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Excavating the Imagination: Dreaming and reverie among
Yolmo-Nepali Buddhists in New York City

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Anthropology

by

Aidan Seale-Feldman

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Excavating the Imagination: Dreaming and reverie among
Yolmo-Nepali Buddhists in New York City

by

Aidan Seale-Feldman

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Christopher J. Throop, Chair

What is the anthropology of imagination and how can we understand imaginative experience? Anthropology has long focused on the readily observable, the visible, and the present, yet the experience of everyday life is also shaped by private thoughts, imaginings, dreams and daydreams. This paper is an experiment in approaching such affective faculties. Drawing on fieldwork conducted with Yolmo-Nepali colleagues in Queens, New York between 2009-2011, I explore some of the imaginative experiences of migrants as they relate to and illuminate complex existential circumstances brought about by social, economic, and political forces. By attending to experiences such as dreaming, daydreaming, and the relationship between the actual and the virtual, I aim to gain a better understanding of the role of imagining in the everyday lives of Yolmo migrants. In

doing so I hope to identify the limits, as well as potential openings that an attention towards the imagination entails in the context of anthropological research.

The thesis of Aidan Seale-Feldman is approved.

Elinor Ochs

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2012

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Excavating the Imagination: Dreaming and reverie among Yolmo-Nepali Buddhists in New York City

Aidan Seale-Feldman, UCLA

No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine. Islands, waters, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit. Till all white in the whiteness the rotunda. No way in, go in, measure.

–Samuel Beckett, “Imagination Dead Imagine”

A Photograph

Once during a trip to Queens, a Yolmo-Nepali man who I will call Mingmar shared a small, wallet-sized photograph of himself with his wife and young son.¹ The three stand in front of a bright white backdrop. They are dressed in traditional *chuba*, Tibetan style garments of silk. Mingmar stands tall with a serious expression, his eyes looking directly into the camera. Slightly in front of him his wife holds their smiling boy in her arms. What is remarkable about the image is that at the time Mingmar had not yet met his son, who had been born while he was living in New York on a single entry visa and could not return home. In this way the photograph is an amalgam, a Photoshopped merging of two portraits taken on separate occasions: Mingmar in one, his wife and son in the other. Photographs generally function as documents of the past, yet Mingmar’s photo is a document of the future, a depiction of his family as it has not yet been.

¹ All names appearing in this paper are pseudonyms.

Mingmar showed this photo to me in passing, quickly slipping it out of his wallet while talking about his wife and son. It seemed to be normal to him to have such a photo; and I didn't make much of the image upon first seeing it, only writing of it briefly in my field notes later that night, in which I jotted down the following:

Mingmar—his wife was 6 months pregnant when he came here. And he has still never met his son, Sangye. He showed me a photo of him and his wife and child; they are all in traditional dress. He later says that the photo has been Photoshopped, because they have never all been together. The photographer inserted Mingmar's wife and child into the picture. (Autumn, 2009)

The image carries the possibility of an actuality, which takes the form of the imagined family. Buddhist visualizations of deities in tantric practices reverberate in this act of seeing, connection, and realization. The photograph stands out as a powerful marker of the experience of separation, a way of coping with absence and attachment, while existing between cultural and social worlds.

In Mingmar's photograph the image manages to capture the essence of a family that has not yet been a family together. This image is a site of interaction between the actual and the virtual, which in turn enables the family to come into being, together, in the present moment. The tension between the world as it is and the world as we would like it to be is what enables this image to exist; the imagining of togetherness made possible by the image, fills the gap left by absence. Past, present, and future collide in this photograph, this artifact of the virtual. The image is an example of what Vincent Crapanzano has described as the "the paradoxical ways in which the irreality of the imaginary impresses the real on reality and the real of reality compels the irreality of the imaginary" (2004:15) To an observer a sense of the *unheimlich*, the uncanny, may arise

in this image in which, as Freud writes, “the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred.” (2003: 150)

I am interested in the imagination; in the relation between the real and the virtual; in dreams and daydreams; in hope, desire, and longing and the ways such forces are woven into ordinary moments. I am interested in gathering artifacts of the imagination—photographs, dream and daydream narratives, poems, drawings, stories, and charting the lines of flight of a wandering mind. Confronted with a wallet-size family snap shot, I was given cause to stop and rethink the potential importance of the imagination for people as they live their lives, try to make sense of their experiences, and perhaps just struggle to get by, to “*keep going*,” in the midst of circumstances beyond their control. (Zigon 2007; Badiou 2001) Our ability to imagine— to hope, dream, desire, to project what is not yet, and to re-imagine what was or what could have been – is part of what it means to be human. Further consideration of imaginative experience has also given rise to classic anthropological questions regarding the extent to which such experiences may be textured by shared cultural, historical, and discursive traditions.

Between 2009-2011, I conducted fieldwork (off and on) on the everyday lived experience of migration among Yolmo-Nepali people living in Queens, New York. The opportunity to work with this group was made possible by Robert Desjarlais, who has worked extensively with Yolmo people in Nepal for over two decades. Yolmo wa (Yolmo people) are a Tibeto-Burman speaking Buddhist group, originally from the east-central region of the Himalayan foothills of Nepal. While circular migration both within Nepal as well as to Burma, Sikkim, Bhutan, and parts of eastern India has been part of Yolmo life at least since the 1950’s (Bishop 1998), for the past 20 years Yolmo people

have begun to migrate from the villages in the Yolmo region down to the Kathmandu valley and, increasingly, out of Nepal to Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Dubai, Malaysia, Canada and the United States, with or without the intention to return. The Yolmo community that has today settled in the Sunnyside neighborhood of Queens, New York is the first generation to come to the United States, a diaspora largely motivated by incredible political and economic instability in Nepal involving a decade-long civil war led by the Maoist Communist Party, the massacre of the entire Nepalese royal family by Prince Dipendra in 2001, and the continuing struggle to transition from monarchy rulership to a democratic political system. This is the backdrop of the migration process that I here explore phenomenologically, attending to the everyday lived experience of Yolmo wa in New York City.

Phenomenological anthropology entails a distinct methodological approach. Such an approach draws from the foundational philosophical work of Edmund Husserl, as well as Martin Heidegger, Alfred Schutz, Maurice Merleau-Ponty among others. Most central to phenomenology is the Husserlian concept of “phenomenological modification,” the way in which “social actors come to take on differing attitudes that evidence more or less reflective or engaged stances when relating to objects of experience, be those objects deemed to be of the mind or of the world.” (Desjarlais and Throop 2011: 88) Through a “bracketing” of the “natural attitude,” a social actor works to suspend her prior taken for granted assumptions about the nature of reality, in order to get to the essence of the object in question. (Husserl 1983; Desjarlais and Throop 2011) As Alesandro Duranti has noted,

Husserl's notion of the "natural attitude" is similar to what anthropologists understand as the cultural constitution of reality. (Duranti 2010)²

Within anthropology the use of a phenomenological approach has often entailed a focus on "life as lived" as opposed to more theoretically driven analyses. (Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Jackson 1996, 2012) Importantly, Robert Desjarlais has called for what he terms a "critical phenomenology," which in many ways lays out the phenomenological approach that I have been most inspired by. He writes,

A critical phenomenology...can help us not only to describe what people feel, think, or experience but also to grasp how the *processes* of feeling or experiencing come about through multiple, interlocking interactions. Such an approach is phenomenological because it would entail a close, unassuming study of 'phenomena,' of 'things themselves' –how, for instance, people tend to feel in a certain cultural situation. But the approach is also critical in that it tried to go beyond phenomenological description to understand why things are this way: to inquire, for instance, into what we mean by feeling, how it comes about, what it implies, and what broader cultural and political forces are involved. In addition, the phenomenology is a critical one because it tries to take into account the makings of its own perceptions. (Desjarlais 1997: 25)

Or, as Michael Jackson has recently put it,

Rather than speak of stable and identifiable entities—whether these be personalities, innate dispositions, cultures, religions, or historical periods—we prefer to deconstruct such categories, exploring the mutable and multifarious character of our actual being-in-the-world, and suspending all assumptions as to the epistemological truth of the descriptive labels we deploy in creating the illusions that the world can be subject to our knowledge and control. Our focus is the human struggle for being—the ongoing, resourceful, and various ways in which we work, alone and together, to affirm life in the face of death, salvage life in the face of adversity, and make life fulfilling rather than empty of meaning. (Jackson 2012: 173)

² For an extensive overview of phenomenological approaches in anthropology, see Desjarlais and Throop (2011)

For me, to engage in a phenomenology of migration is to focus on the everyday lived experience of Yolmo migrants as they strive to live their lives in the midst of separation and uncertainty, as social life and family relations are driven into new formations. Such an approach is concerned with “what is at stake” (Kleinman and Kleinman 1991:227) for a particular person in particular times and places.

Migration creates a distinct existential register that is liminal in nature. In the case of Yolmo-Nepali migrants, culturally informed understandings of time, space, and liminality (the *bardo*) shape intensities of waiting, isolation, longing, absence, “lostness,” and familial and personal reintegration. Victor Turner (and Arnold VanGennep before him), discussed liminality in the context of rites of passage. For Turner, the experience of liminality is necessarily bound on either side by a dialectical oppositions of past and future, high and low, structure and anti-structure. The liminal phase is a dangerous passage filled with energy, creative power, and potential, and marked by ambiguity, and uncertainty. (Turner 1969) The latin root of the word *limen* means threshold, indexing the realm of the in-between. In the context of Yolmo Buddhists, the concept of the *bardo* is a culturally shared understanding of the between.

In Tibetan, the word *bardo* means “between two,” and it is used to describe any intermediate period—the moments between sleep and waking, the time between death and rebirth, or even a pause between words. Although used across a number of contexts, the *bardo* between death and rebirth is the archetypal meaning of *bardo* for Yolmo Buddhists. Described as a time of powerfully disorientating sensations, uncertainty,

ambiguity and suspense, the *bardo* is a space filled with “nightmarish images.” As Buddhist teacher Sogyol Rinpoche writes, the *bardo* “creates gaps, spaces in which profound chances and opportunities for transformation are continuously flowering.” (Rinpoche 1993:105) It is during the *bardo* between death and rebirth that enlightenment is possible. Many Yolmo migrants I have spoken with have talked about migration as being a kind of *bardo*. By considering migration as an experience of profound liminality, and attending to such imaginative processes as dreaming, desire, hope, and the relationship between the real and the virtual which take form during this “in-between,” I aim to illuminate some of the fundamental existential and affective aspects of migration that often resist articulation or go unspoken, yet shape everyday lived experience.

The etymology of the verb, “to imagine,” can be traced from the Latin *imaginari*, which means, “to form a mental picture to oneself,” as well as *imago*, which is “to copy or picture.”(OED 2012) Contemporary conceptualizations of the imagination are numerous, making reference to the ability to form mental images, ideas, objects, and situations in the mind; the contemplation of future potentialities; fanciful thinking, which is detached from reality; or, inspired from the Romantics, taken as a synonym for creativity, inventiveness, and artistic brilliance. (OED 2012)

Toward and Anthropology of the Imagination

From an anthropological perspective, the imagination has been conceived of in numerous ways. In what follows, I will outline what I see as four approaches towards the anthropology of the imagination which I have defined as the following: 1) the social imaginary, 2) the imagination as ethnographic object, 3) the anthropology of dreams, and

4) existential and phenomenological engagements with the imagination. What I have parsed into these groups is by no means an exhaustive list, although it serves to give a sense of the diverse ways anthropologists talk about and understand the imagination.

The Social Imaginary

Within the larger sphere of sociocultural anthropology, the notion of “the imaginary” is perhaps best known from the work of Benedict Anderson (1983), Charles Taylor (2002), and Arjun Appadurai (1996) among others.³ Such studies stress the importance of the imagination for the construction of national and political identities, the ways in which ordinary people imagine belonging to a certain community, and the impact of globalization on the social practice of the imagination.

In his widely regarded essay, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” Appadurai argues that:

The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together: the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson’s sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (*imaginaire*), as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations...the image, the imagined, the imaginary, –these are all terms which direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice*. (Appadurai 1996: 4)

Through his framework of global cultural flows (ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes), Appadurai thinks through the ways in which new “imagined worlds” have come into being. Through an examination of media and migration, it is possible to explore “their joint effect on the *work of the imagination* as a

³ For example, Jean and John Comaroff’s *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (1992)

constitutive feature of modern subjectivity... Such media transforms the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds.” (Appadurai 1996:3) For Appadurai, the imagination, as a collective, social phenomenon, inspires migration and social change, and shapes conceptions of self.

In his book, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Charles Taylor, drawing on Anderson, defines his take on the social imaginary. He writes,

By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations. (Taylor 2004: 23)

For Taylor, the social imaginary is tied up with social practices and the development of a “modern moral order.” This new conception of morality was able to come into being through a specifically modern social imaginary, in which people began to imagine new ways of relating to each other, new social expectations, and ultimately a new kind of social existence. (Taylor 2004: 23)⁴

In accord with such insights, the imaginative forces present in the lives of migrants are both individual and social in nature. Such forces take the form of dreams and daydreams, as well as a more mythic form, the social imaginary of the “American Dream.” Many Yolmo people choose to try their luck in the United States because they have a desire to change their life circumstances, because they hope to improve their lives, and because they see the U.S. as a place of opportunity. As a dream of success, the “American Dream” implies that no matter where you began, with enough hard work

⁴ For a discussion of approaches towards the imaginary see Strauss (2006).

prosperity is possible. Below is a conversation I had with two young Yolmo women whom I asked to tell me about what they imagined the U.S. to be before they came.

Dechen: Like it was the movies. Like “Friends.” We used to watch “Friends” right, and it was like oh wow. They don’t show the jobs you do, just like, ah like a good life.

Phurpa: The nice part.

Dechen: We used to imagine America as like a dreamland. But when I came here I was like, ok, it’s the same.

Many Yolmo people I spoke with shared this perspective, and saw the United States in this way; it seems plausible that, as Appadurai has argued, contemporary forms of media such as film, television, and the Internet, play a part in shaping Nepalese conceptions of life in “America.”

The Anthropology of Dreams

In contrast with sociocultural anthropologists, psychological anthropologists who have focused on the imagination have traditionally done so in the context of dreaming. E.B. Tylor, who claimed that “primitive” cultures were not capable of distinguishing between dreams and waking life, was the first to introduce dreams into anthropology. His theory was later refuted by Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, and J.S. Lincoln, who claimed that “primitives” can and do distinguish between dream and reality, but place higher value on dreams. Later Malinowski also turned to the study of erotic dreams in *The Sexual Life of Savages* as part of his use of Freudian psychoanalytic theory in his fieldwork among the Trobrian islanders. (Mittermaier 2011:12) These early approaches towards the anthropology of dreams are deeply problematic for their evolutionary depictions of

cultures as “primitive” and very much reflect the European rationalist celebration of reality over the imaginary.

Much of the influential literature on dreaming emerged from the North American culture and personality school of anthropology, by psychoanalytically inclined scholars such as George Devereaux, Irving Hallowell, and Dorothy Eggan, who were interested in understanding dreams in the context of culture. In his essay “The Role of Dreams in Ojibwa Culture,” Hallowell explores the relation between dreams, individual motivation, and the sociocultural system among the Ojibwa. Even in this early work, Hallowell points to the ways in which the imagination not only shapes one’s experience of the world, but in the case of the Ojibwa, is a powerful force determining one’s very ability to adapt and survive.⁵ Out of this history, additional work on dreams from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective can be found in the work of Gananath Obeyesekere. In his ethnography, *Medusa’s Hair* (1981) Obeyesekere emphasizes the importance of dreams in the individual experience of transformation from layperson to ecstatic priestess among Hindu-Buddhist religious devotees in Sri Lanka. Through dreams, visions, and trance states, devotees receive knowledge of important deities. Obeyesekere turns to Freudian theory to make sense of dreams in the context of illness and healing.

More recently, a psychodynamic take on dreams emphasizing subjectivity, identity, and emotion has emerged. (Mageo 2003) Out of this work, Douglas Hollan’s

⁵ Hallowell writes “The dream fast was the most crucial experience of a man’s life: the personal relations he established with his pawáganak determined a great deal of his destiny as an individual...the role that dreaming played in the sociocultural system of the Ojibwa exemplifies the complex, coordinate, yet variable factors that may become structurally and functionally related in man’s adjustment to a world in which is own imaginative interpretation of it is fed back into his adaptation to it.” (Von Grunebaum et al. 1966: 289)

approach to understanding dreams in relation to individual experience and interpersonal relationships marks an important contribution. Hollan argues that although there exist certain culturally shared dream meanings, it is necessary to also acknowledge the unique singularities and personal uses people may have regarding their dream experiences. Drawing on ethnographic research from the Toraja highlands on Indonesia, he finds that through dream interpretations, “individuals may use cultural ideas and symbols to externalize and project ‘internal’ thoughts and emotions in different ways.” (1989: 182) Ultimately, shared dream beliefs become meaningful only in the context of an individual’s life experience.

Additionally Hollan has written of what he terms “selfscape dreams.” Such dreams are relational in nature, involving “complex, developmentally sensitive imaginal, emotional, and cognitive processes that reflect back to the dreamer how his or her current organization of self relates various parts of itself to itself, its body, and to other people and objects in the world.” (2003: 65) In this work Hollan explores the ways in which dreams can function to fulfill unconscious wishes, work through trauma, integrate new experiences into one’s schema of self, solve problems and represent one’s relationships to family and community. Hollan’s approach addresses the permeability of waking and dream life, bridging the two through his notion of selfscape dreams and “dream residues,” the lingering effects of dreams that coat waking experience. Hollan’s conception of dreams as relational and reflexive is certainly accurate in the context of dreams of Yolmo migrants, who are often under particularly large amounts of pressure during this radical and uncertain shift in their lives.

Imagination as Ethnographic Object

Stefania Pandolfo's *Impasse of the Angels* (1997), Vincent Crapanzano's *Imaginative Horizons* (2004), and Amira Mittermaier's recent ethnography, *Dreams That Matter* (2011), take the imagination as a central object of study. In doing so these works stand apart from discussion of the imagination in the context of dreams or the "social imaginary". All three anthropologists work among Sufi groups in North Africa, where there is a strong cultural idiom surrounding dreams and understandings of the imagination. Additionally, these three texts are the only book-length works in anthropology to date that explicitly take on the imagination as an object of study. As such they serve as foundational contributions in defining the anthropology of the imagination.

In Pandolfo's *Impasse of the Angels*, she reads subjectivity, history, and the imagination through drawings of maps, dream narratives, poems and stories, excavating the shared poetic and historical imagination through which the Subject of the Moroccan qsar society is produced. Pandolfo's engagement with dreams and the concept of the *barzakh*, known as an "intermediate imaginal realm" (9) in Islamic cultures, is perhaps what most clearly places this project in the category of work on the anthropology of the imagination. Using a hermeneutic approach, Pandolfo puts indigenous dream interpretation in dialogue with psychoanalytic theory, as well as her own dream narratives. This approach can be understood as facilitating an encounter between multiple understandings of the dream, exploring the possibility of commensurability between seemingly disparate philosophical, historical, and cultural traditions. Tropes of ruin, loss, and return, course through *Impasse of the Angels*, implying an important connection

between loss and the imagination. In my own work with Yolmo migrants, separation from loved ones is often implicated in dreams and daydreams.

Amira Mittermaier offers a second ethnographic case in which she emphasizes the historical and philosophical traditions out of which specific conceptions of the imagination take form. Studying the social life of dream visions among Sufi communities, Mittermaier traces competing and intersecting notions and conceptualizations of the imagination in the context of contemporary Egypt.

Mittermaier defines her take on the imagination in the following way:

By the terms *imaginary* and *imagination* I refer not to the made-up or to fantasy, but to a broader range of meanings that encompass a variety of spaces, modes of perception, and conceptualizations of the real...an understanding of the imagination that is not anchored in the individual subject but instead refers to an intermediary realm between the spiritual and the material, the Divine and the human, the dreamer and multiple Others, presence and absence. (2010: 3)

Similar to Pandolfo, Mittermaier also sees the imagination as relating to the tension between presence and absence. By understanding the imagination as a mediating force, both Pandolfo and Mittermaier point to the intersubjective aspect of the imagination. Ultimately it is through the practice and discourse of dreams and dream visions that Mittermaier explores what she deems to be a particularly Egyptian form of the imagination. By considering the economic, political, and cultural forces that shape such discourse(s) and practice, Mittermaier emphasizes the social, ethical, and political dimensions of dreaming and imagining.

Vincent Crapanzano's *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology* (2004) is perhaps the most well known anthropological work on the imagination. Although this book grew out of a series of lectures entitled, "Toward an

Anthropology of the Imagination,” here Crapanzano aims to address one specific, and central, facet of imaginative experience— how people orient to “the hinterland, the beyond.” (2004: 2)

My concern is with the role of what lies beyond the horizon, with the possibilities it offers us, with the licit and illicit desires it triggers, the plays of power it suggests, the dread it can cause—the uncertainty, the sense of contingency, of chance— the exaltation, the thrill of the unknown, it can provoke. Imagined, dreamt, projected, calculated, prophesied, so constructed, the beyond always turns on our take on it. (Crapanzano 2004:14)

Mining ethnographic examples of imaginative processes from a wide range of authors, Crapanzano examines how people imagine and limit possibilities that arise in different genres of experience: the body, pain, trauma and transgression; hope and remembrance; death and the afterlife. Throughout the work as a whole there is a consistent striving to illuminate the ways in which people understand the unknown, paying particular attention to gaps and absences, and that which often resists articulation in the flow of experience. “My concern is with openness and closure,” Crapanzano writes, “with the way in which we construct, wittingly or unwittingly, horizons that determine what we experience and how we interpret what we experience.” (2004: 2)

Of the works I have reviewed here, Crapanzano’s efforts towards defining the anthropology of the imagination and engaging in questions regarding individual imaginative experience have most deeply influenced my own thinking on the topic. In particular, Crapanzano’s attention towards the imagination in its everyday, mundane forms is central to my own project on the experience of the imagination among Yolmo migrants. The case for the importance of mundane forms of experience is drawn originally from the work of William James, and Crapanzano works from James in order

to “call attention to that dimension of experience that insofar as it resists articulation, indeed disappears with articulation, has in fact been ignored.” (Crapanzano 2004: 18)

Additionally, Crapanzano attends to the imagination in relation to hope and such associated experiences as “dreams, waking dreams, daydreams...illusion; anticipation, expectation, and possibility; the future; patience and waiting; doubt, fear and joy; revolution, utopia, and apocalypse...salvation, redemption, and...expiation...realism and resignation.” (2004: 100) Hope is intimately tied to desire. In the context of migration, hope in the form of aspiration and desire for a different life shape decisions to leave one’s country of origin and start again elsewhere. In the face of uncertainty and temporary separation from family members, hope in the form of patience and waiting are part of the everyday lived experience of migration.

Existential and Phenomenological Engagements

A fourth approach to the imagination is set apart by its emphasis on the existential dimensions of imaginative experience, and its use of phenomenology to understand the ways in which one’s existential condition shapes and is shaped by what one can and cannot imagine. Steven Parish, for example, considers imaginative experience in the context of illness and suffering. Through the notion of what he terms “possible selves,” Parish explores the imagination as it influences what one can and cannot become.⁶ In his book, *Subjectivity and Suffering in American Culture: Possible Selves*, Parish writes,

What is possible is a trade-off made in the course of living between what people can be and what social and cultural life supports, between what they already are, what they might be, and what they ‘must be’ in an existential context. Thinking of possible selves opens up questions

⁶ Markus and Nurius also have a well-known theory of possible selves, which is developed in their article of the same name. (Markus and Nurius: 1986) Parish, however, uses the concept in different way.

regarding how people mobilize their capacities for experiencing, feeling, and imagining, and deal with personal conflicts and social contradictions as they engage life. (2008: xii)

Parish's emphasis on the relation between the imagination and the human condition is quite compatible with Jonathan Lear's philosophical essay, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (2006). In this work Lear explores the human imagination through a careful examination of the dreams of Plenty Coups, the last chief of the Crow Nation, as he struggles to find a way to lead his tribe in the face of cultural decimation. Through the case of Plenty Coups, Lear argues that, "in the face of such a cultural challenge, dreaming provides an unusual resource. It enables the dreamers to imagine a radically new future without becoming too detailed about what this future will be." (2006: 76). Lear identifies an important quality of imaginative experience, namely its potential to enable us to "keep going," (Zigon 2007; Badiou 2001) if in no other way than by enabling us to imagine vague possibilities in which to place our faith. From this view, the self can be understood as constituted through imaginative experience, as it creates potentials for being and becoming.

Additionally, in his book *Excursions*, Michael Jackson writes of what he calls "Migrant Imaginaries," in the context of Kuranko migrants from Sierra Leone living in London. Here Jackson calls for an understanding of migration by attending to the relation between the external forces that cause migration on the one hand, and the subjective experience of migration on the other. In this piece Jackson argues for the important ways in which imaginative experience can illuminate the existential struggle for being. Here Jackson takes us on a brief excursion into the lived experience of migration, attending to dreams, homesickness, and the daily fears and uncertainties that shape the everyday lives

of migrants. Jackson aims to illuminate both the fleeting, ephemeral experiences of the imagination in the lives of individuals, as well as the larger shifts in the shared Kuranko social imaginary which together play a part in shaping one's existential conditions in the world. Clearly my own project regarding the imagination in the context of migration among Yolmo wa is directly in line with Jackson's work on "migrant imaginaries." His focus on imaginative experience as a way into the existential realities of Kuranko migrants in London in some ways runs parallel to Sigmund Freud's understanding of dreams as "the royal road into the unconscious." (Freud (1955) 2010) In the future it would be generative to more carefully explore the extent to which particular cultural, social, and historical traditions create variations in the ways in which migrants orient towards the unknown, the uncertain, as well as the ways in which such distinct traditions shape or limit what is possible to imagine.

Much of Jackson's theoretical framing of the imagination, in the context of migration and otherwise, seems to be informed by Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy, particularly his early work in which he examines the imagination from an existential-phenomenological perspective. (Sartre 2004) For Sartre, the imagined image of an object is impoverished in comparison to the horizon of indeterminacy of the perceived object,⁷ and in his view imagining that which one desires is ultimately a childish evasion of reality, and a refusal to accept difficult conditions of lack and distance. "Imaging" an absent object thus becomes a way of possessing what one does not have, by way of imaginative processes. At best, such thoughts enable a kind of escape

⁷ Husserl defines "horizon of indeterminacy" as that which one knows is there, even though it may not be fully visually available. For example, when looking at a book resting face up on a table, one knows that there are pages with words printed inside, that there is a back cover etc. even though those aspects of the book are not visible from one's particular stance at that moment. For Sartre, "imaged" objects are impoverished in this sense. See Husserl (1983) and Sartre (2004).

from oppressive conditions; “the evasion which they invite us is not only that which would make us flee our current condition, our concerns, our boredoms; they offer us an escape from all the constraints of the *world*, they seem to be presented as a negation of the condition of *being in the world*, as an anti-world.” (2004: 136) By way of Husserlian phenomenological reduction, Sartre is able to gain access to the existential grounds of the imagination. In this way, Sartre’s work exemplifies an important bridge between existential and phenomenological philosophy.

Phenomenologically informed anthropological and philosophical approaches to the imagination attend to the experience of imagining in its sensorial and embodied forms through Husserlian methods of phenomenological reduction. Knowledge of imaginative processes is gained through self-observation and careful ethnographic research on the experiences of others with the aim of getting at the underlying qualities which define such experiences as they unfold through time. Thomas Csordas’ work on the imagination and healing in the context of charismatic Christianity continues to stand as an important, detailed theoretical engagement with fundamental questions regarding the imaginal self and religious healing. (Csordas 1994) Csordas identifies what he calls the “North American ethnopsychology of mind-body or mental-material relations that presumes all imagery to be ‘mental imagery.’” (1994: 87) Drawing on his research with charismatic Christians, he points out a variety of types of sensory imaginings, which not only take the form of mental images (although these are the most commonly experienced), but also occur as auditory, olfactory, haptic, kinesthetic, affective and motor imaginings. Such imaginative experiences are embodied in the habitus of Charismatics. As Csordas writes, we must,

Grasp both the aptness and the persuasiveness of imagination as a process of the sacred self, a process that impresses itself on Charismatics precisely because it often appears ‘out of the blue.’ It is at once profoundly of the self, but at the same time is experienced as profoundly other, in a way ripe for thematization as the sacred Other acting *within* the self. If, as we have argued, the body is the ground of self as a ‘setting in relation to the world,’ it is also critical that we have described this imaginal self process in terms of embodied imagery. The cultural elaboration of imagery is an engagement of the entire sensorium, and hence a concrete articulation of what Merleau-Ponty (1962) called the ‘bodily synthesis.’ (Csordas 1997: 94)

In order to investigate the differences between ordinary and religious forms of imagining, Csordas draws on the work of philosopher Edward Casey whose book, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study*, remains an important contribution to phenomenological studies of the imagination to date. Here Casey seeks “to pin down [the imagination’s] structures and to discern the differences that distinguish it from other forms of experience.” (1976: xvii) Through thought experiments Casey identifies three sets of traits that define the structure of the imagination: 1) spontaneity and controlledness—by this he means that images arise spontaneously in the mind and can be controlled at any point, 2) self-containedness and self-evidence—the content of the images are self-contained and do not refer to other experiences and as such are self-evident, and 3) indeterminacy and pure possibility—imaginings lack any specifiable form or content, they are indeterminate, and everything that is imagined is posited as purely possible. In *The Sacred Self*, Csordas draws multiple connections between Casey’s structure of the imagination and the imagination as it exists in the world of Charismatics.

Casey’s emphasis on “pure possibility” as a critical part of the structure of the imagination also echoes Crapanzano, Mittermaier, and Parish’s understanding that possibilities for imagining are tied up with culturally informed practices, or as Csordas

puts it, “if the imagination as a generalized capacity of self, or characteristic somatic mode of attention, becomes part of the habitus generated among Charismatics, it is without doubt part of the *same* habitus that includes those generalized dispositions that make up the repertoire of interpretants for revelatory imagery.” (Csordas 1997: 107)

In his ethnography, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Keith Basso also draws on Casey as he links the act of imagining with the act of remembering to explore possible modes of imagining and relating to place among the Western Apache. In the context of Apache culture “images evoked by place-names cause them to travel in their minds.” (1996: 89)

He writes,

A modest body of evidence suggests that place-making involves multiple acts of remembering and imagining which inform each other in complex ways...it is clear, however, that remembering often provides a basis for imagining. What is remembered about a particular place—including, prominently, verbal and visual accounts of what has transpired there—guides and constrains how it will be imagined by delimiting a field of workable possibilities. These possibilities are then exploited by acts of conjecture and speculation which build upon them and go beyond them to create possibilities of a new and original sort, thus producing a fresh and expanded picture of how things might have been. (Basso 1996: 5)

While the imagination is not Basso’s object of interest per se, this mental process plays a critical role in the practice of speaking with names, which is central to the Western Apache’s way of being in the world. Through his research Basso points out that “an effective narrator, people from Ciecuew report, never speaks too much; an effective narrator takes steps to ‘open up thinking,’ thereby encouraging his or her listeners to ‘travel in their minds.’” (1996: 85)

Phenomenological approaches to the imagination such as those put forth by Keith Basso and Thomas Csordas show the ways in which imaginative possibilities take form

in the context of culture, and how such contexts shape and make meaningful particular kinds of imaginative experience. In this sense, their work is very much in line with Crapanzano and Jackson's take on the imagination. Divergently, Csordas' conception of the imagination as part of the habitus and located in the body marks a departure from much of the other works cited in this paper.

From even a brief foray into the literature on the imagination in sociocultural and psychological anthropology, as well as philosophy, it is clear that there is not full agreement on what should be included as imaginative experience, or how the imagination should be approached.⁸ The psychological anthropologists I cite here draw from phenomenological, hermeneutic, psychodynamic and existential traditions, and yield work that is, for the most part, concerned with how people relate to the beyond, and how people imagine or are unable to imagine certain possibilities. From this line of thinking, Crapanzano, Mittermaier, and Pandolfo's attention to the ways in which people orient towards the beyond and the unknown, and Jackson, Parish and Lear's insights into the process by which existential struggles can be articulated through the imagination are certainly compatible orientations towards imaginative experience. I see these works as offering a specific orientation towards the anthropology of imaginative experience in which the imagination can be understood as an intersubjective force, which mediates between absence and presence, self and other, issuing forth conceptualizations of possible futures in ways that deeply impact one's lived experience of the social world.

Such work clearly stands apart from approaches to the "social imaginary," which in many ways is yet another articulation of the difference between the anthropology of individual experience, which is common within psychological anthropology, versus the

⁸ For work on the imagination as a "communicative resource in interaction" see Murphy (2005)

interest in the shared social world, which is the main focus within sociocultural anthropology.

New Directions: Reverie and Virtuality

There are certain important aspects of the imagination that I believe are still missing from this literature. Although dreams are widely discussed, there is little to no acknowledgment of daydreams or reverie states. Pieces by John Borneman (2011) and Crapanzano (2004; 2006) are some of the few anthropological sources in which daydreams and reverie are discussed at any length. In my ethnographic research, such imaginative experiences proved to be important sites where existential tensions and meaningful reflections regarding one's self in relation to others and the world were played out. In psychoanalysis the importance of reverie as inherently intersubjective in nature is widely acknowledged, and reverie— ruminations, fantasies, daydreams, ephemeral perceptions and bodily sensations— is used to advance psychoanalytic progress through what Thomas Ogden has called “the analytic third”. (Ogden 1997)

In *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Basso writes of a form of daydreaming that is unique to the Western Apache. Such daydreaming is part of the practice of speaking with place-names. Basso writes,

Consultants from Cibecue explain that in positioning people's minds to look “forward” in space, a place-name also positions their minds to look “backward” into time. For as persons imagine themselves standing in front of a named site, they may imagine that they are standing in their “ancestors' tracks,” and from this psychological perspective, which is sometimes described as an intense form of “daydreaming,” traditional accounts of ancestral events associated with the site are said to be recalled with singular clarity. (Basso 1996: 89)

In the case of the Western Apache, Basso points to culturally informed modes of daydreaming that are connected to understandings of place and time. Such cultural variation in both the practice and experience of daydreaming indicates the potential for rich anthropological analysis.

In contrast to Basso, in his article “Daydreaming, intimacy, and the intersubjective third in fieldwork encounters in Syria,” (2011) John Borneman uses contemporary Freudian psychoanalytic theory to illuminate the meaning of daydreaming and the complexities of the intersubjective relationship between himself and his interlocutors. Borneman writes in response to the marked absence of anthropological study of daydreams (a lack that is particularly striking when compared to the robust interest in reverie within contemporary psychoanalysis.) As Borneman writes, “for social theorists as well as ethnographers, anthropology’s inattention to daydreaming and states of reverie is particularly unfortunate, as such moments are ubiquitous in fieldwork encounters and key windows into unconscious communication.” (2011: 234)

Borneman follows the transgressive daydreams of a Syrian shopkeeper, engaging with his imaginative experiences as seriously as any other kind of ethnographic data, understanding “daydreams and reverie as knowledge of largely unconscious intersubjective moments that help to contextualize other experience and point to future communicative possibilities.” (Borneman 2011: 248) The daydreams described are erotic in nature, often relating to pornography and sexual desire. Additionally, Borneman makes reference to the possibility of his own “erotic transferences,” a topic not often discussed openly in anthropology (as compared to psychoanalysis where erotic transference is widely discussed and theorized.)

The acknowledgement of the place of desire in the ethnographic encounter is part of Borneman's exploration of daydreams and reverie. He writes, "daydreaming in fieldwork is all about entering into the Other's phantasies, involving a complicated system of unconscious cues and leading to a compromise between what one wants and fulfilling the Other's expectations." (2011: 244) This article shows desire and erotic fantasies to be critical sites of imaginative experience that anthropology should engage in more seriously. Borneman bases his argument off of erotic daydreams, although it is certain that not all daydreams are sexually charged. Also, are daydreams that are remembered retrospectively, and not in the moment of conception still a "window into unconscious communication"? Borneman makes an important case for an attention to daydreams, but it may be that he is too quick to transpose the relationship between analyst and analysand onto that between ethnographer and "informant."

The relation between interior feeling states and ethnographic knowledge is brought to the fore in Jason Throop's article, "Latitudes of Loss" (2010) in which he discusses the possibility of understanding another's experience of pain and loss through one's own life experiences. He writes, "...homologous experiences between individuals may provide important opportunities for empathic insight. One should never forget, however, that they also might forestall them." (2010: 781) By tracing the oscillations between understanding and misunderstanding, Throop demonstrates the ways in which both are central to the challenge of trying to gain knowledge of another's emotional experience through one's own. Throop argues that not only is it through moments of understanding that knowledge of another is produced, but also moments of misunderstanding that we come to know "previously concealed aspects of our own or

another's being" (2010: 781) In this way, although one may never fully understand another's experience, we may be able to come closer by thoughtfully attending to the oscillations between moments of understanding and misunderstanding.

Perhaps it is only in the intersubjective space between insight and oblivion that we can grasp the experience of another. From this perspective it seems impossible to understand another's experience without some form of empathy, some "type of reasoning in which a person emotionally resonates with the experience of another while simultaneously attempting to imaginatively view a situation from that other person's perspective." (Hollan and Throop 2011) It seems that we must necessarily draw on our own life experiences, and through analogy and imagination come to some sort of understanding with and of others.

In his article, "Being There: On the Imaginative Aspects of Understanding Others and Being Understood," Douglas Hollan also writes of the relation between the imagination and empathy from a psychoanalytic perspective. Involving the imagining of another, empathy is an intersubjective process. In this piece, one of Hollan's central questions is: "What enables a person to imagine well and accurately the emotional states and perspectives of another?...is the empathic imagination necessarily shaped by cultural influences?" (2008: 476) Hollan is interested not only in the ability to empathize and imagine another, but also "to know how others imagine or allow themselves to be known and understood." (2008: 487) Working from this line, anthropological understandings of the imagination should also take into consideration the ethnographic imagination, and the ways in which the imagining on the part of the ethnographer is tied up in the production of ethnographic knowledge.

Secondly, effigy-like creations such as Mingmar's Photoshopped family portrait, are a kind of evocative object not discussed within the current anthropological literature on the imagination, which mainly focuses on individual experience as opposed to material representations. Deleuzian ideas regarding the relationship between the actual and the virtual provide critical insights that help to explain the potency of Mingmar's photograph. Virtuality is distinguished by its quality of potentiality; it is fundamentally generative in nature. The virtual is not opposed to reality, but instead, actuality, as the virtual also has the ability to create real effects, despite its immateriality.⁹ In *Becoming Virtual*, Pierre Lévy writes that "the virtual *tends* toward actualization...The tree is virtually present in the seed." (Lévy 1998: 23) In this example, the virtual presence of the tree in the seed is the potential for the seed to become actualized in the world, to become a tree. Or as Brian Massumi writes in *Parables for the Virtual*, "the actual occurs at the point of intersection of the possible, the potential, and the virtual: three modes of thought. The actual is the effect of their momentous meeting, mixing, and re-separation." (Massumi 2002: 136) The ways in which both Lévy and Massumi describe the virtual— as expansive, generative, brimming with potential and enabling the possibility of a becoming— speak to a central aspect of the experience of the imagination that pinpoints its processual nature.

Integrating insights from the aforementioned literature, in what follows I aim explore uncharted connections between imaginative experiences of dreaming, daydreaming, and reverie as they shape everyday lived experience among Yolmo Nepali

⁹ Early discussions of the virtual-actual relationship can be found in *Bergsonism*, and *Difference and Repetition* by Gille Deleuze, although the idea originated with Henri Bergson.

migrants. Most importantly, I am interested in how such forms of imaginings are tied up with emotions emanating from issues of separation and attachment as people struggle to “keep going” (Zigon 2007; Badiou 2001) in the face of uncertainty.

Ethnographic Associations: Dreams and Daydreams

“I dream of getting to my home, my village, Sermathang,” says Mingmar as we drink salt butter tea one afternoon in Queens, NY. “In dreams I am there in the village...the village is so much, so dear to me.” The unstable political and economic situation in Nepal, frequent Maoist uprisings, insecure employment and low wages motivated Mingmar’s decision to leave his job as the director of an NGO in Kathmandu and migrate to the United States where he works as a night cashier at a grocery store in Brooklyn, NY. “There are some advantages of working in the night for me,” he says. “In the late night the business is quite slow and I have a lot of free time. So what I do is during that free time I make a tour of my mind. Sometimes towards the village, sometimes towards my culture, sometimes somewhere else and I gather the information.”

Michael Jackson writes that during reverie “the mind is set free to wander or journey,” (Jackson 2007) and Mingmar’s words indeed echo this act of imaginative wandering. Daydreaming here has become a “line of flight,” (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987) a movement away from the mundane world of work. Longing and homesickness for loved ones and loved places left behind are part of the daily lives of many Yolmo people who have migrated from Nepal to the United States. Such emotions are often reflected in dreams and daydreams.

While recalling the story of a daydream about returning to Nepal to celebrate Losar, the Tibetan New Year, Mingmar shared the following reflection on the shape his life has taken since he came to the United States.

Very often I used to dream of my village and getting myself there. In my dreams I recall my past. How Losar used to be when I was young, when I was in my village. And what the situation is at the present. Everybody is celebrating Losar there but I had to rush to work. During the Losar we get the blessing from our elders, they put butter on our head, and this year I cannot. And like that, I was recalling these things in my mind and I had to catch the 7 train because I needed to go to work. On the 7 train you see a lot of people tired and hung over, and again I found myself thinking of village life, how I used to enjoy the Losar there, just dreaming and imagining all of those things. Life here is just like a machine. We are a living machine. A machine with a living being, a kind of breathing machine. A machine can't do anything. Once the schedule is set, the machine has to go on working.

Daydreaming is constant in the flow of experience. In the space of separation, love and attachment to family and community cause the mind to take flight from its physical surroundings into a world of memories, sentiments, hopes, and desires. In the imaginative act of daydreaming Mingmar thinks of the village life he left behind. Here it is possible to glimpse the ways in which everyday lived experience is shaped by the temporal tension between memories of the past, hopes for the future, and the conditions of the present moment. In this case Mingmar's mind wanders while he rides the subway. He finds himself surrounded by weary passengers. Preoccupied with the Losar celebration, which was then happening in Nepal, Mingmar ruminates on what he is unable to do because of the responsibilities he has to work. Thoughts unfold onto more thoughts, and memories of Losar turn to the nature of machine-like work in his life in the U.S. Such daydreams culminate in a mood of powerlessness, in which he compares himself to a machine.

Moods emerge from imaginative experience and take form as ethnographically meaningful material. Heidegger's discussion of moods points to this in as much as he writes that, "mood makes manifest 'how one is and is coming along'." (Heidegger (1953) 2010: 131) Yet the source of such moods may not always be clear; "mood assails. It comes neither from 'without' nor from 'within,' but rises from being-in-the-world as a mode of that being." (Heidegger (1953) 2010: 133; Throop forthcoming) Working from Heidegger, anthropological attention to moods stands as an important index of one's existential position in the world. Jason Throop has written of this in regards to "moral moods". In his essay, "Mood, Morality, and Experience" Throop writes that "as an intermediary forms of experience, moods also often inhabit an ambivalent existential expanse where the possible, the ideal, and the actual coalesce in rather complicated ways" (Throop forthcoming) As Heidegger argues in his discussion of Da-sein and attunement, "The way we slide over from one to another or slip into bad moods, are by no means nothing ontologically although these phenomena remain unnoticed as what is supposedly the most indifferent and fleeting of Dasein." (Heidegger (1953) 2010: 131) As ephemeral moments of being, "moods entail residues of past experience and subjunctive possibilities for future transformation...being in a mood is being-between, being-in-transition, being-in-motion." (Throop forthcoming)

Kunsang, a middle aged Yolmo-Nepali man, also migrated to New York in hopes of making a new life for his family and providing his children with better opportunities. While doing fieldwork during the Summer of 2012, he spoke to me of a recurring dream that would come to him during the difficult and uncertain three and a half years he waited for his family to join him in the U.S.

Often times, the dream I have dreamt, it has come to me recurrently. It was really...people called it a nightmare. I saw a big landslide in Yolmo region, and then I was there and I was trying to just– it's kind of a funny thing but the landslide went over the whole region and me myself trying to save it from the erosion and being buried. I saw that from time to time, time to time, although I never saw it in Nepal. And then the next day I had to call, you know. And check if everything was ok in the village. It was so strong, the feeling.

Kunsang has said that since leaving Nepal, the meaning and effects of dreams have *multiplied*. Migration causes intensities of longing and anxiety that are expressed in the language of dreams, and meaning is multiplied under circumstances of separation from family, culture, and society. Uncertainty and anxiety about loved ones left behind and the future of Yolmo culture and tradition shape the everyday lives of Yolmo migrants in a tangible, palpable way. The intensity of Kunsang's dream demonstrates both the power of dream imagery and the lasting strength of emotions created by dreams. This is an image of Kunsang's home buried by earth. There is a pervading sense of loss and collapse, as what was once known is now buried. Many in Kunsang's generation have voiced concerns regarding the loss of Yolmo culture and tradition, which could be part of this dream image as well.

This is an emotionally charged, repeating dream; it necessitates a phone call home to his family in Nepal. The phone call is the tangible form of a kind of "dream residue" as Hollan has put it, in which dream content can be seen to shape waking life. (Hollan 2003) Kunsang argues that such a response is not unique to his experience, and he has said, "I think any Yolmo would agree, if there was any dream coming like that they would just right away call home, check with their families. Because it's rooted in them now, because it has so much meaning." Such dreaming is social in nature, and many dreams and

daydreams of Yolmo people are relational in this way. The relational aspect of Yolmo dreams illuminates the web of interconnectivity between people in time and space, which is a central element of Yolmo social, cultural, and psychological life.

Buddhist practices of meditation and visualization also speak to the structure of the imagination as it is experienced by Yolmo Buddhists. The contemplative mindfulness of meditation and the creative visualizations of deities are both specifically Buddhist forms of the imagination that reverberate in the kinds of imaginings described to me by Yolmo people, and may play a part in shaping the ways in which Yolmo people experience a mind that wanders.

The daydreaming mind follows a circular path, breaking from the present moment and then returning, as William James has said, “like a bird's life, it seems to be made of an alternation of flights and perchings.” (James 1890: 243; Crapanzano 2004; Throop 2009, 2010) When asked what he missed most about life in Nepal, Dawa, a young Yolmo man, replied,

“Nepal...the place...just walking down the street, it feels natural somehow. Here I am used to it but still if I think about it, if I really think about it, it still does not feel like...sometimes I am walking around the street and I imagine, back in Nepal walking on the street... so it feels different.”

Walking in the street, Dawa finds himself imagining Nepal. The imagination punctuates ordinary activities, coloring a fleeting mood or perception of one's surroundings.

The dream and daydream narratives shared with me indicate the emotional landscape central to the experience of migration for Yolmo people. Such tension is the result of deep attachment towards ones family, community, and village in Nepal, despite the fact that at this point there is a thriving Yolmo community in New York as well, and

many Yolmo people I spoke with had been living in Kathmandu and *not* the villages, before migrating to the U.S.

At night Dolma, a Yolmo woman, thinks of her family left behind. The evening is a time when memories about the past and anxieties about the future intensify. Longing follows a diurnal rhythm. “You miss people in Nepal,” Dolma tells me. “You miss your sisters, you miss them so badly. You miss your family members, Ibi (mother-in-law) she used to laugh a lot. I have the vision of her laughing and moving before my eyes all the time.” (*Mi la heer heer onge.*)

When Dolma was in Nepal, separated from her husband who found work in the United States making religious sculptures for Buddhist monasteries, she would often dream of him and worry about his health. “I used to dream of him in rags,” she says. Traditionally for Yolmo people, ragged clothes in dreams symbolize illness. For Dolma, who spent many years in Yolmo villages, such symbols still hold meaning. Landslides too hold divinatory meanings in the corpus of traditional Yolmo dream symbols. As Robert Desjarlais writes in *Body and Emotion*, his book on Yolmo aesthetics of illness and healing, “dreams of tattered clothes and decrepit houses signify a lost lifeforce” and “a landslide or a burning, dilapidated house foretells a death in the family.” (Desjarlais 1992:74) The dream imagery of Kunsang and Dolma clearly reflect these traditional symbols, yet through the experience of migration even the way people dream is beginning to change. The younger generations of Yolmo people who have grown up in Kathmandu or New York City do not interpret their dreams in the same way as the elders, and do not dream with the same images as their parents and grandparents. As Kunsang explained, “I dream about my villages. But these kids, they won’t dream about my village

because they haven't even been there. And they haven't heard stories, our social stories, not just about dreams but different social activities. My dream is always linked with the social activities that I know. The people I know of the village, the different geography. But they don't know that."

Responsibility and moral commitment play a central role in the lifeworld of Yolmo-Nepali migrants like Karma, who migrated to New York with the hope of providing a more stable future for his family.

I was away from them for three and a half years. For me the biggest reason was Uten. She was 9 months old. She couldn't speak a word at that time...Uten...that was really the reason for the stress for me. It's like, if it doesn't happen I thought my god I'm going to lose her. But then luckily, fortunately it worked out. And at one point I was saying, forget about my own visa I'll just go back to Nepal. And then the situation was not good. There were two things going in my mind. Who knows tomorrow, if the communist regime really took power and then you never had a chance to go out of Nepal again. And then, if the school system just failed, what will these kids do? And I said, I mean, then they would definitely blame me, later on they would say my father had the opportunity to do something for us and he didn't do it.

–Kunsang, Summer 2011

For three and a half years Kunsang was separated from his family in Kathmandu, Nepal, waiting for the U.S. government to approve visas for them to join him. Attachment to and separation from loved ones are tied up with complex moral and ethical commitments that people struggle with as they make the choice to leave behind budding careers and ancestral communities to start again in a foreign country. For Kunsang, it was powerful feelings of paternal responsibility for his young daughters' future intertwined with fears of blame and failure, which he sees as motivating his decision to come to the United States and endure three years of separation. Such choices are not made easily. Migrating to the United States meant relinquishing his high paying executive position in

a carpet design firm to work at a much lower level job in the United States; it also meant the possibility that his young infant daughter Uten might have no memory of him. In dreams and thoughts of possible futures, moral struggles regarding incompatible responsibilities towards one's self, family, and community crystalize in everyday acts of the imagination.

Imagining himself through his daughter's eyes, Kunsang envisioned a possible future and a possible self he did not want to become. Such existential imaginings, perhaps out of fear, ultimately gave him strength to stay in the United States, to "keep going" even in the midst of unbearable separation. On the humid August Sunday that this interview took place, Kunsang's young daughter Uten played around us, singing to herself quietly as we spoke. Kunsang's wife and daughters were finally able to secure visas to join him in New York, and the family is now united.

Conclusion

In this essay I have juxtaposed dreams with more subtle forms of daydreaming and reverie states. Such experiences are rarely made an object of study, perhaps due to their fleeting, ephemeral nature. Yet just as dreams leave their mark on waking life, so do our daydreams and reveries leak into our shared social realities. As Crapanzano has written in his essay "The Scene: Shadowing the real," epiphenomena such as fleeting moods and feelings are "a significant and effective dimension of the world in which we live, think, and act." (2006: 389) Edmund Husserl's phenomenological understanding of intentionality further supports this idea. (Husserl 1983; Duranti forthcoming) For Husserl, reality is constituted through intentional acts, by which we "objectivate" (constitute)

objects around us and imbue these objects with meaning. Such a structure of intentionality makes possible a multiplicity of orientations towards any single object. Meaning is created in the world through these acts of intentionality, through our engagement with the world, regardless of whether that world is real or imaginary. Husserl writes,

The ray of the pure Ego's regard sometimes goes through one noetic stratum¹⁰ and sometimes through another...sometimes straightforwardly, sometimes reflectively. Within the given total field of potential noeses and correlative objects of noeses we sometimes look at a whole, the tree, perhaps, which is perceptually present, sometimes as these or those parts a moments of it; then, again, we look at a nearby physical thing or at a complex content and process. Suddenly we turn our regard to an object of memory which 'comes to mind.' Instead of going through the perceptual noesis, which, in a continuously unitary though highly articulated manner, constitutes for us the continually appearing world of physical things, the regard goes through a remembering noesis into a world of memory; it wanders about in this world, passes over into memories or other degrees or into worlds of phantasy, and so forth. (1983: 223)

I have tried to follow "the ray of the pure Ego's regard" as it wanders through the perceptual present, past memories, or perhaps into imaginary worlds, ultimately relating to a particular object in time and space. In my work with Yolmo-Nepali migrants I have tried to attend to the ways in which the overlaying of multiple modes of regard, such as remembering and imagining, shape everyday experiences of the present moment.

Although initially I argued that migration creates a specific existential register that generates certain kinds of imagining, I am no longer sure that the dreams, daydreams and photographs I describe here are unique to migration. Instead I believe they point to something much larger,

¹⁰ Husserl defines the structure of intentionality through *noesis* and *noema*. *Noema* is roughly defined as "sense"; each intentional act has its own corresponding *noema*— "perception...has its noema, most basically its perceptual sense, i.e., the *perceived as perceived*...remembering has its *remembered as remembered*...judging has its *judged as judged*." (Husserl 1983: 214) The noematic (sense) correlate is immanent to the mental process of any intentional act.

something that is part of a shared human experience, a way of responding to absence and separation, as well as more generally, a way of mediating between the world as one would like it to be and the world as it is. (Jackson 2007, 2012) In this regard, I believe that the dreams and daydreams I have discussed here stand as examples of the way that the universal can exist within the singular; the general in the particular. (Throop 2010; Jackson 2012)

I have also tried to trace ordinary affects, to use Kathleen Stewart's term, as they stream through dreams, daydreams, and other imaginings of Yolmo people like Kunsang and Mingmar, as they live their everyday lives in New York City, arising in the movement of a stride while walking down a busy street in Queens, or during a long subway commute. Mingmar's daydreams on the 7 train stretch back to memories of his village, his childhood, of New Year's blessings from the elders in his community; these thoughts, in turn, build intensities of feeling— desire to be in the village, nostalgia for the past, frustration for the present in which returning to Nepal is impossible. The experience of the present moment encompasses memories of the past as well as imaginings of possible futures. As dreaming and daydreaming impinge on waking life, subjectivity is textured by and perhaps even created through imaginative processes. There is still much work to be done to map the connections between dreams, daydreams, and reverie, and the palpable ways in which such forms of imagining enable us to “keep going,” as we struggle to balance our conditions of existence in which we find ourselves simultaneously thrown into the world and constrained by conditions beyond our control, yet able to dream, imagine, and craft the future as we wish it to be.

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