and bad consciousness in people and are regarded as helpless, lonely and miserable; as a social problem. Well into my fieldwork, after talking to a number of elderly Ladakhis, I started

realizing that Ladakh was going through a similar process as the European countries in terms of care and respect for the elderly, only it was just starting in Ladakh. Here too, elders were beginning to be regarded as a burden. Or at least some of the elderly themselves felt like a burden on their families. As new opportunities and possibilities arise in Ladakh together with development and outside influence, people's dreams and ambitions change, and more and more people try to adapt to the changes. Curiously, my experience was that not only the young grasped the possibilities presented to them, but to a certain extent the elderly, too. However, as the possibilities of modernity are more geared towards a young and able-bodied population, the young are probably the ones profiting most from the changes, while the elderly have in some cases come to be seen as superfluous or even as a burden, impeding the growth and success of the younger family members. This is because the notion of caring for one's elders is still highly valued and thus places the young in a dilemma, having to choose between personal benefit, individualism and materialism and the traditional values, where the collectivity, the family, cooperation, compassion and care are crucial values.

Land and children as life insurance

Due to modernization and urbanization and the decline of polyandry and the joint family, children not caring for their parents is an increasing problem in Ladakh today. Instead of fearing the high pressure on the land, solved in the past with polyandrous marriages, numerous fields are today left uncultivated, and with them large empty houses, or houses inhabited by an alone elder or an elderly couple. Alone elderly *per se* is not only an "affliction" of modernity, and hence the flexibility noted in the Ladakhi family has traditionally ensured a great deal of solutions for the widowed, unmarried or childless Ladakhis. Due to land being an extremely valuable source, and to the fact that the eldest son, up until 1956[22] and to a certain extent still, is favoured at the hour of inheriting family property, taking care of alone elders with property is often seen as a lucrative option for a young son of a family of several sons, this being his only access to land. Property is seen as life insurance for an elderly couple, and their "adopting" or "borrowing" of a young couple to care for them is often practiced, even today. It is a "win-win" situation for the parts involved; both for the elderly person or couple in need of care both for themselves, for their fields and their livestock, and for the young man who was not entitled to inherit land through his own family in the first place.

[22] When the Hindu Succession Act was passed, granting inheritance rights for all sons and daughters in the case of no sons.

However, as new opportunities in the city give people other options than depending on land for existence and survival, individual interests are followed and collective and Buddhist values downplayed. Simply put, the elderly tend to lose out when the young choose between city and village. Their property and land and big houses are increasingly seen as out of fashion, backward, traditional and primitive in opposition to the urban, modern and progressive trends in the city. Having children or land is no longer equalled to having a life insurance. An increase in individualism will often alter the self. When the self changes, family and intimate relations also change, duty values are weakened, and the need for self-fulfilment is reinforced (Giddens 1992 [1991]). The care for relatives and family members does not necessarily disappear, but it is often created in new ways.

When modernity and urbanization change family relations in Ladakh, relations between parents and children are often the ones touched first. A weakening of the relationship between parents and their children can be noted due to labour migration and urbanization, since young children are often left in the village with grandparents or older siblings. But at the same time, the relation between grandchildren and grandparents or between siblings, are often reinforced. Heyer (2004: 50) notes that in many places in Kenya, the grandchild-grandparent relationship was reinforced as it had become more socially acceptable and economically viable for single mothers to support a child through engaging in wage work in the cities. The mothers would leave for the cities and the grandparents would take care of the children. So while mothers and children would have limited contact and their relationship might be weakened, the one between grandparents and grandchildren would be reinforced. The link is clear: Modernization and urbanization often lead to the dissolution of the extended family; intimate relations are changed and reconfigured. But as we see; where relations deteriorate, they are sometimes also reinforced on another level.

From valued resource to heavy burden

However, in Ladakh, most of the elderly I talked to admitted that they saw the gap between themselves and their children or grandchildren as growing, and their mutual understanding, care and compassion declining. The urbanization and the modern ideals such as education and wage work were perceived as increasing the distance between the generations, as their type of knowledge, interests and values diverge more and more. The elderly who have traditionally been highly respected, their knowledge and wisdom, perspectives and experience valued, feel

increasingly redundant. Their authority is challenged by the increased focus on modern formal education. The traditional and local education that the elderly have received from their own parents, within the confines of the family, is seen as superfluous in a society where the traditional is seen more and more as backward and primitive. The young, with the introduction of cash economy, have in many cases become the income earners in families which have traditionally been more or less self sufficient. This again creates a confusing landscape for the elderly, who are used to being the most respected and knowledgeable of the family. The importance of cash economy suddenly puts the young in a respected position, and shoves the elderly to the side. Van der Geest notes upon this ability of money to measure the "value of people" in Ghana. His study shows how the changing position of Ghanaian elderly in family and society is also closely tied up with money. Money has become one of the most effective symbols by which people evaluate their lives, assess their relationships and express their feelings. The elderly were used to being respected because of their mere advanced age and life experience, but see that age in itself no longer engenders respect, and claim that respect nowadays is bestowed upon those who have turned their life into success, which again is most easily measured in money (Van der Geest 1997: 534-559). We have seen above that having land or children in Ladakh was traditionally equalled to securing old age care, but that this is no longer necessarily the case. Van der Geest suggests that the Ghanaian elderly of today need money to ensure respect and care from their children.

The Ladakhi elderly see themselves as moved from being a resource in the family, to constituting a burden on the family. They are regarded as a social problem, as something one does not know how to dispose of. The traditional building and agricultural skills are less in focus, even the Ladakhi language is less important these days, as Urdu and English are taught in most Ladakhi schools. The elder's knowledge - traditional, local, well adapted and tested throughout centuries - is being challenged with the changing times. The formal education replaces the local and traditional one and prepares the young for work and study away from home. "The young learn to read, write and speak English, but they don't know how to build a house; they don't know how to run a farm. They are only running after money and profit these days" one elderly informant told me, expressing concern over the trend of leaving the traditional behind in an exclusive search for the new and modern. Another 85 year old man from a relatively well-off farming family in a village outside of Leh told me: "The young do not see that today we are depending too much on the outside, we are dependent on India like we have never been before. Before we were completely self-subsistent, and although we had

less variety, there was more hardship and we suffered both colds and starvation, we knew that whatever might happen, whoever might become our enemy, we could depend fully and wholly on ourselves and our produce. The fields and the barley are our diamonds and gold. This is what the young don't see these days; they are too absorbed in the pleasures and goods of this new life".

The elderly experience an alienating environment. They see themselves, their authority and their knowledge questioned, challenged and even out-conquered. They feel superfluous, outdated and burdensome. Particularly elderly women's lack of formal education induces in them a low self-esteem, and a feeling that their traditional knowledge is valueless in the "new" Ladakh. As demonstrated above, Ladakhi women generally tend to be associated with domestic work and perceived as the main caretakers of children and animals, the house and cooking. Following stereotypical gender models, men tend to be associated with taking care of the fields and gardens, being the decision makers and the main income providers, hence being associated with paid work. As paid work has increasingly come to be regarded as superior to non-income generating work or domestic work, men's work seems to be valued higher than women's work. Many women displayed a great sense of insecurity and feelings of inferiority related to their own knowledge, skills and labour. As the importance of formal education is emphasized in Ladakh, and formal education is again often linked with paid work, many middle aged and elderly women had an almost apologetic attitude towards their own type of traditional knowledge or work since very few of these women were educated or literate as compared to their male counterparts. "*Chi she*" ("What do I know"), "I can not read or write", "I will not be able to answer your questions properly, I don't have education", "I would not know that kind of stuff, I am a farmer", many women replied when I asked them if I could talk with them about their family, the changes happening in Ladakh, about the old days and about their lives. When asked if they did not regard their kind of knowledge as important compared with the men or the young generation's knowledge, many admitted that they felt the type of knowledge held by the men or the young was more important and that their own knowledge seemed unnecessary. Ironically, these very women were all "vegetable women"; farming ladies carrying their surplus vegetables to the market in the winter when supply is short, and selling it to the villagers and army personnel, thus contributing substantially to the household economy. Hence the image of the Ladakhi woman exclusively taking care of the domestic domain and not engaging in paid work does not display the whole

picture. In fact, as tourism in Ladakh is growing, more and more women are in charge of the economy and of the running of family guest houses.

"Vegetable women" along the pavements of Leh's "Main Bazaar".

However, the ones most heavily involved in the cash economy, and hence the ones providing the family with the most notable cash flow, are the young and able-bodied. If they have not separated from the extended family, these young breadwinners may exercise a certain power over the elders in spite of the elders being the traditional decision makers and the most respected members of a household. Legitimized by the fact that the young provide the family with the biggest part of the income, the young couple also expects a certain freedom or rights in exchange. The use of space in the house is transformed, creating new codes of privacy and shared space. The distance in education between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law also remoulds and transforms the intimate psychological space. The young woman, in most cases being an "outsider" in the household, often coming from a faraway family and village, may have very different thoughts about child care, family health, cooking and recipes and the spending of the household economy than her mother-in-law. Her education and modern knowledge creates instability in the authority hierarchy, where the mother-in-law (senior female head of household) has traditionally been in charge of household affairs, with the daughter-in-law only as her assistant and helper, at her disposal, until she retires and hands over the household duties and responsibility voluntarily. One could ask whether the young woman's knowledge, different from that of her mother-in-law, creates a more equal

relationship between them. Do they cooperate, supplement each other and draw on each other's experiences, or does the daughter-in-law take the authoritative role that a mother-in-law traditionally had, inversing the roles completely?

Many elderly expressed great disillusionment with the new times. Ironically they would often welcome the material improvements, but at the same time would grieve the loss of family values, consideration, sharing and love. "When I was young, we lacked shoes and clothes, life was difficult and we had to make everything ourselves. I am happy with the progress and changes, now we have proper shoes and clothing, and we have rice, but earlier times were better for our peace of mind. There was more respect for old people, too. People's minds were soft and clear, even with shortage of food and clothes. There was care and help. Now people chase the money and travel away from Ladakh" Puntsok Tashi, a "housing colony" resident told me. Many elderly even describe the young as being proud and arrogant with their new wisdom and ideals; they admitted that they had no expectancies towards their children taking care of them when they were too weak to care for themselves. Others however, think that education, and extensive religious teachings, increase people's respect for the elderly. Many of the elderly I talked to tried their best to understand the young; they rationalized on their behalf and said that this development away from family values towards individualism and even egoism was probably normal. Again, there were many contradictory statements. Tourism and development were seen as good, because they bring money into Ladakh, and they deemed it very important that the young learn English in order to communicate with the tourists and hence work for them as monastery- or trekking guides. At the same time they lamented the young turning away from the elderly, focusing only on their own benefit.

Young Ladakhi men earning a living as guides, “horse men” and cooks for the trekking tourists visiting Ladakh.

To an extent the changes brought about in Ladakh also have increased the elders’ work burden, since the young often leave the village for the city with the elderly caring for the house and fields. Traditionally, age is the period of life when a person engages in religion, preparing for his next life. With the changes, his natural distancing from the chore of the household affairs is impeded, and instead they are pulling him back to the centre of the household to perform worldly and daily duties. However, to present the whole and nuanced picture, elderly are not always left behind in the village, alone and estranged. Sometimes I saw the completely opposite scenario being played out. The elderly couple or person were the ones to leave the village and the large family house behind, bringing their agricultural surplus produce to Leh and settling in the “housing colony” for the winter season or for good. Thus, they are the ones taking advantage of the modern times, the money economy and the opportunities embodied in Leh, by showing entrepreneurial attitudes and adapting to a Ladakh in transition. They would be the urban migrants, leaving the extended family, returning to the village for harvest season or for festivals.

We have now seen that the new “era” in Ladakh presents the Ladakhis with a range of new options and choices, and that often the elderly are the ones lagging behind when a society goes through a period of transition. Traditional authority hierarchies are reconfigured, resulting in the challenging of elders’ position as advisors, decision makers and holders of traditional knowledge in the family. We will now see that, independent of modernization and development, the changes and point of transition that marriage represents for the persons marrying and their respective families, are frequently also prone to conflict and tension.

"Outside women" and marriage - the root to conflicts?

We saw in chapter 3 how polyandry is by many seen as an adaptation to hard life circumstances and an extreme environment, and I suggested that polyandry also may have made people more flexible and adaptable in relation to the composition and organization of the family unit. Literature on polyandry to a large extent portrays polyandrous marriages as functioning smoothly, with tension and conflicts seldom arising (Norberg-Hodge 1991: 55-57; Rizvi 2004 [1996]: 134). Many informants supported this contention, claiming that jealousy and other types of friction were not common. In my experience, polyandry bears within the potentiality for tension and conflict. For the same reasons that polyandry has probably made people flexible and complying, it has doubtlessly also created tensions among the parties involved. If we picture three brothers sharing a wife, and the youngest of them only being able to ensure his conjugal rights when the two[23] others are away, this must most certainly constitute a strain on the relation between the brothers. Ortner follows up and notes that in Sherpa society (where polyandry is practised), there are strained relations between brothers, precisely because of the "natural hierarchy" between them, implying that the eldest brother has "natural" authority and status over his younger brothers (Ortner 1989: 30-33).

We can also imagine the tensions created if a wife favours one of her husbands, thus neglecting the others. However, the fact that landholdings were kept intact by polyandry doubtlessly was a factor contributing to the peace of the family, since one did not have to fight over small parcels of land. The *magpa* marriage where stereotypical gender roles to a certain degree are inversed due to the woman being the heiress of the land, and hence the household head and decision maker, is also a clear source of tension. Here we see potential conflicts arising within the same age cohort or between husband and wife. However, as argued above, a great number of the conflicts arising within the household seem to be conflicts between the age cohorts, across the generations. We have above seen conflicts arising between parents and their children, or between the elderly and the young in general. The changes happening in society were listed as main reasons to the changes and tensions in these relationships. We will now see that tensions also arise within the family when the family unit is transformed. The flexible family unit described above, may sometimes become less flexible. This becomes visible particularly at the point of marriage in a family, which again touches and twists the relationship between the generations.

[23] Three brothers married to one woman is normally the maximum number of brothers noted in a polyandrous marriage.

A mother-in-law in most cases experiences her own daughters leaving the home, and becoming "others", belonging to others, at the time of marriage. When a Ladakhi woman marries, she cuts the strong bonds with her house and family line, the hearth around which she has been socialized, kept warm and fed, as well as with the prayer room and the house god. She connects new strong bonds in her new household, to a new hearth, of which she will eventually be in charge, a new family line, a new home, and to the new prayer room and house god. For a mother it may be difficult to see her daughter leaving, while at the same time having to open the door of her home to an "outside" woman, becoming an "insider", namely the wife of her son, her daughter-in-law. As women shift residence upon marriage (except in *magpa* cases), men are the stable elements of a household, representing the continuity of the generations, caring for the aging parents, furthering the family line with their offspring, in this way interlinking the past, present, and future. A daughter thus constitutes an unstable or fragile element. Knowing that one's daughter is moving out, taking her possessions and loyalty to another house and hearth, may obviously cause a strain on the family relations. The common Hindu saying: "To raise a girl is like watering the neighbours' plants" or the Tibetan proverb "The hen eats at home and lays its eggs outside", referring to daughters only "residing" in the house until marriage, and the great cost that their dowries (in Hindu society) confer upon the families, are also to some extent descriptive of Ladakh. Dowry has not been part of the traditional Buddhist wedding, but it is seen more and more frequently, as money in addition to the traditional "bride string" is required by the groom's family. Thus the marriage of a daughter places an economic cost/loss on the parents of the bride in addition to the emotional loss of her.

The period after the marriage of children is in Ladakh frequently seen as a time of tension. There is a new woman in the home; and one or several are "lost" to other homes. When daughters marry they are of course welcome back to their natal families, but their strong bonds are now with the new family. Therefore when a daughter returns to visit her parents, she is not allowed to enter the family prayer room (Phylactou 1989: 265), since her loyalty is now with the house god and prayer room of another house and family. She brings food into her parents' home cooked on her new hearth, symbolizing where she now belongs, and it is important that her children are born in her new home, thus establishing the connection between infants, their house, the hearth, the land and the family line as early as possible.

The new element of a daughter-in-law in the home often creates tension between her and her mother-in-law who may be missing her own daughter and who eventually will have to hand over the responsibilities of the household to this "newcomer", and even depend on her for care in old age. She may worry about the care and respect she and her husband will be given, and whether her worries are legitimate or not, they may create tensions between the two women. The daughter-in-law is also often perceived as creating tension between parents and their sons. Suddenly the son's loyalty is with the "newcomer" and not only with them anymore. Vatuk's study in a north Indian Hindu village (Vatuk 1980: 142-143) notes how daughters-in-law often set parents up against sons and how the aging parent couple depends on the daughter-in-law for food and care. If the relation is tense, she may reduce their food portions or neglect their care, and she may take advantage of the parents-in-law's vulnerable position. In Ladakh, the relations between daughters-in-law and parents-in-law may be strained, but often the tensions arise simply out of the fear for complications or from misunderstandings. However, the frequently tense relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law was also sometimes explained to me as lying inherent in women's nature as conflictive, talkative, and emotional. A close friend of mine told me he did not want to marry at all, precisely because he was afraid of having to leave his parents if tension arose between his wife and his mother. He loved his mother so much and felt that he owed his parents the return of the care that they had given him, so he did not risk getting married.

Lamb notes that family conflicts in West Bengal were the most common source of affliction facing people in old age (Lamb 2000: 71). As we have seen above in relation to modernity transforming family relations, transitions in life such as marriage are also likely to pull an individual's bonds with siblings, parents, children, husband or wife in different directions. "As one bond grows closer, another may stretch and break, and someone may be left out in the cold" (ibid: 71). Lamb was told that the bonds between generations were especially vulnerable, as members of each generation moved on to new phases of life as the "pulls" of the new relationships that these life phases entailed, made the bond between for example a husband and wife stronger, while the one between mother and son grew weaker (ibid: 71). This is similar to the picture painted of Ladakh above.

Ortner also notes among the Sherpa "…a fairly high degree of friction in interfamily relations…" (Ortner 1978: 47). She further notes how the Sherpa society to a large degree seems to be filled with tensions that are released or relieved through several rituals. Especially

within the household unit, tensions seem to arise. In Sherpa society, she claims, parents see the marriage of their children as a threat to their own care in old age. Not only will the particularly strong bond between sons and mothers (*nyingje*) be broken, but the marriage of a child also breaks up the productive family unit as well as the family property (ibid: 41-48). Sherpas see the family as embodying values in total collision with Buddhist principles of a meritorious life. The family is built on procreation, sociality, production and consumption, while a merit making life, devoted to religion, should be a life of total abstention from food, from sex, and even from conversation, in deep religious contemplation. Further, marriage is seen as antithetical to the altruistic ideals of Tibetan Buddhism, and the elderly find themselves in positions of dependence, under the command of the son and daughter-in-law who also often has a conflictive relationship with the mother-in-law. The elderly of the Sherpa society partake every year in the merit-making *nyungne* ritual which is perceived as fostering altruism and compassion, presented as alternatives to the self-interested modes of social relations. They see the ritual as a solution to the problems of human experience and neglect in old age. By partaking in the ritual, they acquire merit, they break all social bonds, refuse to form new ones, and concentrate on seeking enlightenment. This way, like the Ladakhi elderly, distancing themselves from the family on-goings, the Sherpa elderly not only seek the religious path to prepare for next life, but also to seek comfort or to forget the disillusionment felt with their children (ibid: 52-60).

However, in contrast to the Sherpa described above, some of the elderly I talked to in Ladakh contended that the happiest period of their life was when their children had married and settled, moved out and started their own lives. The parents did not have to provide for them anymore, they were free to go to the *gompa* and round the prayer wheels, to sit in the sun chatting with their friends in the bazaar, and they did not have to worry about their children's future or send them money anymore. Many described this phase of life as a phase of relief and peace. It was also a feeling of success, or having fulfilled the requirements of life, giving the children a good upbringing, care, compassion and education. Interestingly, the elderly sometimes also saw the dissolution of the joint family as good. They explained to me that when they were all living together, there was more tension; when the children settled by themselves, they were independent and managed on their own and relationships were more stable. However, they would always add, that even though they were settled by themselves in a separate house, it was important for children to look after their aging parents.

A Ladakhi elderly woman living alone.

6 HOSPITALITY CONTROLLING SOCIAL RELATIONS

Introduction

Above we have seen that tension arises within the household, in spite of close bonds and flexibility within the family. The family members are protected from the outside by their house, which encloses them like a protective castle or fortress. Yet there is constant movement and exchange across the threshold of the house. The household is involved in a series of social exchanges, mutual aid networks and ritual groupings and alliances on the village level. Hence, ties among the members of a community crisscross on a number of levels. Although the cooperative unit of the household has been described as ultimately self-subsistent, people know that they depend largely upon neighbours and villagers for the effectuation of a number of ritual or agricultural tasks. Cooperation and exchange make life more easy, but the close cooperation, sharing and exchange within the village, also hold a potential for conflict. Village groupings and neighbour unions ensure cooperation at harvest and communal shepherding of the animals. The *phaspun* is a group of households helping each other at the time of birth, marriage and death. Generally, the households in a *phaspun* group share the same household god and are intended to relieve economic or emotional burdens of the family actually grieving or feasting. The *phaspun*s will act as hosts on these occasions, providing the butter tea and enormous amounts of food for the villagers coming to offer their condolences or congratulations. We see that the social flexibility typical of Ladakhis allows for a number of aid, cooperation and exchange networks, but the sharing of water, agricultural tools and machines, exchange of labour, economical and emotional help may also carry great potential for conflict. One is indebted to a number of households, the debts have to be kept track off, and relations between the different cooperating households have to be nurtured in order for them to remain good. We will se how hospitality is a means for nurturing and maintaining these relationships of dependency.

A village gathering in the spring. Every household contributes with food, tea and beer, carpets and tables.

Hospitality will also be demonstrated to be a control mechanism. Like the threats lingering beyond the village confines, a guest can also be seen as an outside force or threat, hence it is of utmost importance to "domesticate" and "tame" a visitor, too. In Ladakhi eyes, an outsider can be potentially harmful. Therefore, a new visitor to the village is immediately invited in for tea, in part to disarm any potential danger that the outsider may represent, and in part because once a person crosses the threshold of a house, the guest-host[24] relation is effectuated and formalized and the outsider submitted to the household rules and regulations. Protected by his house, a host is in control and by offering a guest his food reserves, he creates a debt on the part of the guest, thus maintaining control of the situation. Here we see a link between the "untamed" guest and the perception of unorganized and untouched space as threatening and needed to be controlled. There seems to be a similar notion at play when it comes to people; outsiders have to be domesticated in order to become less frightening or potentially harmful. However, hospitality in Ladakh is not only a matter of creating debts, maintaining control or playing games, but also a means to keeping and maintaining good and important relations and social order.

[24] Here I apply the term host as a gender neutral term for the sake of simplicity, although the host may often effectively be a hostess, especially at the occasion of serving meals.

Good hosts and full cups

Giving and receiving hospitality are among the major acts of sociality in Ladakh. The *dzangs* institution is central here, as it manifests itself in most guest-host settings. *Dzangs* implies that whenever you are a guest at someone's table or in someone's house and you are offered something, you should decline at least two or three times before you accept. The host will keep insisting on serving you a meal, a cup of tea or giving you a good seat near the fire until you finally accept. This "play" effectuated by the host and his guests is formalized and well integrated in all formal hospitality settings. Similarly, once the guest has accepted a meal or a cup of tea, he should leave the plate or cup untouched until the host offers to refill the cup or serve another helping of the meal. Then first, the guest should take a careful sip of his tea or spoonful of the food. The "secret" of the "game" is that the host should never wait too long before offering his guest a refill: If the guest's tea or food has become cold before the host comes around offering a refill, the host is not fulfilling his role as a good host. Ortner notes that a similar "game" takes place at Sherpa hospitable settings (Ortner 1978: 61-90).

Even when a guest is full, he is pushed to eat more. The host is again regarded as a bad host if his guests leave with empty stomachs. People are forced to eat much more than they actually want or can, and often the only way to escape another generous serving of one's plate, is by hiding the plate. I found it quite amusing to see proud men or quiet and timid women suddenly hiding their plate behind their back, or covering the plate or cup with their hands, resulting in the host trying to tear the plate from their hands to refill it, accompanied with loud shouting. Similarly, full plates are attempted shoved back into the hands of the host. "*Don-le, don-le*" is repeated again and again as the host tries to scurry the guest into accepting and eating another plateful. Pressure, resistance and finally acquiescence, the creation of debts as well as the manifestation of oneself as a good host, with the ability to serve one's guests huge amounts of food, beer and tea, is descriptive of the play revolving around the rituals of serving as well as for seating arrangements.

Butter for babies

In big parties too, like weddings or the celebration of an infant's birth, events that often include several hundred guests, giving and receiving is also highly formalized and kept track of in order to know to whom one owes one's debts. All the neighbours also contribute with

food, beer, tea, carpets and tables for big occasions like these. Evidently, the huge number of guests requires a system for registering the gifts, but I was quite surprised when I was invited with *ama-le* ("mother", the female household head of my host family) to go to a birth party in the neighbourhood. We dressed up nicely in *gonchas* and silk trousers and blouses and walked towards the huge tent in the upper Changspa road where the party was held. On the way, *ama-le* seemed to suddenly remember something making her stop for a moment. Since she did not speak any English, unlike the other family members, and my Ladakhi was still quite limited, I did not quite understand. She said, "*mar, mar*". I knew the meaning of *mar*, namely butter, but I did not understand why she was thinking of butter there and then. She ran to the little shop down the road, while I waited near the bridge by the big prayer wheel. She came back, turned the prayer wheel a couple of times and we proceeded upwards. In her hand she was holding a package of butter. I was puzzled, but thought no more of it until we entered the party tent.

We entered together with a young lady, who was a relative of *ama-le* and from one of the highest ranking families in Ladakh. We were greeted by a number of people standing in a line, and then we walked straight over to a table where two persons were sitting with an enormous book between them. The young lady who came with us handed over a 1000 rupees bill, the people at the table lifting their hands to the forehead in respect saying "*O julley, o julley*". Then they quickly wrote down the amount in the book. Then suddenly *ama-le* handed over the butter and some money. The butter was taken by a woman who then disappeared with it, while the two persons at the table wrote down the amount of the money. When this was done, another woman led the three of us towards another table. Men and women were sitting separately, and most of the guests were women. The chatting and laughter was loud. We were led to a table near the altar set up in the tent, and the tables and mattresses there were more ornate and colourful than in the rest of the tent. It felt like a superior position, and we were the only ones seated there. I wondered why we were seated a bit away from the other ladies, and I wondered about the butter. Then I saw it. A table in the middle of the tent was loaded with dozens and dozens of packages of butter!

I did not understand and it was not until I met Thupstan Angchuk later that day that I could enquire about everything I had seen. He explained to me that the book where the gifts were registered was meant for the host to know how much to give if he was invited for a party to any of the guests present in his party. If the guest had given him 50 rupees at his party

(explained to me to be the regular initial amount), the host would then know that he should give 55 rupees in return if attending a party held by that particular person. The idea being always to return a slightly superior amount. This idea of the receiver seeking constantly to surpass the giver and the formalized system of gift-giving, is described in detail by Mauss in Polynesia and Melanesia (Mauss 1995: 23-91). I now also understood why we were given the best seats of the party, when realizing what an amount of money had been given by the lady we came with. The amount of money, Thupstan Angchuk explained, also depended on people's rank and their proximity to the host family, but nevertheless, 1000 rupees was a large amount of money.

Then about the butter: Thupstan Angchuk told me that butter is regarded as an auspicious substance, and therefore it is given to newly wed couples or to newborn babies to give them luck. As this was early in my stay, I did not know about the special status of butter. In the light of Thupstan Angchuk's explanations, I started realizing the many uses of butter in ritual or religious settings in addition to the everyday use of it. The butter tea, which is consumed all over the Himalayan area, is practical for soothing dry lips and providing salt in the dehydrating climate, but the butter is also auspicious and used symbolically or ritually. The main and central pillar in the kitchen, thought to be a communication channel between the humans in the kitchen and the gods above in the high and heavenly domain, always has a lump of butter at its top. We have seen how babies' foreheads are smeared with butter topped with a little soot from the stove to protect them against evil, thus also tying bonds between the family hearth and the infant. The *chotpa*, the dough figures of gods and goddesses put in the prayer room, are made of butter. The dough for dry cleaning the baby contains butter, and a mother will spread butter on the skin of her baby after giving her a bath. All these different uses of the butter suggest that butter plays an important role, which may have originated in its role as a nutritive, but which has come to have a symbolic and auspicious role too.

This again suggests the power and symbolism of some substances and of certain foods, and the exchanging of food, which is at the centre of guest and host relations, the one putting the other in a debt situation. We see the same in marriage preparations: A girl's hand is asked for through numerous visits from the groom's male family members bringing beer (with a lump of butter on every brass container carrying the beer) to the male members of the potential bride's family. Again a play is enacted, where refusal is implicit; the visitors, their beer and

gifts as compensation for taking the girl are rejected and renegotiated several times before a deal is settled.

From the scenario described above we learn that giving and receiving is formalized and kept meticulously track of. We also see how the exchange of food, and particularly auspicious food and substances, plays an important role in the giver-receiver relationship - both because a host wants to offer his guests his best and most auspicious substances, but also because these substances contribute to positioning him at the top of the guest-host/giver-receiver hierarchy, until the roles are turned in another festive or hospitality setting. Social hierarchies are crystallized and manifested through these formalized exchanges. For example, we saw how the amount of money given by a guest at a party, had great consequence to what seat, service and degree of respect he or she was subsequently offered.

High and low people

Although class distinctions these days are to a large degree wiped out, and people have been made aware of the brutalities of such a system, one sees these hierarchies manifested especially in host-guest relations, and at festive or ritual occasions as demonstrated above. It is interesting to note that although the maintenance of class distinctions today is regarded by most as negative, people seem to know well their position in the hierarchy and the degree of closeness, relaxedness or respect they are allowed to or expected to have with other people. When there is a wedding, people know where to sit, whether on the mattresses near the embellished tables or on carpets straight on the floor fronted by less ornate tables (the lady I entered the party with probably knew very well that she would be taken to one of the central tables). People know whether to walk straight in or wait at the front gate whenever visiting a house, whether to remain at the kitchen door or enter the room when asked in, whether to sit down or to remain standing when entering a kitchen, whether to accept a seat near the hearth or not, whether to accept meals or not. People seem to know how long to stay, and with what relaxedness or formality they should make themselves comfortable in another home. *Dzangs* is always to some extent at play when a host and a guest meet, or an insider of a house and an outsider meet. To me it often was incomprehensible that a visitor or guest knew exactly how to behave in front of specific people. Typically as a foreigner, one commits many mistakes of the sort when one does not know one's position in the hierarchy or the many embodied social rules and codes of conduct. Normally a foreigner is treated with utmost respect and care, and

also any mistakes committed are excused by their culture being different from the Ladakhi's. Nevertheless, when trying to apply their codes of conduct, one realizes that it is easy to make mistakes.

We have seen how social hierarchies tend to be crystallized and manifested particularly in hospitable or festive settings. The hierarchies are as mentioned to a large degree disappearing, they are downplayed in daily life, and the higher ranking families, descending from the nobility, of which there are still a few, are concerned not to be regarded as discriminative towards the lower ranking families. A few decades ago, the stigmatization and discrimination towards the lower classes were more integrated, accepted and visible in everyday Ladakhi life. One example related to me by *ama-le* was the curious practice of lower ranking family members getting off their horses when passing higher ranking family members on horse. Due to the notion of height being related with the auspicious, the lower people were showing respect to the higher people by physically positioning themselves lower than the high people. A similar practice, she told me, was seen when high and low people were eating together. Normally they would not do so, since sharing a meal with lower people, especially the lowest in the hierarchy like the *gara* (carpenters and blacksmiths, regarded as low since their extraction of metals from the earth is believed to anger the *lhu*), *beda* ("wandering minstrels") and *mon* (musicians), was regarded as potentially polluting (Clarke 1997: 62-63; Norberg-Hodge 1991, p 48; Rizvi 2004 [1996]). But if by coincidence they had to share a meal in the fields and hence eat directly on the ground, the lower people would dig their cups and plates down a few centimetres into the ground, since the higher people in the open air would not have their slightly higher tables, benches and cup-holders that would be provided for them in domestic or formal settings. Again, we see a reference to height as noble and auspicious.

Today, Dalai Lama has been an important messenger on the negative effects of class distinctions across the Tibetan cultural area. As the highest, most revered and probably best known personality within Tibetan Buddhism in general, people put great emphasis on His Holiness' words. He regularly comes to Ladakh to give teachings, and on one of his visits the evils of class discrimination were the subject of his teachings. Hence he visited a family of musicians, the *mon*, regarded as among the lowest in the traditional hierarchy. The *mon* are originally from the mountainous regions south of Ladakh, *mon* meaning "from the lowlands". His Holiness sat down on the floor and shared a meal with them, showing that the stigma connected to sharing meals with lower class people should be abolished.

I find it important to emphasize that hospitality in Ladakh is not only motivated by a desire to create debts in others and to be the person in charge, nor solely by the need to disarm the potential threat that the guest represents. People have indeed genuine desires for sharing and giving. And often the *dzangs* mechanism is not at play at all, since the most common form of social exchange is with neighbours, relatives or close friends when they step by unnoticed for a meal, some gossip or a cup of tea, without hierarchies being activated or games and rules being necessary. Reciprocity, mutuality, cooperation, collective considerations and altruism are highly valued qualities and are important aspects of the social exchanges, too. Similarly, within the family confines, the *dzangs* game is not effectuated, and a more relaxed attitude is displayed than when outsiders are present. There is more joking, bodily contact, mocking, laughter, and even quarrels. When outsiders are present, the family is more aware of their façade, appearance and perfection, of the power games and of being a good host. We can draw a parallel to Goffman who uses the dramaturgical model to demonstrate the clear divide between "back stage" and "front stage", in this case the inside and outside of the house, or with or without guests present (Goffman 1992).

We have seen how keeping good relationships with one's surroundings is necessary for the cooperation and mutual help in the village. We can see hospitality, the formalized giving and receiving, and the exchange of food as part of, or as a precondition for a bigger game, namely the exchange of labour, services and mutual help on the village or community level. Hence it is important to partake and to be hospitable on the individual or household level, not only to ensure keeping one's good reputation, but also to ensure smooth village functioning and cooperation. This way we could see the food exchange as the precondition for labour and favour exchanges or turned around, cooperation and mutual help and services could be seen as the consequence of hospitality.

Food for thought

Food in itself is not a neutral substance in Ladakh. Being the main actor in the *dzangs* game, it is on the contrary laden with meaning and symbolism. Food is seen as acting upon the body in a number of ways. It can be healthy and provide strength and force, but it can also be potentially polluting. Beer and meat are substances that should be had only in small quantities or avoided completely. These substances are ambiguous, since they are seen as corrupting the

morality of humans, while they used to be vital in the offerings to the deities (slaughtering of animals for the deities is now discouraged by Dalai Lama, and hence is seldom seen). Food is talked about as healthy or unhealthy, but it is also believed to act upon humans' mental state, moral and spiritual behaviour. The traditional medicine practiced in the Tibetan area, the *amchi* system, is closely connected with Buddhism, and food or abstention from food are prescribed as part of a healing process. The *amchi* practitioner tells the patient that a person's diet is narrowly linked to his physical and mental health as well as his behaviour, and thus he may prescribe the avoidance of certain foods, like bitter, salty, hot or sweet.

Dalai Lama holds his teachings for the Ladakhi Buddhists and the exiled Tibetans in the fields outside Leh. He preaches about the importance of not taking lives, of living with care and compassion for every sentient being. Dalai Lama comes to Ladakh frequently to speak to his followers.

Most Ladakhis I talked to referred to Ladakhi food as simple, but healthy and tasty, while "Indian" food was often seen as oily, spicy, sweet, greasy, unhealthy and using a lot of rice and wheat flour. Typically, the elderly claimed that the young preferred the Indian food, which made them fat, lazy and sick. Many elderly claimed that today people get old much earlier than before, and that they saw this mainly as a consequence of the new dietary habits of Ladakh, where rice is a relatively new element. "Lifestyle diseases" is a new phenomenon in Ladakh. When I asked the elderly how they kept fit and healthy into old age, they invariably referred to the healthy simple Ladakhi diet as the main reason, adding that the

young preferred “Indian” these days, and therefore they sometimes had to eat that kind of food since many did not bother to prepare a special Ladakhi meal for the elderly. But all the elderly preferred Ladakhi food if they could choose. The “Indian” food is however also tied up with ambiguity. It is seen as unhealthy, taking over for and squeezing out the Ladakhi diet, making it seem primitive and simple, but it is also the food favoured at large hospitality settings where rice and different curries and *dhal* (lentil dish) are served. This ambiguity could interestingly be related to the shortage and little variety of food seen in Ladakh in the past. As earlier mentioned, the staple diet of Ladakhis was *tsampa* in different ways and forms. With this in mind, it is therefore evident that when hosting a large party, serving a variety of exotic (and expensively imported) “Indian” dishes is a symbol of affluence and wealth, showing all the villagers that there are no material limitations in this particular household.

Sonam Wangdus and Chunzin Tsomo dressed for a wedding

Interestingly, in large parties, like weddings (*bhagston*) and birth parties (*tsaston*), which last for a full day or even several days, the guests come and go, leaving the enormous party tent for other smaller private parties in the neighbourhood. One will see a group of women get up to go and gather in the house of one of them. There they stay for an hour or two, have tea, biscuits and dried fruits, or sometimes also full meals, before they reappear in the main tent. Here the large plates of “Indian” food may be about to be served. The ladies are by now probably quite full, but they are all given huge plates of food. The enormous portions again testify to the host wanting to show that there is no lack or limitation on his part, hence the

plates are again a symbol of affluence and abundance. But interestingly, what happens next, after the usual discussion between the guest covering her plate and the host wanting to fill it, the ladies finally accept the food, and all over the tent used potato crisp bags or plastic bags (which are banned in Ladakh and fined with a high fee if carried) are extracted from the ladies' purses. The plastic bags are filled with the delicious food, prepared by neighbours of the hosts in big pots on fires outside the tent. The food is taken home to the family members who do not partake in the festivities, since often only one member represents the household in a party in the village, unless they are very close relatives of the hosts. I was shocked the first time I saw this practice, but judging from the way it was done by almost all guests and completely in the open, it had to be perfectly normal. Even the higher classes would do it, although slightly more discretely. Again this practice reveals a sense of food being valued highly, reminding us of the little alimentary variety found in Ladakh a few decades ago. This way, the serving of "Indian" food for hundreds of guests, even when the guests arrive with their stomachs full, is a sign of affluence, "progress" and abundance, but the careful bringing home of the food in reused potato crisp emballage also reveals that not so long ago Ladakh was a place of hardship, little variety and tight budgets. Where there used to be hardship and hunger, today there is plenty.

The "Indian" food served in a wedding party, brought home to the family members not partaking in the party.

Preparing *kholak* in the fields.

Open doors and thresholds

We have seen how the threshold formalizes the guest/host relationship, thus being a vital actor in the hospitality game. In the past Ladakhis never locked their doors, it was always open and welcoming. Now people tend to lock at night or when they leave the house, but mostly, Ladakhis make sure that one family member is at home watching the house, and thus the door remains open. People expressed a concern at the growing crime rates in Ladakh: "Before, everybody's house was open, now we have to lock our doors because of thieves". In spite of this, most doors are wide open during the day. It is interesting to note the contradiction in the bounded and fortified appearance of the house and the (almost) constantly open door. It may say something about the play that goes on between insiders and outsiders, where boundaries are set up to be torn down or penetrated, only to be set up again, reinforced or reconfigured. A guest is tamed and hence becomes an insider for a while, until he leaves and the house again embraces and protects the family members against outside forces. The way outside elements, like guests or food, are brought into the house, food or wealth can also disappear from a house. Therefore Ladakhis follow a system giving different value to the different days of the week. Some days are good for exchange, barter and business, while on other days these activities should be avoided, since exchange on such a day may bring ill fortune to the house and thus empty one's riches and reserves. In the Kabyle house, an open door in the summer allows for the life-giving light (remember the entrances of both Ladakhi and Kabyle houses face east) to enter, and with it fertility and prosperity. Among the Berber, a closed door symbolizes scarcity and infertility, and sitting on the threshold is equalled to hindering prosperity and good luck from entering the household. The threshold is also seen as inverting fundamental opposites, the world is inverted; what is inside becomes outside and vice versa (Bourdieu 1996: 17). Interestingly, at Ladakhi weddings, the kitchen which is normally at the centre of the house and the domain of women, is brought out into the garden, where the men take over the cooking and preparation of the meals. Meanwhile, the kitchen becomes the place for the "public", where the marriage rituals and ceremonies go on.

The kitchen brought out in the garden for the preparation of food for a wedding. All the relatives of the marrying couple contribute to the great meal. Notice that the men are doing the cooking.

Throughout this thesis, we have seen that the Ladakhi family is a closely bound unit, and that the house as a fortress protects them against outside dangers. Still, the family is a flexible unit, ready to incorporate a new member, but it has also been demonstrated to be an arena of conflict, especially in times of transition. The family members depend on each other for the smooth working of the family unit of production, but this unit is to some extent falling apart as households divide and new and smaller households are created. Similarly to the family members, the household as a unit depends upon other households for the same smooth functioning of the village. Dependency on others places one in an uneven relationship with the surroundings and hence may also cause friction.

In the hospitable acts we see a parallel to the breaking up and dissolution of the joint family: Guests and the giving and receiving of food are penetrating and opening the boundaries of the household, thus making it more fragile, less controllable, and less ordered. From the point of view of the guest who has penetrated the house, he resists accepting a meal or a cup of tea to avoid debts. Implicitly, he wants to resist the exchange of material goods and social bonds, because these create dependency and potential conflict. But at the same time, he is dependent

upon the exchange for the execution of a number of tasks. This makes hospitality, exchange and cooperation highly ambiguous. As a countertrend to the dependency bonds within the village, modernity and development also influence the exchange and mutual aid on the village level. People today are more self-helped through the use of machinery, and instead of depending on their neighbours, they now depend on paid help from Nepali and Bihari day labourers. Thus the close traditional village networks are dissolving. The mutual care and support both within the family and the village, is "outsourced" and downplayed. And as we have seen already, and which will be witnessed in the next chapter, this individualization of the Ladakhi society often means sacrificing the care for the elderly in exchange for modernity and progress.

A family using machines and hired day labourers for threshing instead of threshing in the traditional way, activating the village mutual aid groups.

Threshing the traditional way, using the *yak* and *dzo* walking in circle stamping on the grain.

Young and old working together when winnowing the grain.

7 CASE: THE MAHABODHI OLD AGE HOME

Introduction

We saw early in this thesis how the generations of a Ladakhi family are sedimented in the traditional cyclical model of house construction. The materials are reused and new houses raised on top of the old, ensuring people's lasting connections with the land and ancestors. With the emergent trend of modernity, where architecturally new and smaller house bodies spring up in the landscape, we have seen a fragmentation of the traditional extended family and household. This trend bodes important transformations in the kinship arrangements of Ladakhis. The new houses alienate people from their ancestral line, the nurturing hearth, their family and their land, and many elderly are not cared for the way they used to be. It is in the climate of crumbling traditions, where houses no longer embrace several generations, that the Mahabodhi old age home emerges as an embodiment of the changes and an exemplification of the new house bodies in and around Leh. The old age home becomes a substitute family for neglected elderly. In a region like Ladakh, where the care and respect for the elderly has been highly valued, and the neglect of them highly stigmatized, sending an elderly family member to the old age home thus is something only a few dare to do. As a home for the "poorest of the poor", for those with no other options, the Mahabodhi also becomes an ambiguous entity. For the inhabitants it is a house of relief, while for the outsiders, it may be seen as a threat, an embodiment of eroding Buddhist principles. Old age homes are for the most part understood in social problem terms, and in India they are associated with the "West", since they were introduced in India by the British (Lamb 2000: 91). Old age homes and neglected elderly are widely presented as "afflictions of modernity" and signs of a degenerating society. But as will become clear in this chapter, the elderly in the old age home were grateful to be admitted in the home, seen in the light of their earlier lives of hardship, poverty and neglect.

Heaven or a "house of shame"?

"To the one ever eager to revere and serve the elders, these four blessings accrue; long life and beauty, happiness and power"
- The Buddha

"Mahabodhi is a good place for the poor and needy, but it is not [an option] for me" - Informant not living in the Mahabodhi

"Here I am happy. I get along with everybody. We are like a big happy family here" - Informant living in the Mahabodhi

The first and only old age home in Ladakh is run by the Buddhist charitable organization "Mahabodhi". The Mahabodhi runs a hospital, a boarding school, a nursery, a meditation centre and a library in addition to the old age home. The organization occupies a large terrain close to Leh. The campus is called *Devachan*, meaning "heaven" in Tibetan and Ladakhi, making reference to the good intentions of the place. The old age home was opened in July 1995, and today it houses 28 inhabitants out of whom only 3 are men. In addition to mostly elderly people, there are 2 girls and 1 young man living in the home, the rest are all above the

age of 45. Three of the inhabitants are mentally challenged; 2 women and 1 man. 6 are physically handicapped from birth. There is one monk and two "nuns"[25]. Common to all is the fact that they do not have families who care for them, either because they may simply have no family, or they have been left on their own by their family, their family can not afford economically to take care of them, or they are disabled and hence in need of extra care which their family is not able to provide. Most of the inhabitants are from poor families and they come from villages all over Ladakh. All are Buddhist. Muslims are accepted, but no Muslims have so far lived in the home. Most of the residents have come to the Mahabodhi on their own, but their backgrounds are checked in order to verify that only the very needy are granted admittance.

There are three persons in each room. The old and the young, the mentally challenged, and the physically handicapped, all stay together, but men and women are kept apart. In their rooms, they have some clothes, beds, cups and plates and religious equipment. They do not pay a fee for being there, hence allowing for the very poorest of society to be taken care of, unlike in many other parts of the world where old age homes are relatively expensive and hence cater only to more affluent people. There are a number of bathrooms and several "local" (compost) toilets. The capacity today is for 100 people, although only 28 beds are being occupied at the moment.

Most of the elders in the home care for themselves, but some need the assistance of the staff for washing, eating, dressing and simply moving around. About half of them get visits from relatives, former neighbours or villagers. In addition to this, the school children in the boarding school on campus come to keep the elderly company. This is part of the school's goal to further Ladakhi Buddhist values and culture to the upcoming generation. The care and respect for the elderly is as we have seen an important aspect of the Ladakhi society, and seen as particularly important to bring on to the young since it is declining. The elderly regularly get a medical check-up at the hospital on campus, and every Tuesday a group of German physiotherapists from the Namgyal Institute (a local NGO) come to work with the physically disabled. There are fixed daily routines, and religious activity plays an important role in the everyday life. The physically fit circumambulate the big prayer wheel on the campus, while

[25] Women who have taken care of their own aging parents, without marrying, leading lives and dressing as nuns.

the physically disabled stay in the home chanting their mantras or spinning their prayer wheels.

There are five full time staff members, who all live in the home. The staff is not trained either in old age care, medicine, nursing, psychology or physiotherapy. They are paid, but the salaries are very low considering that it is a 24 hours job, and that most of the staff members have families who live elsewhere. The founder of Mahabodhi is from Sri Lanka, while 90% of the funding comes from other foreign countries, like Germany, USA, Japan, and Korea. Some Ladakhi villagers donate fuel, clothes, shoes, or building materials, the kitchen building was donated by a politician, while the army has donated sleeping bags.

The reason why mostly women live in the home, is the fact that in general men control property in Ladakh[26]. Many of these women are unmarried, divorced, widowed[27], childless, or have illegitimate children. One lady had been left by her husband because of her inability to conceive a child. They are poor and often seen as outcasts of society. Some have deformities and handicaps, hence they are not productive members of the family, others are mentally challenged and consequently often stigmatized and therefore also regarded as a burden by the family. Many have grown up as maids or servants in rich families because their parents died early, and they have had to fend for themselves through working. With age and declining health they are no longer able to work, and hence nobody is there to take care of them. They may have lived under very unhealthy conditions, with hard physical work for long hours, often in extreme cold, with limited light causing a strain on their eyes. Hence they are more prone to develop physical disabilities and handicaps than the rest of the population and are therefore often more in need of care. There are also women in the home who, because they themselves took care of aging parents, and therefore never got married and instead led nun-like lives, have no children of their own to care for them when old.

[26] Except in the cases of *magpa* marriages.
[27] Widowhood in the rest of India is often seen as a ”social death”, putting severe constraints on the widow’s life. Both her diet, dress, public behaviour and residence are controlled and constrained (Vincent 2003: 24). In Ladakh, the remarriage of a widow is socially accepted, and often even encouraged. The widow in many cases marries the brother of the deceased husband and continues to lead a normal married life.

Some of the elderly women living in the old age home

Some of the women living in the Mahabodhi

Some more of the inhabitants in the Mahabodhi gathering with their prayer wheels and *mani beads* (prayer beads) after lunch.

The old age home is a typical example of the new architecture springing up in Ladakh, and as we have seen above, the changes on the architectural, visible level engender changes on the psychological, intimate and emotional level. We can see the Mahabodhi as an embodiment of, or a metonym for the changes. This physically modern "body" has come to replace the extended family and family home which have traditionally been the most important arena for taking care of aging family members, but which are now dissolving and disintegrating. Cohen, who studied elderly and senility in a frame of modernity in Varanasi, notes how the old age home as institution is seen as an envisioning of the lost family, and to be imagined as a new large joint family (Cohen 2002 [1998], p 114). If we think of the "Panopticon"[28] and Foucault's studies of institutions as control and surveillance mechanisms, an old age home could also be a means of controlling the "inmates", since there they are more surveiable than in their own homes (Bentham 2002; Foucault 1972; Foucault 1975; Foucault 1991). However, and in spite of the old age home being highly "surveiable" with the front wall exclusively made of glass, I would not state this to be the case in the Mahabodhi, since it is founded on Buddhist principles of compassion, is based on charitable funding and since all the inhabitants express great relief at being there as compared to their former lives.

[28] A model for a prison building designed by the politically radical English philosopher J. Bentham in the late eighteenth century (Bentham 2002). The concept of the design was to allow an observer to observe (-opticon) all (pan-) prisoners without the prisoners being able to tell if they were being observed or not, thus conveying a sense of an "invisible omniscience". The model for the Panopticon has later been seen as applicable to any type of institution; schools, "poor-houses", factories, "mad-houses", old age homes and hospitals.

The old age home, in that it can be seen as a metonym for the changes happening in society, dissolving the family, causing decline in the respect and the care for the elderly, may also therefore represent a threat, or cause fear in people. Nobody would like to end up in a situation with nobody to care for them, and most think it will never happen to them. Hence a psychological boundary marker is set up between them ("the outsiders") and the old age home dwellers. Helped by the image of the inhabitants as being the "poorest of the poor" of society, and often stigmatized people, the "underbelly" and outcasts of society, often divorced or with illegitimate children, the "outside" world express that they think the Mahabodhi is a wonderful place for those who need it, but many also add, "It is not an option for me", even if they are not very well cared for by their own families.

I was curious to see how the residents of the old age home felt about living in such a home, taking into consideration that they live in a society in which it is highly valued and expected that seniors will be cared for by their children. The Mahabodhi was obviously a place tied up with both positive and negative connotations. However, most of the elderly in the home expressed great gratitude at being there and to the Venerable Sangha Sina, the Ladakhi monk who is the co-founder of the home, since almost all of them had led lives of hardship, poverty and loneliness prior to being taken into the home.

The tight and transparent village communities in Ladakh doubtlessly ensures a great deal of social control and sanctions, hence leading people to at least provide a minimum care for their elderly, since neighbours will know instantly if an old family member is neglected. In Leh, a city of almost 30.000 inhabitants however, the control may not be as all-encompassing. But as people are also concerned with being good Buddhists, attaining merit and good *karma* for their coming lives, they know that they have to care for their elderly and be compassionate towards the needy. The dissolution of a joint family is in many parts of India regarded as a shame similar to a divorce. It throws dishonour upon a family (Wadley 2002: 11) The disintegration of an extended family and the often consequential neglect of the elderly is socially sanctioned and throws shame upon the family. Levine notes on the Nyinba of Nepal, how the "*trongba* (estate) betterment" and unity is the principal and common goal of the Nyinba family. Being separated from kin and community is undesirable as well as looked down upon. Maintaining an undivided household and an intact estate from one generation to the next, is by most seen as the most important factor for obtaining "*trongba* betterment"

(Levine 1988: 100-106, 264). This could be said about the Ladakhi family and estate as well, but as there are pulls and motivations in different directions, the ideal goals are not always put to practice even though the dissolution of the family and the leaving behind of elderly family members will lead to a social stigma. However, as mentioned above, the social stigma seems to prevent a substantial number of families from dissolving and neglecting their elderly, although they might only provide the very minimum care required in order for them not to lose face towards the outside world.

Stanzin Laskit, an 80 year old neighbouring lady, admitted that she was not well cared for. When she was young she gave birth to a girl, but the girl died after some years. After that she tried very hard to conceive a new child. She became pregnant again, but she had an accident which caused heavy bleeding, and finally resulted in the loss of the child. Without children of her own, she has no one to look after her in old age, and therefore some distant relatives have to look after her. She lived by herself in her family's old house, but now her health has deteriorated and she is in need of care. Her husband is dead, all her siblings, too. The

relatives with whom she stays only provide her with food. "They don't even enter my room, they say it is smelly. I have looked after their animals all my life, taking them to the pastures, and now that it is their turn to look after me, they are not behaving nicely. They never come to see me or talk to me; they say I am too dirty. I have been to the doctor, he doesn't think I smell, you don't think I smell, only my relatives tell me I stink. I use the toilet, I don't do it in my pants, but still they tell me I smell". It was a clear sunny April day and we were sitting in the garden of her relatives' house. Stanzin Laskit continued: "My health is not good now, and in the morning my body is so stiff. Getting dressed is very painful, and nobody is there to help me; they say it is disgusting because I am so dirty and smelly. Then I cry and wish I could die, but how can I die if God is not calling me? Also in the night my whole body hurts, and I can't sleep. Nobody comes to comfort me or look after me, and I get very sad and wish I were dead". I ask her if she knows about the Mahabodhi, and she says she knows it is a place for people who do not have children or who are not well cared for, with permanent housing of old and alone people. "But the Mahabodhi is an embarrassment for the family; it shows that they don't care for the old family member. It sounds like a good place, it is good for people with no family. Maybe they are happy there, because they have facilities and are taken care of. It would be nice to be there, but it would be an embarrassment to my relatives if I went there".

We see how an elderly person who is not well cared for, who is sad, alone and struggling with bad health does not dare to go to the Mahabodhi because that would be "embarrassing" to the family. Even though they are neglected, or even verbally insulted, they protect their families or relatives.

The old age home as an institution can easily be compared to the *ashram*, an institution found all over India catering to elderly who have reached the penultimate stage of the four life stages recorded by Hindus (Cohen 2002 [1998]: 113). In this penultimate phase of life, the aging person retreats from the family, he engages in religious pursuit to attain merit. The ideal is to cut all worldly ties, emotional ones as well as material ones. Cohen notes how the *ashram* allows for the retreat from the family, but it is also a response to the decline of the joint family and "the dangerous ascendancy" of the West", as more and more elderly do not come there out of free will, but because they are left with no other options (ibid: 114).

Cutting ties and letting go

Lamb, who studied aging in West Bengal, notes how the elderly people have strong bonds to their families and their possessions. These bonds are called *maya*, and in order for an aging person to be able to leave this world and move on to a new life - in other words, to be able to die – he or she has to loosen these tight and long nurtured bonds (Lamb 1997: 283-286; Lamb 2000: 115-143; Lamb 2002: 60-63). The irony is that an old person is the one with the most numerous and tightest bonds after a long life of gathering possessions and developing intimate and social relationships, but he is also the one who has to break these relationships in order to "move on".

This cutting of ties may be a difficult process since family bonds in many cases are strong. As we have seen, an old person often has a very close relationship to his grandchildren. As a step in the direction towards cutting the *maya*, the elderly often position themselves, or are positioned, physically at the periphery of the house (Lamb 1997: 283-286; Lamb 2000: 125; Lamb 2002: 57). From having been central persons in the running of the family, in decision making processes, being respected and revered for their knowledge and wisdom, they now move to the periphery of the household. This means leaving the position as household heads to the following generation and attaining a more marginal position themselves. Cohen notes how many of the elderly he spoke to in Varanasi were placed on the porch of the houses, thus attaining a double status, both as distanced and marginalized from the centre of the house, the hearth and the rest of the family, while at the same time being relatively central and visible on the porch, where they greet visitors and by-passers (Cohen 2002, [1998]: 182). Paradoxically, the problem becomes not how to maintain family relations that have been described in the previous chapters as disintegrating due to modernity, but the actual loosening of these ties.

In Ladakh we see a similar pattern, as elderly parents often move out into a small house on the property, leaving their duties and responsibilities behind, moving from the centre to the periphery of the household. They distance themselves from the chore of the household and spend most of their days on religious pursuit. The Buddhist idea of everything being impermanent, include not only material things or stages in life, but also emotional and family ties. Hence the family is in one way very important, but when everything is impermanent, relationships and family ties should not be clung onto. Ladakhis remind themselves of this

fact, saying that "When we die, we go alone; we will bring neither our family nor diamonds and gold". This Buddhist poem also insists on the impermanence of things:

> What is born will die,
> What has been gathered will be dispersed,
> What has been accumulated will be exhausted,
> What has been built up will collapse,
> And what has been brought high will be brought low

This acknowledgement may make the distancing from family and property somehow more easy, but many elderly regret having to distance themselves from the family.

Let me return to the concept of *maya*. *Samsar*, also a hindi term, which is most commonly translated into English as "family", literally means "that which flows together", and its extended meaning overlaps with the concept of *maya*. "*Samsar* not only refers to the people of a family or household, but also includes any household animals, such as cows, goats or ducks; any family deities; the space of the house itself; and the material goods of a household - cooking utensils, bedding, wall hangings, and the like. All of this collectively makes up what Bengalis call their *samsar*, the assembly of people and things that "flow with" persons as they move through their lives" (Lamb 2000: 42). In Ladakh, aging people, by moving to the periphery of the household or by distancing themselves from the daily concerns and activities and instead engaging in religious pursuit, also cut intimate and close affectionate ties. It is interesting to note that upon the death of these persons finally having "managed" to cut ties and leave this world, their cremation is also seen as a further cutting of ties, and thus helps their release from this life. Further, and posterior to the cremation, some of the dead person's belongings are auctioned out by the monks of the *gompa* to which the deceased person belonged. The money gathered is given to the *gompa*. This practice can also be seen as a yet another way of cutting the bonds between the deceased and this world, which is at times difficultly achieved.

Padma Yangdol, the neighbour of my family in Likir was 93 and claimed to be the oldest person in the whole village of Likir. She was sitting in the sun outside her house every day as I walked by; she was almost blind and deaf and had difficulties moving. Her only wish was to die. She was well taken care of, but she felt like a burden on her son and his wife. She asked me again and again: "When will I die? I have had my time, I am satisfied with life. I have seen my son and now my grandchildren grow up; there is no more for me in this life. I only sit here outside the house in the sun, and I have been sitting here for so long that my body has left a mark on the ground". Something was obviously preventing her from letting go, but she did not seem to know what, why or who. She continued: "Do you think I will be alive next time you come back to Likir?" I was caught in between my hope to see her again, and her desperate hope to be able to go.

Ortner, in "Life and Death on Mt. Everest" contends that the crying of the family and relatives of the deceased also makes it difficult for the dead to sever attachments and move on. The belief that the deceased person has not fully departed yet (due to the soul of the dead person "floating around" for up to 49 days in *bardo*), puts restrictions on the crying of the relatives in order for the dead person to be released. Also it is claimed that too much crying at funerals will cause blood to rain from the sky, or cause a veil of blood to cover the eyes of the deceased so that he or she cannot find "the road", the way to the good rebirth (Ortner 2002

[2000]: 139). In Ladakh it is also said that people who are too attached to this world, often come back as ghosts after their deaths, while the Yolmo studied by Desjarlais think that when a person is not "allowed" to die, it is bad spirits keeping him alive, as punishment for bad deeds (Desjarlais 2002a: 303-304; Desjarlais 2002b: 176). Lamb notes that "…too much *maya* at the end of life can also cause the soul to linger on in frustration as a ghost around its former habitat, seeking vainly to be reunited with the scenes of its previous life" (Lamb 2002: 62).

Portraits of neglected elderly

The prevalent view that aging in rural, "traditional" societies is not a problem, since the aged in such societies are viewed as possessing high status, does not hold for all such societies. Seen from a different angle, elderly, together with women and children, often are the most marginalized and unprivileged in these "traditional" societies. The Sherpa of Nepal, studied by Ortner and Fürer-Haimendorf, is one such "traditional", rural and agricultural society, where the elderly do not necessarily hold a high position. To the contrary, Ortner and Fürer-Haimendorf claim that elderly Sherpa hold low status and are regarded as constituting a burden on the younger generation (Ortner 1978: 33-60; Fürer-Haimendorf 1964: 87). In contrast to my impression of Ladakhis - in spite of neglect being noted more and more frequently – of taking relatively well care of their elderly, "…elderly Sherpa parents are ultimately more or less abandoned, or at least neglected and treated with some callousness" (Ortner 1978: 47). Levine also notes how elders hold a marginal position in the Nyinba society of Nepal. They sleep in the barn, on the roof or in the outer corridor. She also describes how the elders receive reduced food portions, and notes that this fact reflects their reduced economic contribution to the home as well as their lesser needs (Levine 1977: 145). Consequently, we here have several examples of Buddhist communities whose elderly are not only peripheral to the household due to their own turning away from worldly concerns and towards religious pursuit, but who are actually pushed to the margins by their families because they are regarded as a burden, and an obstacle to the advancement of the other individuals of the family.

Constituting a burden on one's children was an explicit concern and fear even among a great number of Ladakhi elderly. Even though their children cared well for them, most expressed a wish to die while they were still relatively healthy. Becoming a dependant, both physically

and psychologically, is a situation most Ladakhis want to avoid. “I want to die while my feet and hands are still working”, Chunzin Tsering told me, implying that as long as she could be a participating member of the family, it was good, but once she was debilitated and kept from partaking, she would rather die. Ladakhi elders, and particularly elderly women, in spite of sore hips and joints, often do contribute to the running of the household, taking care of grandchildren, keeping the fire burning, milking the cattle and filling the water bowls in the prayer room. But even so, most elderly persons expressed fear at not being able to perform even these simple tasks, hence becoming a dependant, and would therefore prefer dying before this would happen. Many of the persons in the Mahabodhi have deteriorating health or handicaps, and have therefore not been able to contribute to the family cooperation and production. This has made many of them want to come to the Mahabodhi to avoid being a burden on their families.

Tsetan Putit, has been in the old age home for 4 years. She came there before she had had the chance to constitute a burden on her family. Her son died 12 years ago and her husband had died a few years before him, hence only the daughter-in-law and grandchildren were remaining. Tsetan Putit thought that the daughter-in-law would not have the means to look after her nicely in the long run, and she came to the Mahabodhi. “We had nothing, and I was constantly hungry. I came here before any problems arose. I still have contact and a good relationship with them. One of my grandsons is in the boarding school here on campus, so he comes to visit me once in a while. Here I am very happy, those who cannot care for themselves are cared for, we eat together, we are like a family here.”

Sonam Dolkar, another of the inhabitants of the home, is 88 and has been in the home for 6 years. She comes from a poor family. She married at 18, but the husband's father did not like her and therefore did not approve of their marriage and she was thrown out, pregnant. She had a daughter and fended for herself working as a servant in a family in Lamayuru. Her daughter now works as a servant herself. "She sometimes comes to see me, then she brings a little tsampa for me, but she is poor, too, so I don't expect anything from her. Before, my life was hard, I was constantly cold, hungry and with poor clothes. Here I have a good relationship with everyone; we are all in the same situation".

Yangchen Angmo has recently arrived in the Mahabodhi. She has lived great parts of her life with aching knees, and therefore walking and moving around has been painful and limited. She never married because of her knees, and therefore never had children of her own either. She stayed for a while with her eldest sister (they were a family of only sisters) who inherited the family house and property, but then the sister's husband died. As her knees prevented her from helping out in the household, she mostly spent her days spinning. She was served meals, but her knees got worse from sitting still for large parts of the day, and finally she came to Leh to see the doctor and was then admitted into the old age home. "I had my knee problem already when I was young, and because of it, I could never go with the others to marriage parties or village gatherings. It made me feel sad. Here I am happy, I can concentrate on religion, and I don't have to worry about food or work"

Rinchen Padma, came to the Mahabodhi 3 years ago. He had no children and never married. When young, he travelled to Kashmir[29], Tibet and to Changtang near the Tibetan border. He traded apricots and walnuts which he brought from Kashmir for butter and pashmina wool picked up in Tibet. His brother married, and had children, but then he married a second wife, and Rinchen Padma went to live with the first wife. They never had children together, and she died recently. His health was deteriorating, and he could not look after himself. There was a division of land between the brothers. "I finally came to the Mahabodhi. Noone wants to come here, but it is nice here after all. When my health was better, my brother cared for me, but when I got worse, he neglected me. My brother is still alive, but his second wife died, too. The children live in a separate house. I don't have a very good relationship with my family, because of the division of land. Before we cultivated the fields together, then there was the division of land and I wanted the children of my brother's first wife to have some of it. He only wanted to give the land to the children of his second wife, but in the end all children got a plot of land. This resulted in a disagreement between me and my brother. Even though I fought for the rights of my "wife's" children, they never looked after me. Here in the Mahabodhi there are good people, and we get meals on time, but I mostly stay by myself. I am happy spinning my prayer wheel. With the women I feel like wasting my time; time is better spent on prayer. Sometimes I feel like a burden here, without working for the food or clothes, but I am happy here".

[29] Referring to the parts of Kashmir that lie West of Ladakh. Often, when people spoke of Kashmir, it was the area around Srinagar they referred to.

Tsering Kunsis is 65 and was a nomad before she came to the Mahabodhi two years ago. She had no children, and her husband died when he was 40. "I have one brother, and he could maybe look after me for some months, but for the rest of life until death, that would be difficult. He has children, but they did not care for me. These days, people's children don't even care for their own parents, then why would they care for me? We nomads don't have land and houses to pass on to caretakers, we have only sheep and goats, they are our property. I lost almost all my animals in the freezing cold. In the end I only had 4-5 goats. When I left, I gave them to my brother. Changtang, where I come from, is very dry and cold, and with 4-5 goats I did not have much to live from. Also I have a knee problem, and my eyes are not so good either. All my life I have been living in a tent in extreme cold, with snow and strong sun. Life as a nomad is hard, as we shift place frequently. I miss the landscape, the plains, the animals, but life was difficult for me back there. I used to see wolves in the plains and sometimes I saw the snow leopard in the hill side. I sometimes miss the nature and the scenery, but I am happy here, I have a good relationship with everybody here, and I can practice religion. I stayed alone for many years after my husband died, but when most of my animals died too, I came here." I asked if she was sad about not having her own children. She said "My life has been up and down with the death of my husband and my animals. I was dreaming of having children and grandchildren, but not having them was not a great problem. I am not feeling sad; it was because I did not have good karma".

It was interesting, however probably symptomatic, that the inhabitants of the old age home thought loneliness and feelings of neglect among Ladakhi elderly was quite common, while my conversations with people outside the home made it clear that they thought it was only very rare. It also seems, from the life stories described above, that when more distant relatives are responsible for the care of elders, it becomes more neglectful or non-existent. They certainly don't feel the filial bond or obligation so strongly, but will at the most provide a minimum of care in order not to throw shame upon the family.

Among the Sherpa, Goldstein and Beall found to their surprise that a large number of elderly people were actually living alone or together with an elderly spouse, "given the almost universally accepted belief that the elderly in traditional societies reside with their children as they age and become dependent" (Goldstein and Beall 2002: 51). Goldstein and Beall also note that the Sherpa diverge from many other societies across the Tibetan region where the Buddhist culture confers a high social status on the elderly. Goldstein carried out a study in Ladakh in 1980, finding that only a very small proportion of the Ladakhi elderly population lived alone, hence adding to the common notion that elderly are cared for by the family in the Tibetan cultural area (ibid: 51). However, the trend may be changing in several of these communities, and as we have seen from my study, due to modernization and urbanization, the neglect of elderly in Ladakh is clearly rising. The 25 elderly presently living in the old age home are probably not representative of the many more or less neglected in Ladakh today, since only the very marginalized are embraced by the system and admitted to the home and also since many neglected elderly protect their families from the stigma and shame of sending an elderly family member away. They most surely present only the top of the iceberg of the growing trend towards negligence of the elderly. These processes may have taken place at an earlier stage in the Sherpa culture, because also there, Goldstein and Beall suggest, the original ideals would confer great respect and care upon the elderly, while the actual social reality is somewhat different (ibid: 52-54).

There is dissensus on the consequences of modernity on Sherpa society. Ortner claims that the Sherpa traditionally lived in nuclear families and hence the alone elderly is not a new phenomenon. Goldstein and Beall claim differently. They contend that the decline of polyandry and consequently of extended families is due to the increased interest in cash generating jobs, such as porters and guides for expeditions and treks. Hence the focus on

keeping family property and land undivided is disappearing. This, Goldstein and Beall claim, is an indirect consequence of modernization. Thus, they conclude that elderly Sherpa were living alone not because of traditional values and norms, but because they had to (ibid: 52-53).

In anthropology, there is always a degree of uncertainty tied to studies of the care for the elderly. Do people's statements about the elderly, and their care and respect for them represent the true picture, or do they simply reflect what is seen as ideals of care and respect - what people strive towards, but not always achieve? Likewise, as we have seen, the elders' wish to protect their family may colour their statements about the care they receive, even preventing them from leaving a situation of neglectful care. This goes for the inhabitants of the Mahabodhi, too: When expressing gratitude at being there, there may also be an inherent attempt to protect the establishment, thus ensuring their own position. To themselves, they may even have doubts about whose interests I, as interviewer, represent. One could wonder why the inhabitants so unreservedly open up to a foreigner like me, and tell their often sad stories of hardship and neglect. Especially since I used my male translator at the Mahabodhi, which could potentially have led to less openness, since most of the inhabitants are female. I wondered about this frankness of the elderly, presenting their very honest and sometimes miserable stories. Could it be that since they are already in the Mahabodhi, it is already clear that they have lived under neglectful circumstances, and thus they no longer had families to protect? Or could it be that people, when approaching old age and death, see that they have nothing to lose in telling the true stories of their present and past lives, since they now are more preoccupied with the life to come?

One could also wonder whether the general satisfaction of the Mahabodhi inhabitants is an attempt to safeguard their own pride. One wants to present oneself as having done the "right thing", having made an informed choice, one of which one is proud. Along with this, my portraits of some of the elderly in the home could probably be seen as a conscious manipulation or selection of the various voices found there. Pictures can often misrepresent or transform the truth, since they freeze reality and take it out of context. Taking pictures of people not used to having their pictures taken, may also cause the objects to pose or act differently than they otherwise would. However, all these factors taken into consideration, and after having visited the Mahabodhi several times and talked to most inhabitants more than once, I do insist on them seeming genuinely happy and content. That being said, my intention

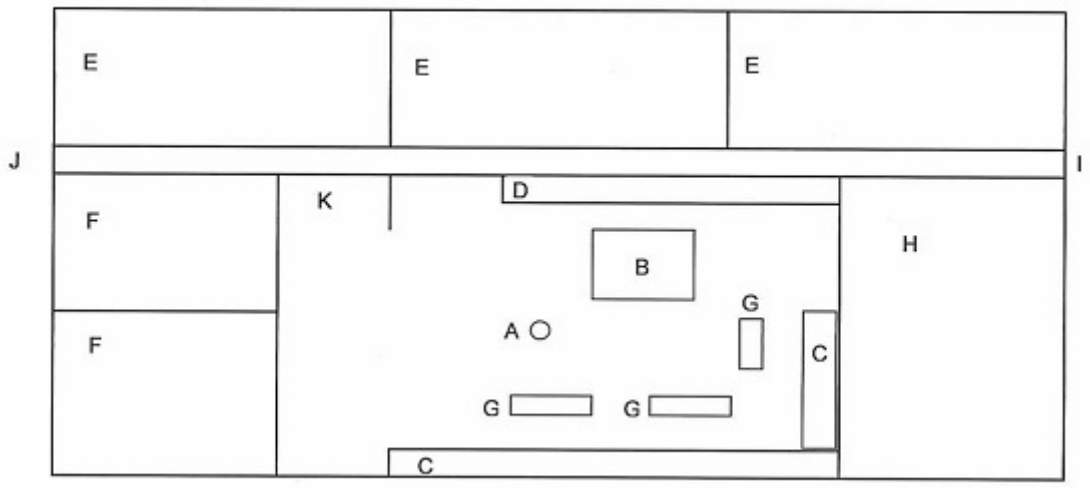
has not been to present the Mahabodhi as the optimal or only solution for neglected elderly, but as a description of an emergent trend in Ladakhi society, contiguous with new constructions of Ladakhi elderhood.

Summing up

In the alienating and confusing environment that the Ladakhi elderly are presently experiencing, the old age home is by some seen as a relief. To others, it represents the erosion of traditional Buddhist values of compassion and care for the weak and needy, which up until now has been a family affair. If we recall the elderly Sherpa described by Ortner, they had low expectations as to how they would be cared for by their children. Instead of staying with the young, feeling like a burden, the Sherpa elderly turned towards religion and the ritual of *Nyungne*, intended to increase their merit and hence the chances of a good rebirth (Ortner 1978: 33-60). We have seen that the Ladakhi elderly also distance themselves from the household and worldly on-goings to prepare for the next life, but traditionally they have been cared well for, even at the periphery of the household. Nowadays, the elderly experience a feeling of being superfluous, outdated and a burden, and therefore, perhaps they more easily manage to distance themselves from the heart of the house, from their beloved grandchildren and family members and turn more strongly towards religion. In this scenario, the Mahabodhi can also be seen as a good environment for a full focus on religion. As a consequence of the transition that Ladakh is experiencing, many childless people state that they are happy not having children at all, as children today are only very "demanding and neglecting the elderly". This in a region where having children has been equalled with having a life insurance and a guarantee for care in old age. The changes in society make the elderly reorientate more easily: As they experience alienation and estrangement, next life becomes more important than this.

APPENDIX

Sketch of the house interior



The above sketch should only be interpreted as tentative, or as an example of one house interior (mid floor), as the distribution of spare rooms, store rooms and sleeping quarters to a certain extent varies from house to house. Common to most houses however, is the central kitchen. For the description of the furnishing of the kitchen, see pp. 56-57, and for the discussion of gendered domains of the kitchen, see pp. 69-70.

A – Main pillar of the kitchen, demarcating the division of female and male "domains" in the kitchen.

B – The traditional stove.

C – Low benches for receiving guests, for the male family members, for babies sleeping next to the hearth, for the family meals to be consumed and for the family sleeping near the fire in the winter.

D – Open cupboards displaying the family heirlooms and movable wealth often connected with the women of the household.

E – Sleeping quarters.

F – Store rooms, the one for food-grains often situated under the prayer room.

G – Low tables.

H - Disposable room.

I – East facing entrance.

J – Corridor.

K – Kitchen entrance.

VOCABULARY

L=Ladakhi, T=Tibetan, H=Hindi, O=Other

Abi-(le) (L) grandmother

Ama-(le) (L) mother

Amchi- (L/T) traditional doctor practicing Tibetan medicine/ Tibetan medicine

Ashram- (H) Hindu institution for religious retreat, often it houses elderly in their "penultimate" stage of life

Bardo- (L/T) liminal state or phase passed through after death before being reborn

Bardo Thödröl- (L/T) "The Tibetan Book of the Dead"

Bartsan- (L) "middle world", the world of the *tsan* and humans

Beda- (L) wandering minstrels

Bhagston- (L) wedding party, celebrated on the 1st anniversary of a marriage

Bodyig- (L) Ladakhi written language

Bukhari- (H) small, simple steel stove with potential for heating one or two pans

Chang- (L) locally brewed beer

Chansa- (L) kitchen

Chi she- (L) "I have no idea", "How should I know?"

Chogtse- (L) low, decorated table

Chorten- (L) a structure originally holding the relics of a renown rinpoche or bodisattva

Chotkhang- (L) house temple, shrine/offering room

Chotpa- (L) dough figures of goddesses and gods

Devachan- (L/T) heaven

Dhaba- (H) simple, street restaurant/kitchen

Dhal- (H) lentil dish

Don-le- (L) "Please, here you are"/"Please, receive this food/tea"

Drib- (L) ritually polluting actions

Dzangs- (L) the "game" of pressure, resistance and acquiescence being played out at hospitable settings

Dzo- (L) crossbred between yak and cow

Dzomo- (L) female dzo

Gara- (L) carpenters and blacksmiths, traditionally low status

Gompa- (L) temple, monastery

Goncha- (L) traditional maroon coat worn by both women and men

Gur gur- (L/T) cylindrical container where tea and butter are mixed for the butter tea, the name derives from the actual sound produced when preparing the butter tea

Jullay- (L) hello, goodbye, thank you, welcome

Karma- (H) the sum of deeds in this and past lives having an influence upon your next lives

Karu skyodat-le?- (L) "Where are you going", a question asked to any by-passer in Ladakh

Khambir- (L) flat round bread made from tsampa

Khangbu- (L) a little house on the premises of a "mother house" for the elderly parents

Khangchen- (L) "mother"/"main" house

Khangri- (L) snow-capped/alpine mountains

Khanpa- (L) house in general

Khataks- (L) ceremonial/prayer scarf

Kholak- (L) dough- or porridge-like meal made from butter, tsampa, and butter tea, and sometimes dried cheese and beer

Khrag- (T) menstrual blood

Kök- (O) "root"/"origin" in the society studied by Delaney

Lama- (L/T) monk

-le- (L) particle added to almost any word, confers an idea of respect

Lha- (L) god, deities of the heavenly world

Lhato- (L) recipient filled with auspicious objects for the protective deity of the house, changed every New Year

Lhu- (L) water deity/spirit

Magpa- (L) a marriage where the woman is the head of the household, heiress and decision maker, and the man marries into the household, contrary to the regular exogamous pattern where the woman marries out of her natal home and into a new home

Mani (beads)- (L) prayer beads

Mani (wall)- (L) long wall at the entrance of Ladakhi villages, composed by engraved stones with religious mantras

Mar- (L) butter, auspicious substance

Maya- (H) bodily, material or emotional bonds developed throughout life, which have to be cut in order for a person to be able to "let go" and die in Mangaldihi society studied by Lamb

Mon- (L) musicians, originally from the "lowlands", traditionally low status

Mok mok- (L/T) steamed dumplings filled with meat or vegetable

Nyemo- (L) close, near

Nyen- (L) relative

Nyingje- (O) particularly strong bond between mothers and sons in Sherpa society (Nepal)

Nyungne- (O) merit-making ritual fostering altruism and compassion in Sherpa society (Nepal)

Onpo- (L) astrologer

Paba- (L) hard dough-like meal made of *tsampa* and boiling water or butter tea

Pagphey- (L) wheat flour

Pari- (O) life-giving and life-threatening supernatural beings in the mountains of Hunza, Pakistan

Pemar- (L) dough-like meal made of butter, peas flour, sugar and butter tea

Phalha- (L) protective house deity

Phaspun- (L) group based on worship of a common god helping each other at life cycle rituals

Rinpoche- (L) high *lama*

Ruspa- (T) semen/bone, model of descent

Salwaar kameez- (H) female attire consisting of baggy pants under a knee long dress

Samsar- (H) "family", the assembly of people, and things that "flow" with persons as they move through life, can be compared to *maya*

Sang- (L) fumigation of juniper

Shar choks- (L) East

Shelkhang- (L) "glass room"/"window room"

Soldja khante- (L) butter tea, salty tea, (in honorific language, used with guests to confer a meaning of respect)

Stanglha- (L) heavenly world

Stupa- (H) reliquary

Sülale- (O) notion of reproductive semen in the Turkish village studied by Delaney

Thap- (L) stove

Thapka- (L) hearth

Trongba- (O) "estate" in Nyinba society of Nepal

Trus- (L) ritual ablution

Tsampa- (L/T) ground and roasted barley flour

Tsan- (L) backless spirits of the "middle world"

Tsaston- (L) birth party/festival for the newborn

Wrugbe- (O) "afterlife" among the Beng of West Africa

Yak- (L/T) the traditional "beast of burden" on the Tibetan Plateau

Yoklhu- (L) the domain of the *lhu*

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