

*'The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same': Idioms of House Society in the Leh Area (Ladakh)*¹

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Introduction

I had a strange sense of *déjà-vu* writing this essay as I found myself thinking about virtually the same issues as I had before, during and after my doctoral fieldwork in the early 1980s, along with colleagues working on the household and contemplating the impact of the by-then solid and militarised borders surrounding Ladakh. At that time, we learned that households were named property-holding units that lasted over time. We were struggling to work out the relative importance of the conjugal tie, the sibling group, the *phaspun* (a handful of houses joined for ritual purposes in the Leh area), legal title and state or religious dues in reproducing the corporate unit. The Buddhist smallholdings among which we were then working are known as *tronpa* (*grong ba*),² containing one or more houses: a main or 'big house' (*khang chen*) and one or more offshoot 'small houses' (*khangun*; *khang chung*). The small houses held an older 'retired' generation and individuals who did not or could not marry, given the local ideal of just one marriage per generation per household.³ These latter residences, we were told, always reverted to the main house each generation. I worked closely with colleagues from my undergraduate days among whom Maria Phylactou (1989) contributed much to our understanding of the position of younger brothers, and Nicola Grist (1993) to commonalities among Muslim and Buddhist households across Ladakh. They asked whether siblings were now establishing independent households and whether the apparent contrasts within Ladakh that pitted Buddhist non-division against Muslim practices of household division, fuelling in turn a highly charged politics relating to intermarriage and population growth, had any empirical foundation. I returned to Ladakh only sporadically in the 1980s and then not at all for fifteen years before visiting regularly again more recently. I was surprised to find similar issues rousing much the same passions today as they had 30 years ago.

Such are the issues posed by a consideration of households over the span of a generation. In anthropology, we tend to take social reproduction for granted in an implicit teleology sustained by a troublesome trope of change

and continuity. Despite widespread recognition of the limited purchase of this device, it has proved difficult to draw temporal, spatial and other co-ordinates effectively into the story or frame.

Another challenge is presented by the central place accorded to the household in the regional literature. The household has conventionally *stood for* the Tibetan-speaking region just as caste or tribe have done in other parts of the world. A substantial literature has arisen about architectural, symbolic and material forms in relation to governmental and other ‘top down’ efforts to classify and enumerate so as to demarcate territories, populations and yields as well as strategies ‘from below’ to get by and conserve household property and labour. It is not possible to review this literature in a few pages⁴ but, in what follows, I highlight a conventional narrative among Ladakhis as well as outside observers that narrates the fragmentation of previous household forms in the Leh area.

The narrative draws on developments over 50 years and more, since shortly before and after Independence in 1947. It refers to laws prohibiting polyandry, large landholdings and taxes, and mandating equal (partible) inheritance. The losses and opportunities of militarization, which brought much trade to an end whilst offering wage employment and cash incomes, are considered in terms of household labour. A strong army presence is intimately associated with the growth of a developmental state intent on modernization, with an impact on desired as well as actual household forms. The questions we asked in the 1980s were thus widely shared; they were developed across a comparative literature⁵ and in local discourse. In this essay, focusing on Ladakhi views, I hope to describe both how everything has changed and yet also stayed the same. Drawing on three generations in a single family whose memories encompass this period, I suggest that this narrative is not simply a series of reflections *about* the house but rather a story that is internal to the household, refracted across the decades by each generation in turn.

In the 1980s we were presented with an alternative paradigm about the house in place of the household. Although households constitute generally important social groupings and often refer locally to what anthropologists have subsumed under the terms of ‘lineage’ or ‘dynasty’ based on political, economic and ritual as well as kinship criteria, we also learned that they constitute a particular type. Lévi-Strauss inspired research on a holistic, *singular* form, combining material and immaterial property, and emphasizing specifically the mediation of different and often incompatible principles of organization. Lévi-Strauss revisited Boas’s difficulties with the Kwakiutl *numaym* and noted the meshing of political and economic history with ties based on real or supposed genealogies (1983: 171) or disguising political

and social manoeuvres under the mantle of kinship (ibid: 176). He suggested that contemporary ethnology had failed to offer the concept of house in addition to that of tribe, village, clan and lineage, and turned to medieval European history to show that “it is not the individuals or the families that act, it is the houses, which are the only subjects of rights and duties” (ibid: 173). Lévi-Strauss defined the house, after Schmid, as:

a corporate body⁶ holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both. (ibid: 174)

The ‘house’ was a moral person with a name that lasts. Even though it has not proved possible or plausible to distinguish house societies from non-house societies (Carsten and Hugh Jones, 1995), Lévi-Strauss’s approach inspired those who had been struggling to account for Ladakhi households in the wider regional context: as I hope to show, households and houses in the Leh area are sometimes distinguished, sometimes conflated and sometimes merged.⁷

I draw attention to two points that I find valuable and I shall not address the evident problems with Lévi-Strauss’s work.⁸ First, there is a tone of celebration of this total social fact that replaces earlier complaints that studying the house meant studying everything, which was impossible. Second, Lévi-Strauss’s conceit of the house as a moral person can be seen as a plea to focus on its singularity as well as agency. The analytical domaining (MacKinnon 2000) of earlier British kinship studies into, for example, domestic versus political kinship had proved sterile, and subsequent Marxist-inspired theorists encountered comparable difficulties in distinguishing household production and reproduction. Lévi-Strauss drew such terms into relation, by mediation or tension. The house might be a kind of fetish in its built form, masking the tensions of alliance that meant depending on outsiders in order to become self-sufficient (Lévi-Strauss 1987). There could be a tension between ancestral and territorial names (*noms de race* and *noms de terre*), how to marry close and far away or within and outside a given unit. Surveying a range of examples, Lévi-Strauss saw the house as an institutional creation that permits compounding forces normally considered mutually exclusive to be held in and by the form, in fact, to define it:

all these notions, ... are reunited in the house, as if, in the last analysis, the spirit (in the eighteenth-century sense) of this institution expressed an effort to transcend, in all spheres of collective life, theoretically incompatible principles. *By putting, so to speak, ‘two in one’, the house accomplishes a sort of*

inside-out topological reversal, it replaces an internal duality with an external unity. (ibid: 184-5, my italics)

It is at the intersection of these antithetical perspectives that the house is situated, and perhaps formed. Whether or not Lévi-Strauss remained too closely bound to a kinship duality—having himself admitted the relevance of a wide array of interlocking concerns and conflicts—I find this formulation a valuable corrective to the trope of continuity and change. ‘Topological’ reversals become properties of the house⁹ and this emphasis on form, or what counts as a unit, helps in accounting for the repetitive nature of the narrative to which I have referred.

‘Tangpo’ House circa 2005-2010

Space permits only a single case study for exploring this form alongside methodological challenges of longitudinal research. I recount a conversation with three people in a village close to Leh. They are: a woman of the older generation who I call *Ane* (father’s sister), a middle-aged and a younger man who I call Anchuk and Tashi respectively. All three individuals pointed to impasses that have since passed. I date these difficulties to a notional 2005 and their passing, in retrospect, to a notional 2010. These people belong to one Buddhist house of the majority ‘middle’ status of smallholders which I have known for more than 30 years, and I draw on a fourth household member, *Meme* (grandfather), who died in the late 1980s, to take the story back to around 1930.

2005

I ask Anchuk about his situation. We have not seen each other for 15 years and he lives in a house he has built over the old threshing floor. Anchuk thought long and hard and then told me, “Everything is the same, and yet it is very difficult now.” Later he confirms, “No, nothing has changed”. And he reiterates, “It is such hard work”.

Despite my protestations at the clear evidence of building (Figure 1) and all sorts of developments including the gates and fences that made it impossible to travel my old route from the town, Anchuk says, “No one has sold land, no one has bought land. Nothing has changed; it is all the same.” “But”, he says, “we do have a problem. Nowadays there are 70 houses or so. With only the 28 households,⁹ there aren’t enough people to do all the work”.

The figure of 28 represents the village or suburb: Ladakhi villages are commonly denoted in terms of this count, that is, the total number of constituent households. There were several ways, however, to count the ‘sub-units’ that made up a village and I had to ask repeatedly about the ‘extra’ I knew from the 1980s; a ‘plus one’,

specifically distinguished as house rather than household in the past, belonging to a Muslim family. It turned out that this family had left during the agitation of the late 1980s. Furthermore, I noticed that we were just 28 now, in place of an equally common denotation in the early 1980s, which left a 26 unspecified but named two lower status units separately: '26+1+1' along with the *khache* or Muslim house.



Fig. 1. New builds in the village. Photos: Sophie Day

In 1982, the 28 households included a further 26 offshoots (*khangun*). Half were what you might call traditional *khangun*, housing unmarried sisters or retired members of the older generation. The other half housed or

anticipated housing children. Two of these had formally divided from the parent house according to the Indian law of the 1940s that mandated equal inheritance. A third seemed to have divided but later rejoined its parent house.¹¹ These new-style *khangun* had grown by fifty per cent over the intervening years and I eventually discovered that land had been sold to one incomer from Lower Ladakh who provided the exception to the statement that all the new buildings had been made by villagers. As Anchuk said, “You give land to whoever asks for it [in the family]”. Daughters rarely asked but sons did. In other words, longstanding legal developments had come to engage household practices so that the unity of the sibling group, specifically brothers, was less important and gender more important in property transfers. Anchuk amplified with reference to the work required for the monthly *chishu* (*tse bcu*, ‘10th day’, an occasion to read texts and, at least in the past, to drink beer together), the village posts that had to be filled for irrigation, for meetings, for keeping animals off the fields. “And”, said Anchuk, “there aren’t so many men at home all day; they are in government, in the army, in the town, outside Ladakh.” Nothing had changed and yet everything had. We have an impasse. As Anchuk asks, “What do we do now?”

Ane was as much a mother as an older sister to Anchuk. She had always worked hard but as the efforts of older brothers and sisters yielded dividends for the younger in the form of education, the latter began to leave and *Ane* was left doing the work of a younger woman despite being in her seventies. In some ways, Tangpo approximates the old picture of a *khangun*, with an ageing woman looking after two ageing brothers, one already retired.

Ane too insists that nothing has changed but it is hard work: “Everyone has left and so there’s just work and no help”. “I am *chikpo* (alone)”, she tells me. I remembered conversations from the 1980s in which this term, applied to my own situation, connoted a sense of loneliness and often anxiety. Here too is an impasse: how can the house continue with only a single generation at home? Who will do the work; who will look after *Ane*; who will keep the house alive?

In *Ane*’s case, there is a glimmer of hope. She has a nephew, Tashi, grandson to the house I knew in the 1980s. Tashi belonged to a generation that returned to Leh in the 2000s after their education only to find that there were no jobs. Unlike older men and women who had been educated ‘abroad’, although in smaller numbers, they could not move into public service and wondered if they were doomed to become a lost generation and perhaps also a generation in exile. Tashi’s work in 2005 was precarious but he insisted, “I will marry soon, everyone keeps saying [so]. But it is difficult to marry without a job and it will be impossible to stay in Ladakh unless I get one.” Here is our third impasse.

2010

By 2010, Tashi had a good job and a wife. He expostulated, “How could I have moved out and left *Ane* alone?” “Anyway”, he repeated a comment I had heard before, “it’s expensive to build a house.” *Ane* no longer complains about being alone and Tashi’s wife does all the work. The daughter-in-law, still something of a stranger, often goes back to her own home. Later though (2013), with two children, it looks as though she will stay and her husband diplomatically acknowledges: “Yes, it is very difficult to go and join another house; that’s why I work with her all the time.” It seemed that Tashi joined his wife morning and evening to work in the house and fields.

The house is reanimated. What Tashi tells me shows that it was not just his living but also his dead relatives who called him. Indeed, it was not just people but the fabric of the house and its objects that summoned him. For example, as we looked through my old photographs one day and came across a picture of *Meme* spinning a prayer wheel in the winter sun outside the house, Tashi says that his grandfather turns his prayer wheel through him today. It was not until I saw the wheel in use that I wondered whether Tashi was in fact anticipating his own future life, for it was always the two ‘fathers’ of the house who turned the wheel. Perhaps I was being told what will be, what will come about as one generation replaces another (Figure 2). I was reminded of the phrase that Virginia Woolf recorded of Katherine Mansfield’s lyric writing, for the house like the narrative seemed to seek a ‘merging into things’ (Diary Entry. 25 August 1920) that transcends or freezes durational time; the line of the house is not just a succession from one generation to the next but also a merging of one into another.¹²

And what of all the village affairs that troubled Anchuk? I realized that a troubling moment had passed even though it was not clear to me what had changed. Tashi explained the obvious, “Whoever does the work, they are the owner. Before, the *khangchen* made all the donations, they worked at the monasteries. They provided labour dues. They did all the village jobs. That’s why the land stayed with them.” Tashi was in fact referring to specific, highly elaborated, valued and visible forms of labour calculated most commonly in relation to affairs of the village or village section, which construct and reaffirm the formal equivalence of named units called *tronpa* (household) or *khangchen* (main house). He was not thinking of the systematic siphoning off of *khangun* labour towards the *khangchen* or of domestic labour in general. He continued, “Now that the *khangun* have agreed to take part, we are all the same. Maybe there are four or five old-style *khangun*, with a retired couple, that won’t last - but the rest of us are the same.”¹³ Certainly, some people had joyfully embraced the independence of *khangun* life in the 1980s and before,

including unmarried sisters known as ‘lay’ nuns, but *khangun* life was also likely to entail domestic service. Although all who share the name belong to a single unit, those who lived in the small house also worked *for* the main house, and joined its rituals under the protection of its gods. Access to land and the means of production from the *khangchen* required a return of all you had, that is, your labour. While a senior, ‘retired’ generation in the *khangun* rarely laboured unduly, the nun was seen as a household drudge and her abject figure stood for the iniquities of this internal household organization in some accounts. No longer, as Tashi emphasised, was this the case.



Fig. 2. *Meme*'s prayer wheel (top, 1982; bottom, 2013). Photos: Sophie Day.

Tashi was engaged in the process of retelling one of the many stories about land redistribution. The relevant clearance had occurred before my 2005 visit but only turned out to have resolved the village impasse in retrospect. I paraphrase the key point:

For a long while the people of Leh felt that everything was going to incomers. The pasture land on the backside of Tsemo was not being used and it was this land that was distributed to the people of Leh (Figure 3). The government (by now an autonomous hill council) had to do something. So they took the pasture behind the castle at the top of Leh and gave it to all Leh people. This was for the whole of Leh, because the land belonged to Leh people. Everyone in Leh got a plot but it was allocated only to full houses. For us here, we were able then to insist. We *khangchen* told the *khangun* that they couldn't possibly join the land redistribution without also joining the village work: 'If you want the land, you have to do some work and become members of the village'. This is when the *khangun* and *khangchen* both really became *khangpa* ('houses'). That's how the *khangchen* got the *khangun* to take on village responsibilities ...

For those who knew *khangun* as the underprivileged and overworked servants or surplus of the main house, if not the hovels dismissed by Ramsay (1890: 63), this seems an odd reversal. The mid-20th century developments that I have described had uneven and varying purchase on practices that preserved the unity of the house but, together with the loss of agriculture and the growth of employment, you could carry on building without ever knowing if you had divided your house. Educated younger brothers or grandsons therefore enjoyed the opportunities in-between, part of the village but with no responsibilities to it, part of the household at least in name but unavailable for household work, generally agreeable to paying cash for the lesser amounts of labour now required to cultivate vegetables and the odd field of barley. This and other accounts suggested that traditional roles had been inverted: small houses had come to seem parasitic growths, proliferating rather than dying out, while big houses held the overburdened workers, on the verge of extinction as they were abandoned by each younger sibling in turn.

It will be apparent that Anchuk did not speak as a member of the *khangun* that he might have been considered to occupy. Everyone referred to his home as a *khangun*, attaching his personal name to the house name, Tangpe Anchuk. Just as *Ane* embodied the old *khangun* style in the main house that she kept

going so did Anchuk act as though he were head of an old style *khangchen*, albeit one of the modernizing elite able to liaise with officials and solve technical problems. He did not identify with the picture that he himself had painted of offshoots abandoning their parent houses and taking all they needed with them. To the contrary, he spoke of the work he performed for the village. The impasse therefore is more complex than I have indicated.

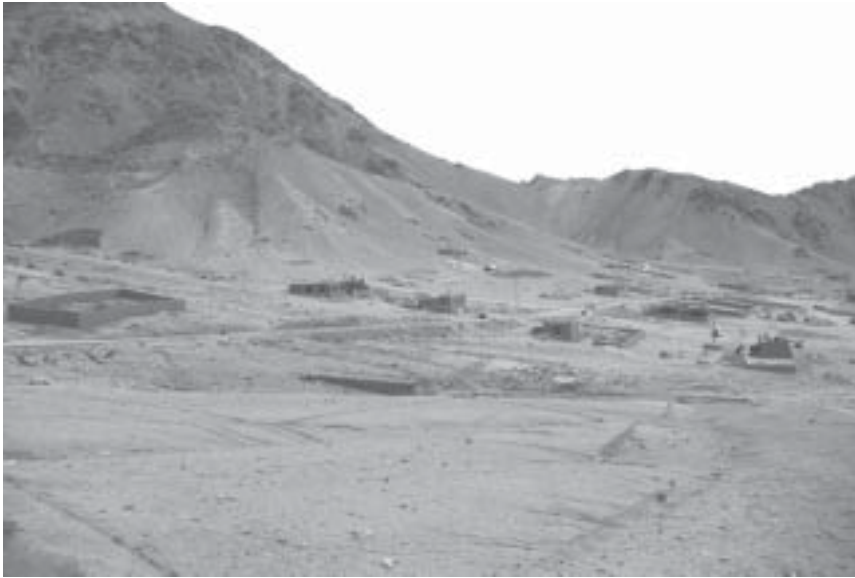


Fig. 3. The new plots behind Tsemo. Photo: Sophie Day.

Anchuk's move suggests initially an upward mobility as well as geographical separation. Everyone can marry now and, by and large, the marriage of a younger brother or occasionally a sister will lead to a new house with one or two fields. Elsewhere, comparable 'small houses' have been associated both with upward and downward social mobility.¹⁴ If the new-style *khangun* contained the more educated who were privileged as far as employment in the city and government was concerned, they have neither been reincorporated into the traditional household nor have they become a separate social stratum. It seemed to me that Anchuk felt stuck between, neither *khangchen* nor *khangun*. His position, I suggest, was associated with the encroaching city that threatened to absorb the village and all its apparent traditions. Neither *khangchen* nor *khangun* could exist independently of the village and, in Anchuk's eyes, it was this village that would guarantee the new-style houses too. The recent equivalence asserted between old *khangchen* and old *khangun* thus allowed workloads to be recalibrated within the village as a whole. And it also gave Anchuk his rightful

place among equals instead of the anomalous position he had occupied in between an ill-fitting ‘model’ of the small house that he had built and a more fitting status in the big house, which he had left.

All three problems I have described had receded from view in 2010, all of apparently little interest. Still I hear, ‘everything is the same’, ‘nothing has changed’. Anchuk’s father used to say to me in the early 1980s, just like his children, that everything was the same but he too had worked hard all his life. In *Meme*’s stories about the period before Independence, everyone was poor and everyone in debt. I was told they all owed a lot up the valley even though there was less debt in this village than elsewhere. *Meme* said, “We had to give free labour those six months, borrowing grain at 25% interest in the spring for repaying in the autumn”. “Now”, *Meme* said, “very few people are in debt or, if they are, it is just for a short period.” With further questioning, it turned out that there may have been 30 houses in those days. Assuming that the named units were much as they are now, there can have been only very few *khangun*. As Prince Peter and others have suggested of the 1930s, poverty had probably led to a decline in *khangun* formation since parents could not afford to move out in their old age (Prince Peter 1963).¹⁵

Fig. 4. Resident population of the village, 1982-2010

Population: 38 % ↑ (c. 290 to 400 residents) with extensive in-marriage	
1982: 55 units	28 <i>khangchen</i> 26 <i>khangun</i> (attached to 17 <i>tronpa</i> , housing approx. 76 people 1 <i>khangpa</i>
2010: 79 units	all are <i>khangpa</i> : 8 are similar to the old-style- <i>khangun</i>

Once more, it seems, ‘nothing has changed’ despite the evident differences across these three generations spanning nigh on a century. In the 1980s, we asked each other, Ladakhis and visitors alike: will the numbers of *khangun* continue to increase; will they come to look more like *khangchen*; will they split off from the household altogether; and how will these developments compare across the different regions (Figure 4)? I wonder if much the same was asked in *Meme*’s day as in my notional 2005, and whether we have an answer now. Will Anchuk’s children repeat the refrain in a few years’ time?

House and household in Ladakh

All three difficulties in this one illustration will be familiar to Ladakhis and others who know Ladakh. They speak to relations of gender and generation as well as the house. Thus, *Ane's* position at home working and waiting is more common and more arduous further away from the urban centres, and it evokes the sense of being alone attached to a range of femininities. It can haunt a life, returning at key moments, as the following account suggests:

Do you know what *ache* (elder sister) used to say to her mother before she died? Grandmother had forgotten her present life. She could only remember how, when she was young, she always used to try to run home. That is, as a new wife, she was homesick and wanted to go back home. Now an old woman, this is all she remembered and she would keep leaving and trying to run home. *Ache* used to tell her that the police would come and get her. [We had been talking about agitations in the town and it was in relation to arbitrary policing in times of trouble that I was told this story.] That's how *Ache* kept her at home. Then she wouldn't go out at all. It was very bad; it was very sad.

The laments on leaving home at the time of marriage and the contrast with a (different) servitude experienced by single women—who cut their hair and retired either to the offshoot house or to a nunnery where they undertook comparable work for monasteries—have been explored sensitively (for example, Aggarwal 2004, Gutschow 2009). *Ane* had not married or cut her hair but her complaints can be situated within the wider set of women's laments insofar as she too was figured in terms of a 'lonely' domesticity and interiority.

The ennui of waiting for the next generation to return is likewise reported widely through the eyes of those who may or may not come back. Young Ladakhis, educated elsewhere, say they do not know how to fit in and cannot find jobs; perhaps, they remark, they will decide for now to simply stay away. I was visiting a young woman of Tashi's generation during this five-year window in Delhi (Figure 5), where she was determined to stay. She came from the Leh area. This young woman told me, "Usually, the house goes to the one who stays so probably I will only get a 'field'. I won't go back there to live, I never really lived there." She explained that the generation above her had returned and found jobs, especially in government, but her own and younger generations would not have that opportunity. They did not want to marry Ladakhis either, she added, before concluding, "I won't go back, it's too small, boring and hypocritical. You know, even in Delhi, young Ladakhis tease each other, 'we'll report you to ... [one of the more conservative local religious associations]'."

Soon afterwards, I learned, she returned to marry in Leh where she now lives with her young child. Houses are produced through such generational interactions and, in turn, pace and fashion generational cohorts. As this encounter indicates, I learned of estrangement from a Ladakh peopled by seniors followed by gradual accommodation, across caesurae and ruptures as well as mutual incomprehension, easing into everyday life and practice whence such experiences will most likely become embodied, passed on, considered a part of skill or knowledge and normal generational time.



Fig. 5. Delhi lodgings. Photo: Sophie Day.

The confusion between houses and households is also a widespread development that is told and felt in different ways. Often, it is described in terms of the difficulties of naming: what is Anchuk's house called? In another village, further from Leh, a friend of mine described a newly completed house as a *khangun* but then she paused and said, "I am not sure what it is. I am not even sure which section of the village it occupies." She generalized for my benefit, "What is [my *khangun*] called? And what if my child takes another share, what then? Nowadays we have to call the house by a person's name and that's how we lose our identity." I ask, 'what identity?' She refers to the identity of the house and of the family, which I understood to refer especially to the way in which this name joins one generation to the next and people to gods, animals, fields and much else.

A companion to our discussion explained that there will be so many divisions even in the unit that counts as the *khangun* that there will be a different name every generation: "Say you have a fight and you don't get along, you would

start to call yourself something else and just divide. Earlier it was simple as it was always possible to keep to just one *khangchen* and one *khangun*... Now there are so many divisions: which is the *khangchen*; who is the *khangun*?" We agree that it is hard to know and my friend adds, "Now we identify a house like this ... we use the name of the land", and she gives examples from her village using the names of fields and landmarks.

She does not like this new nomenclature and cannot imagine how houses will be named in the future. But, as I knew from working with her and others in the village, a good many houses had been established within living memory and what initially circulated as a person's name or the name of his land soon settled into just another house-name joining the carpenter's house, the Muslim house, the weaver, the one by the water and so forth. While these new house names were not initially histories in the way of others (some names carry higher or lower status from the historical division of labour and associated stories), they seem to be naturalised (Harris 1981) readily within a generation and carry no long-term status implications.

It was the fragmentation and dismemberment of the house that preoccupied my interlocutors: names are supposed to last and they cannot be divided. While you can qualify a house name once by adding a personal name as a suffix, you cannot do it twice or three times. At what point, I was asked, do you lose the 'real' name that you used to carry and which carries you? The two women indicated both the chaos that results from attempts to divide property, as brothers argue about the (non-) equivalence of different fields, and the anomie that results from the mere thought of losing the name. Household members detach from their house name every generation but these two women were contemplating a more general disruption to an order of names that makes and holds persons along with most of what they do. They drew a picture of a distinctively dystopian future in which it would be impossible to place anyone, themselves or others, because house names are supposed to fashion and convey a stable, lasting and even 'timeless' series of social identities and positions.

Discussion

What might it mean to take seriously the manner in which Anchuk, Tashi and Ane approached their problems in much the same way and as much the same sort of—enduring—dilemma? As I have laboured to show, they and also *Meme* agreed that the more things change the more they stay the same. I am reluctant in consequence to differentiate these issues along an axis of life as normal or continuity of a sort and one of historical change that documents the emergence of equivalent houses out of internally differentiated households.

The Ladakhi *tronpa* has proved a capacious and a flexible form, which can be stretched from ancestral home in the village and its local offshoots to encompass urban residences, reproductive units under younger brothers and, at times, other family, even reaching to include dwellings outside Ladakh that provide respite for all those (including non-humans) who come and go. In the past, several brothers and sisters might have belonged to a house in which they resided only sporadically. Younger generations left to trade, fulfil their labour obligations to political authorities, join religious communities, and seek adventures including, previously as today, education. In 1980, for example, we were engrossed by the way that houses were also made up of short-distance trading and subsistence production across different ecological niches, and memories of the long-distance routes across Central and parts of South Asia with which they intersected.

Similarly, religious communities have been considered to encompass households and vice versa (Mills 2000). It has often been noted that Buddhist houses also enact magnificently the world as a whole; they entice gods from above as well as ‘water spirits’ (*lu*; *klu*) from below and accommodate various worrying creatures who live among people, the three realms joined by a central pillar. Activities are geared to the distribution of animals and stores below, domestic life in the middle and religious practices on or towards the roof. In relation to this enactment, the Buddhist house is fortified: doors, windows and outer walls are adorned and surrounded with protective devices that have focused attention on the difficulties of exchange. How, for example, is a marriage partner to leave one house and enter another, with a new name and a new protective deity: how to cross the threshold; how to stay well? Lévi-Strauss’s house society similarly foregrounds the difficulties of exchange (alliance) and the tension with principles of filiation.

Yet, the edges to a house are not simply barriers; they facilitate connections in both directions. Simmel described the person as ‘the bordering creature’ (1997: 174), where borders both separate and connect. The banks of a river, for example, must be conceived as separate in order to connect them by means of a bridge, while doors create an interface that is approached quite differently from the outside than the inside:

Given the fact that the door creates a sort of hinge ... it overcomes the separation between inside and outside. The wall is mute. But the door speaks. It is essential to man in the deepest sense, placing a limit on himself, but with the freedom to take it away again, of being able to go outside it. (Simmel 1997: 174)

Limits are also possibilities. Furthermore, doors create different boundaries at one and the same time as they control flows in and out of the house: within the individual, between full, half or partial members of a community who have differentiated rights and duties, towards other equal, bounded units and also towards the boundary-less, that is, towards the possibility of what Simmel called permanent interchange (Simmel 1971).¹⁶ Metaphors of bridging, separating and allowing focus our attention on the regulation and calibration of flows.

Lévi-Strauss's agent or moral person thus has a door or hinge whose interior and exterior are constituted by closure. This social boundary can also be understood as a fold, marking the interiority of the house. Considering the baroque and specifically, the relations between an exterior façade and the interior of a house, Deleuze (1993) attends to the repetition and differences created through folding, which creates sides that are both the same and different, and in tension as each fold extends into the other. Folding makes the interiority of the person as well as the house and Massumi (2002) draws on Deleuze in a way that speaks to the difficulties of naming today in Ladakh. Unfolding can flatten a subject and empty out a lively interior life, he suggests, leaving only a container of something fixed and premised upon continuity over time from which subjectivity has been evacuated. *Khangchen* and *khangun* more often hold nuclear families for longer periods of time today but this process of emptying the house attracts far less concern than the potential 'flattening' of the person that Ladakhis anticipate as new house forms evolve still further and threaten to lose the capacity to carry their previous names.

The idiom of folding and unfolding indicates even more strongly than references to the threshold, door and hinge that apparently discrete scales might not be distinct at all but contained within each other. The house, therefore, can be applied at different levels representing different groups, relations and connections. The difference between polities, between valley and plateau, and between kin and affine can all be folded within the walls of a house. Moreover, in this particular story, the house finds a conditional limit in the village. The German *Grenze* (boundary, barrier, border) provides a sense of movement in Simmel's accounts towards a limit, beyond which "lies the risk of death or loss of identity" (Kemple 2007: 3). And, it is in relation to the 'village-house' that the 'house-parts' are able to redraw their own boundaries without losing identity or 'risking death'. For, to return to Lévi-Strauss's topological language, the process of turning inside out and rearranging the constituent parts of the village (themselves previous 'wholes' made up of several house 'parts') is held by the "28" who move together as a set or

neighbourhood. As my references to topology imply, the house is not best represented as a ‘larger-scale’ person or aggregate of people, nor is it a ‘smaller-scale’ village. It is a provisional form or entity with an integral set of relations, different aspects of which become more prominent or, to the contrary, hidden from view in circumstances such as those I have described.¹⁷

In the 1980s, involution occurred in the household: in 1982, one *tronpa* boasted as many as five *khangun*, but now involution is occurring in the village.¹⁸ As households have turned inside out or flattened themselves into simple ‘houses’ (*khangpa*), the village has come to accommodate more than 70 units in place of the 30 identified by *Meme* some time before Independence, distributed still across 28 names. All now are simply houses and, soon, it is likely that questions will be asked about the shape, scope and resilience of the village rather than of households, as the neighbourhood expands behind the town. But, for the time being and in the context of this particular story, the village provides a resting point for the house. Its own configuration or form is, of course, redrawn at the same time.

As Tim Ingold noted of a medieval reader or ‘follower of tradition’:

Derived from the Latin *tradere*, ‘to hand over’, tradition meant something rather different from what it is commonly taken for today. ... The word was [rather] used to signify an activity or performance, thanks to which it was possible—relay fashion—to *carry on*. (2013: 741, italics in original).

Each creature, he adds in reference to Boria Sax’s (2001) survey of animals, “*is its story, its tradition, and to follow it is at once to perform an act of remembrance and to move on.*” (ibid.) A recent survey of scholarship on Ladakh contrasts the literature today, “*resolutely contemporary and political in nature*”, with “*early scholarship*,” (seemingly, circa 1975-1995) which “*appeared in the form of intense and predominantly apolitical monographs*” (Demenge et al. 2013: 7-8). I have explored idioms of the house, continuity and change and, by implication, asked about the grounds on which we might consider houses in the Leh area, along with their families, property regimes, cultivation, commuting practices and the like any less political than other forms of bordering such as that between nation states or categories of citizen. More importantly, can one such practice be understood independently of others? Somehow, Anchuk has managed to claim two plots in Leh, which he will keep for his children. What will their houses be called? If I had visited this village first in 2010 rather than 1980, what would I have learned about the 28 named units that comprise the settlement?

Notes

1. I would like to thank my friends in Ladakh, especially ‘Tangpo’ House, for their kindness and patience as well as participants in the Heidelberg International Association for Ladakh Studies (IALS) conference in 2013 and the editors of this issue. In addition, I acknowledge support from Intel Research for a collaborative project on numbering (2011-2014) and the British Academy for a project on images in Ladakh (SG 54354, 2009-2011).
2. Where appropriate, the Tibetan spelling is added to a phonetic or conventional rendering of the Ladakhi.
3. Goldstein’s (1971) monomarital principle.
4. Many relevant accounts have been published in the pages of this journal, frequently in comparative perspective. For contemporary Ladakh, see contributions to the International Association for Ladakh Studies’ *Recent Research on Ladakh* series (see www.ladakhstudies.org) and monographs such as: Aggarwal (2004), Ahmed (2000), Crook and Osmaston eds (1994), Dollfus (1989), Grimshaw (1992), Goldstein and Tserong (1985), Gutchow (2004), Srinivas (1998).
5. For an early example, see Goldstein (1981).
6. ‘Personne morale’ is translated as ‘corporate body’; however, I also use the translation, ‘moral person’.
7. Among other accounts since the 1980s: see da Col (2012), Mills (2000, 2005, 2006), Samuel (1993).
8. There is a tendency towards a functional and evolutionary argument in his subsequent work (1987), suggesting that the house sits somewhere between elementary and complex structures. See further the very helpful synthesis and commentary from Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) as well as individual contributions to the collection, which ask for example about Lévi-Strauss’s assumptions of hierarchy, equally pertinent to the Ladakhi Buddhist smallholding.
9. See also Leach’s (1961) comments on ‘the geometry of elastic rubber sheeting’ where shape, size or distance are less significant than what holds ‘things’ (variables) together, that is, how they are connected or related.
10. Quotations are not literal as they are taken from my notes. Anchuk used *khangpa* for house but the terms *tronpa* and *khangchen* interchangeably for what I have translated as ‘household’. A household (*tronpa*) has only one big house (*khangchen*).
11. Unusually, they had divided the one house into two, with two front doors, one of which was later removed.
12. “I said how my own character seemed to cut out a shape like a shadow in front of me. This she understood (I give it as an example of her

understanding) & proved it by telling me that she thought this bad: one ought to merge [into things].” (Woolf 1980:61)

This reminder is clearly evoked by local idioms of re/incarnation, including those associated specifically with the house such as the young children, dead before their time, who are buried in its walls, anticipating (so some say) an early rebirth.

13. We found that there were eight small houses inhabited by elderly relatives when we checked more carefully.
14. See, for example, Jahoda’s careful analysis of historical records on upward mobility in Spiti (2008), and a wealth of material on Tibet and North-West Nepal relating to downward mobility including: Aziz 1978; Goldstein 1978; Levine 1988.
15. Ngawang Tsering Shakspo notes more recently that younger brothers who had married separately used to encounter difficulties feeding their wives and children (1988:34 cited in Phylactou, n.d.).
16. “Every single determinate boundary can be stepped over, every enclosure can be blasted, and every such act, of course, creates a new boundary...” (ibid: 354) “But since its further flowing is not to be stopped... there arises the idea that life pushes out ... [and sets] its limits by reaching out beyond them, that is, beyond itself” (ibid: 363-4).
17. I should perhaps emphasize that this concluding discussion departs from local terms and representations although I hope that the analysis extends rather than cuts short the preceding account.
18. “Folding-unfolding no longer simply means tension-release, contraction-dilation, but *enveloping-developing, involution-evolution...*” (Deleuze 1993: 19, my italics).

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