

Pottingo

From the Field



**Student Journal of the Anthropology Programme,
Royal Thimphu College**

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Jottings From the Field
Student Journal of the Anthropology Programme,
Royal Thimphu College

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Thank you to Karma Yeshey for providing the photos on the journal cover

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Jottings from the field is a student lead journal intended to showcase the writings of Anthropology students in RTC. The journal is intended to both highlight the research of anthropology students as well as provide an opportunity for interested students to learn the skills needed to run a publication.

As this is the first issue of the journal, we would like to note that the journal is planned to be published twice per year, following the academic year rather than calendar year (e.g. No. 1 of a volume during Autumn Semester, No. 2 during Spring Semester). The Autumn editions will be fuller in scope, whereas the Spring editions may be somewhat closer to a newsletter format.

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Introduction to the Journal

From the journal's Faculty Advisors

Despite the shadow cast by the ongoing Covid pandemic, it is an exciting time for anthropology in Bhutan. Royal Thimphu College's Anthropology Programme just recently graduated its first batch of Bachelor of Arts graduates in July 2021. These students demonstrated a highly diverse range of interests, and the first feature in this journal - a selection of abstracts from some of their Capstone papers - captures that diversity well. We wish these graduates the best of luck with their future endeavors, and anticipate the important role they will play in creating, and advocating for, greater awareness of anthropology in Bhutan. Indeed, as many of our readers will be aware, other social sciences such as sociology have a notably longer history here. While such allied fields have increasingly adapted the methods of participant observation that were first pioneered by anthropologists, training in anthropology undoubtedly retains its own unique advantages, which we hope will shine through in the pages that follow.

As implied by the word 'jottings' in this journal's title, the articles featured here should be regarded as works in progress. For us, it was more important to convey a snapshot of how anthropology is developing in Bhutan, at least from the RTC side of things, rather than insisting on polished works. As for the 'field' in the journal's title, we emphasize original work as much as possible. Aside from important features like book reviews, a roundup of student events, and also interviews, this journal aspires to provide readers with glimpses of the experiential research of our students, as opposed to, say, presenting revisions of purely literature-based research papers.

We would like to thank the student editors for their hard work, and we are certain that the foundation they have created will help to guide future editorial teams, as well as students submitting materials to the journal.

Brent Bianchi

Tashi Choden

From the journal's Senior Editor

Bringing this student journal to completion has been quite the journey. As the first issue of the Anthropology Student Journal, there were no guidelines or sample of how things were done before for our team to look at. Moreover, none of the members had prior experience and we were all playing it by ear. The experience was truly one of trying things out to see what works best and learning as we go. Nevertheless, we were not truly alone in this as we had our faculty advisors supporting us every step of the way.

The articles published to this student journal are all efforts of Anthropology students, some of whom have graduated since the beginning of this project. The first article showcases selected abstracts from the capstone projects of the graduating class. The second and third articles are Op-Eds written based on the capstone projects of the respective authors, Sonam Pelden and Ally Caesare. The fourth essay is a longer research paper, extracted from the capstone project by the author. The fifth contribution is an illness narrative by Jigme Wangchuk, and it shares similar themes to that of the fourth article. The sixth and seventh essays are both program related event recaps from the past year, of which there were few due to the ongoing pandemic. The eighth essay highlights the experiences on the field of nine students from the graduating class, with using and applying anthropology to work with organisations. We end the student journal with a book review of James C. Scott's famous book by Pranita Sharma.

On behalf of the journal's student team, I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude towards the Programme Leader, Dolma Choden Roder, for her constant support, Jigme Gyeltshen for the help he extended our team on the designing aspect, our two faculty advisors, Brent Bianchi and Tashi Choden, for guiding us through the entire process, attending every meeting, and for lending their time and expertise towards bringing this journal life. Without you this would not have been possible. Looking at the final product, an amalgamation of the hard work put in by our team, our advisors, and the authors, we are proud to present you with the very first issue of *'Jottings from the Field'*.

Pema Yangchen

Selected Capstone Project Abstracts of 2021 Anthropology Graduates

Deki Yangzom, Pema Yangchen, Sonam Pelden, and Tshering Denkar

Anthropology 2021 graduates

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Spiritual Landscape: Explanations and experiences of highlanders of Merak in their worship of Ama Jomo in Bhutan

This research provides an understanding of the study of how ecology and religion overlap one another. Using the concept of ‘spiritual landscape’, it studies the varieties of daily motivations the highlanders of Merak show in their worship of Ama Jomo, their guardian deity. This ethnographic account documents the existence and ascendancy of Ama Jomo in the spiritual landscape of Merak, who mediate Merakpas social, religious, natural, and economic interactions. It is evident in my research that such interactions deepen cosmic mutuality and relational connection between the human and non-human entities, thereby demonstrating their intersubjective relationship. This has profound implications on how the Merakpas interact with their surrounding environment. The Merakpas are associated with Ama Jomo in terms of ritual, offering, security, and prosperity. In Merak, both Merakpas and Ama Jomo have equal control and say over the ecology, thereby, enhancing their co-existence in the cosmic landscape. Moreover, the ritual of *Jomo Kora* endorse both Ama Jomo and the Merakpas as active and agential beings in shaping the landscape of Merak. In Merak, ritual offerings to Ama Jomo are of quintessence, without which Merakpas fear misfortunes, ill-health, livestock failure, and natural calamities. An annual ritual called *Jomo Kora*, which is a Bon ritual of the land par excellence, is conducted to acknowledge Ama Jomo for bestowing them with *jinlab* (Spiritual blessings). Thus, enhancing the intersubjective affinity through the process of ritual offerings.

Keywords: ecology, religion, deity, spiritual landscape, bon

Deki Yangzom

Tale of Two Worlds: Thimphu Gamers and their life experiences

Gaming culture has been growing worldwide in the past few decades, and Bhutan is no exception. Bhutanese youth now spend much of their teenage years playing online games and are thus frequently engaged in interactions with the online and offline gaming communities. The impact these interactions have on the youth has been painted in a bad light by news outlets in the past decade. Influenced by these news reports, the popular rhetoric concerning youth and gaming is generally negative and rarely takes into account the perspectives of the youth themselves. This study aims to look at Thimphu gaming culture by prioritising the perspectives of the Thimphu Gamers' themselves on gaming culture. With the understanding that a significant portion of the Bhutanese youth population now participate in gaming culture, this study further aims to contribute in the understanding of Bhutanese youth in general. By exploring themes of subcultural capital, subcultural spaces, gaming communities, perceptions of gaming, the role of gender in the gaming community, and the value Thimphu Gamers find in gaming, we see the role gaming plays in the construction of identity, social interactions, the banalities of daily life experiences of Thimphu Gamers, and how it gives them meaning.

Keywords: online gaming, youth, subculture

Pema Yangchen

Child Rearing or Child Abuse? *Child abuse and neglect in contemporary Bhutan*

Authoritarian disciplinary practices in child rearing such as scolding, yelling, beating, and insulting still prevail in contemporary Bhutan. Such practices are often believed to be vital in the transmission of core Bhutanese moral values, such as *tha damtsig* (moral obligation) and *le judre* (karma). Recent studies on child abuse in Bhutan have focused on the issue superficially, attempting to cover all aspects of child abuse in all contexts and the driving forces behind them, but have not explored these core factors in detail. These have failed to explore the covert aspects of child abuse and neglect, their nuances and ambiguities in Bhutan. This study seeks to fill this gap by instead exploring the subtle nature of abusive acts towards children within the Bhutanese context to contribute to understanding the role of local child-rearing practices on the lived experiences of children and how it is largely shaped by predominant socio-cultural factors of the society. Accordingly, 23 semi-structured interviews with adult survivors of abuse were conducted, and this information was compared with other data, combining interviews with textual exegesis.

The study determined that, although disciplinary practices can be used with benevolent intentions, it appears to reinforce a social acceptance and prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Bhutan. The prevalence of disciplinary practices causes children to internalize their sufferings as they continue to ignore or tolerate the subtle forms of abuse and neglect they experience in their daily lives. Crucially, abuse survivors appear to have a long-standing acceptance or impression of their imagined guilt in abusive relationships. The study demonstrates the long-term impacts of abuse as manifested in the sufferer's self-esteem, mental health, and relationship with law enforcement.

Keywords: child abuse, cultural morals, disciplinary practices

Sonam Pelden

The Lives of Amateur Youth Singers in Bhutan

Formal research on music is rarely studied in Bhutan, and the lives of amateur singers in Bhutan are particularly neglected. People are much aware about the lives of professional artist or singers, but little is known about the lives of those amateur youth who are interested in music and singing. In this study, I interviewed youths who engage themselves in musical activities, and I also did online observation on the 'Bhutanese Singing Forum' on Facebook to understand amateur singers' lives in Bhutan in terms of their perceptions and experiences. I found that different youth prefer different musical genres and singing has become one of their hobbies in life due to various reasons. The inspirations they get from the artists and from the different aspects of songs keep them engaged with music. However, in pursuit of their hobbies they face lots of challenges. One of the main challenges is the influence of non-Bhutanese music and songs which makes them feel less Bhutanese, which often contradicts with the idea of giving highest priority to the cultural protection of the country.

Keywords: music, youth, tradition, modernity

Tshering Denkar

For further examples of Capstone research from the 2020-21 Academic Year, please also consult a shortened form of a paper on health-seeking behavior by Pema Choden Dorji, p. 13, and also the two Op-Eds that immediately follow this current abstract section.

The Ills of Bhutanese Parenting Skills: Child abuse and neglect in contemporary Bhutan

Sonam Pelden

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For her Capstone Project, Sonam Pelden researched ways of child-rearing in contemporary Bhutan and its relation to subtle forms of child abuse. Below is an Op-Ed written by the author based on her research. Readers may contact the email address as given above if they wish to see the author's research in its entirety.

Children in Bhutan often undergo harsh disciplinary practices such as beating, scolding, yelling, or at times even insults by their elder family members. Bhutanese elders, especially parents or caregivers, use such practices, often with the intention to discipline the younger ones in order to raise them into responsible adults. However, the prevalence of such authoritarian disciplinary practices causes children to internalize their suffering as they continue to ignore or tolerate the subtle forms of abuse and neglect they experience in their daily lives. This can lead to long-term negative impacts on their overall health and wellbeing.

Lhamo Drukpa (pseudonym) is one of the survivors of child abuse I spoke to, who was greatly affected by her mother's use of harsh words on her on a daily basis. Lhamo was born out of wedlock, after her mother was raped by Lhamo's biological father. Her father belonged to an aristocratic family in their village while her mother is uneducated and, from a humble background. With not much of a choice left, Lhamo was then raised by her mother. Since Lhamo was born out of wedlock, her grandmother (her mother's mother) often spoke ill of her. This, she believes, had influenced her mother in speaking harshly against her.

When I was in 12th standard. Our results were out and I could not qualify for further education. My mother was upset with me and she began to compare me with other children... When your parents compare you with other children, it breaks your heart. It's natural for us to feel hurt. During that very moment, I may have felt hurt and reacted in a way that I shouldn't have but it's hard not to. I couldn't control the tone of my voice while speaking to her as I was hurt by her words. So, when I reacted harshly, she lashed out by saying that I was probably her enemy in our past lives. She said she wonders what bad karma may have befallen her that I was born as her child... Enraged, she said that she has only one wish. She said she will pray that I never succeed in my lifetime. I was devastated on hearing this. This is because there is a belief in our society that whatever prayers parents make for their children will eventually become true. It felt like her words had pierced my heart like a sharp knife. I was really hurt! Therefore, I lost all hope to live my life. I thought that my parents would be better-off without me. I saw no purpose in living my life when my own parents did not want me.

The daily arguments between Lhamo and her mother impacted Lhamo to the extent that she began to have health problems like migraine. She also suffered from low self-esteem issues that causes her to isolate herself from socializing with others. She even attempted suicide on one such event when her mother threatened to leave her. Yet, throughout my interaction with her, she felt hesitant to speak ill about her mother while she was recounting the verbal and emotional abuse she went through. She often used phrases that showed her love and compassion towards her mother while narrating the suffering her mother had put her through.

Now, I don't know how else to say this as it may seem like I'm being an ungrateful child to my mother. It would be wrong to say that she did not provide for me. Like any parent would, she has given me all the basic necessities. So, in terms of expenditure, I have not faced any problems as such. But you see, money is not everything. What I lacked was not money but love and care from my parents.

I have a step-father at home. He is a moody person so the environment at home is quite gloomy and unpredictable. There are many instances where my mother and step-father do not talk to each other. If they talk for one month, the next two months would be spent in silent treatments. Therefore, my mother often remains under a lot of stress whether it be regarding my step-father, my grandmother or us children. I think this is the main reason why my mother ends up behaving badly with me. It is not that she is intentionally choosing to ignore me. It is the circumstances she is in that makes her behave like that.

Such level of understanding that children have towards their parents is not uncommon. While growing up in a family with strong traditional Bhutanese values, I often heard the elder members in my family say that a son should be controlled while he's still a boy and a daughter should be controlled during her teen years. Folktales and proverbs alike are used to justify the authoritarian parenting style (through beating, scolding, yelling, and so on) that is commonly practiced in Bhutan where Bhutanese sense of morality based on the concepts of *tha damtsig* and *le judre* is engrained into the Bhutanese children from an early age.

Both at homes and in schools, elders teach children the importance of showing *tha damtsig* to their loved ones, especially their parents. *Tha damtsig* originally refers to a pledge in tantric Buddhist practices but today, it can mean a moral obligation or commitment either to one's family, community, or the country. *Le judre*, popularly known as *karma* among the younger Bhutanese generation, is the law of cause and effect based on one's actions in past lives. During our school days, we were often reminded by our teachers (especially *Dzongkha lopens*) that in order to prevent sufferings in our next lives, it is important to be aware of not committing any sinful acts in our present lives. Similarly, if we want to reap good results, then one must accumulate merits through right act and thoughts.

Possession of such core Bhutanese values among the adult survivors of child abuse I have spoken to, for my final year college project, was quiet apparent. Not all of them could use these typical native words to describe or express their values but I could sense the deep level of respect and compassion they have for their elders, simply by the way they spoke about them, particularly their parents. While the concepts of *tha damtsig* and *le judre* in themselves may not contribute to child abuse, such concepts when internalized can cause the Bhutanese children to ignore or tolerate the beating, scolding, and several other authoritarian disciplinary practices that they undergo every day.

In Lhamo's case, her poor academic performance had further worsened the tensions between the mother-daughter duos, eventually causing Lhamo to attempt suicide. Likewise, I found that application of disciplinary practices are likely to be exacerbated by factors such as alcohol, divorce, domestic violence, financial problems, single parenting, strong extended family ties, lack of awareness and implementation of the Child Care Protection Act, and the rising expectations of children to perform academically well in the modern world.

My intention here is neither to blame the Bhutanese parents nor the children. The sole purpose is to take seriously into consideration, the voices of Bhutan's children and to initiate an active dialogue about Bhutanese parenting style, especially at a time when issues of child rights are being brought into lime-light worldwide. So that we may finally ask ourselves the following dreaded questions:

What is the thin line that distinguishes parenting or disciplining from abuse? Does pointing out the parenting flaws of their care givers make a child immoral? How can subtle forms of child abuse and neglect be identified and conceptualized?

Continuing Culture Through Dzongkha

Ally Caesare*

Anthropology 2021 graduate

For her Capstone Project, Ally looked at youth and government perceptions of Dzongkha use in modern Bhutan. Below is an Op-Ed written by Ally based on her research.

When I first came to Bhutan as a tourist in 2017, I started in the East and drove through the entire national highway. Once I reached Punakha and Thimphu it felt like I was in a completely different Bhutan. So many more people were wearing street clothes, listening to western music, and gone were the quiet small villages from beyond Wangdue.

I then came back in 2018 as a university student at Royal Thimphu College. The more time I spent in town and among my Bhutanese friends, the more I heard the phrase, “Bhutan is changing” and “Thimphu is changing so fast.” Some of these utterances came from pure observation, some from excitement, and many came from concern. These changes that have been occurring have made many apprehensive about the impact on cultural and social values within Bhutan and among the younger Bhutanese generation.

I decided to focus my area of study particularly on language use, especially pertaining to Dzongkha. Bhutan is a culturally and linguistically rich and diverse country, with at least 19 different languages being used within its borders. Being able to speak more than one language is typical, and can be seen happening even within a singular conversation. What surprised me, was the struggle many have to read and write in Dzongkha. As a Dzongkha learner, I struggled to learn the script, and I quickly realized I was

* At the time of going to press, we were deeply saddened to learn that our former classmate, Ally Caesare, had passed away. Ally had been excited for her work to be published in this journal, and was a joyful and helpful friend to all her classmates. We publish her work in memory of her and the ideas she wanted to share with the world.

not alone. Even those who speak Dzongkha as their mother tongue at times find great difficulty to master the ‘Ucen script and traditional Chöke spelling.

As my final year research project, I decided to look at how younger ones in Thimphu felt about language use, and compare that to the national government’s stance and initiatives that have been implemented to support Dzongkha use within the country. From Bhutan’s earliest days, Driglam Namzha was instituted to create social order and unity for the Bhutanese. “One Nation, One People” and its value continues to be taught and emphasized through school and society.

Among the people I interviewed, this phrase and line of reasoning occurred over and over. In order to truly be one people, there must be one common language. Even among those who do not speak Dzongkha as their first language, there is a belief that the cultural and social importance of Dzongkha continues to be a priority when it comes to having a national language.

It continues to be a matter of national policy through articles of the Constitution as well as Dzongkha Development Commission policy and planning. Official government documents highlight the importance on the benefit of Dzongkha as a national language benefiting the Bhutanese population by uniting them through one language, but also by preserving Bhutanese culture.

In an overwhelming consensus, all of my respondents agreed that Dzongkha continues to be important within Bhutan as a national language. Most also listed Dzongkha as their most or second used language. It only fell behind those whose mother tongue wasn’t Dzongkha, but it was always ranked in use above English.

I was surprised to see how well used and valued Dzongkha still was among the younger generation within Thimphu, given the amount of change and interest in both the Western media as well as the large amount of Bollywood and K-Drama entertainment that is on the rise.

This doesn’t mean that Dzongkha use isn’t under threat, prevailing the conversation was the difficulty of reading and writing in Dzongkha script. Romanization is becoming more and more prevalent in messag-

ing, social media, and chats. Increasing literacy and promotion of Dzongkha writing could help ensure that writing with the traditional ‘Ucen script doesn’t fall into disuse completely.

As many would attest across multiple aspects of life, prevention is more effective than a cure. The same holds true with language use and linguistic shift. While all languages are changing with the times that we are living in, preventing linguistic extinction is easier than revitalizing a language once it has stopped being used altogether.

While Thimphu may seem to be changing quickly right before our eyes, Dzongkha continues to be used and cherished across generations. New Dzongkha movies, music videos, and songs are ways that younger generations are working to incorporate their heritage and national language in new and exciting ways to make it accessible to young Bhutanese. This continues to support social values, both at a national and local level, to continue to use and recognize the importance of Dzongkha within Bhutan.

Perceptions of Illness and Health Seeking Behaviours Amongst the Households of Kabesa, Thimphu

Pema Choden Dorji

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Introduction

Historically and presently, Bhutan has preserved its rich biodiversity with an almost unchecked growth of flora and fauna (Wangchuk, P 2010). Most of Bhutan's flora is considered to have medicinal values and is perceived to be potent and effective (Wangchuk, P 2010) in healing. In Bhutan, people use various health care systems that include modern and traditional medicine. Traditional medical practices can be further categorized into two types of traditional healing systems: the Sowa Rigpa and the Local Healing System, consisting of healing through herbs, minerals, animal parts, and spiritualism. This range of practices included burning incense, shamanism, hot springs, and other local healing practices based on oral traditions passed from generation to generation and whose practitioners are local or folk healers (Wangchuk, P 2013). People who seek modern health care also perform rituals during hospitalization because they believe that integrating religious care in the modern health care system helps speed recovery (Pelzang, 2010). Hence, Bhutanese have various options to engage in different health-seeking behavior to cure different illnesses, resulting from their own understanding of illness and spiritual beliefs. This research paper will examine the health care practices amongst the people of Kabesa, located at the outskirts of the capital Thimphu, well known for its herbal hot stone baths. My study will explore different healing practices and people's perception of illness by using Kleinmein's explanatory model of illness. Furthermore, I will illustrate people's explanations of why they prefer certain practices and reveal traditional and modern health care's perceived efficacy. My research question will accordingly be, "how do perceptions of illness amongst the people of Kabesa affect the kinds of health care practices they seek?". My research paper will help people identify the cultural and medical aspects of why people engage in certain health-seeking behaviours.

Methodology

In order to collect a detailed perspective of health care practices from the people and generate anthropological knowledge on illness and health care systems, I did ethnographic fieldwork in Kabesa, Thimphu using methods like semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation devices and participant observation.

Semi-structured interview allowed me to have a two-way conversation with my participants and also gave them the freedom to express anything they wanted that wasn't covered by the questions. Participants felt comfortable and reassured when I listened as well as replied to them by asking questions. Hence, I was able to collect relevant data that allowed me to look at their general perception of illness and healing practices they are engaged in.

Another research methodology that I used is photo elicitation devices. Photo elicitation devices use photographs into a research interview which evokes a different kind of information from the participants. I showed my participants some images of the hot stone bath of Kabesa to let them talk about '*menchu*', a herbal hot stone bath.

Furthermore, I did participant observation at the Kabesa Menchu. Participant observation is a research method in which the researcher observes the group and participate in the activities. According to Jurgensen (2015), the researcher interacts with the people in everyday life while collecting information from the participants. I experienced the hot stone herbal bath personally and this method helped me understand why people decide to come there to treat themselves.

Research Ethics

Before conducting any interviews, I made sure to introduce myself and my research topic in detail so that my participants understand what I am asking and why my research topic is important in the larger society. I asked for consent before doing any interviews. Additionally, I allowed my research participants to withdraw his or her participation if they felt awkward and did not want to answer any further questions. In order to maintain confidentiality and privacy of my participants, I used pseudonyms to keep them anonymous.

Study Area

I chose Kabesa of Kawang Gewog as my research field site because it is on the outskirts of Thimphu town, and due to its easy access to town, education and health facilities are comparably better than other rural areas of Bhutan. Thus, old traditional practices and people adapting to new modern changes exist together here. Agriculture and livestock production are the main sources of income, along with small businesses such as running shops and driving taxis. We can find few *lhakhangs*¹ and sacred *neys*² that people visit to do purification rituals to eliminate any misfortunes; and two hot stone baths namely *Menchu Karp* and *Chhokhor Menchu* under Kawang Gewong. The *menchus* benefit in the treatment of tuberculosis, piles, and a variety of other ailments. Therefore, the Kabesa area is a rich site to study about healing practices from an anthropological perspective. So far there has been no anthropological literature written on the health system in Kabesa, Thimphu. Therefore, my research project will serve as a source of knowledge about the Gewog to people who are interested to learn about it and also to health practitioners to understand what kind of healing practices is done at home.

Results and Discussion

I move on to my discussion by first differentiating diseases and illness, because a greater portion of my research paper focuses on illness and the treatments. Many anthropologist have investigated the distinction between illness and diseases in which they found that it has now become reified in medical anthropology (Inhorn, 1995). Kleinmein regarded diseases as natural phenomenon which is the etic view of explaining causation of sickness whereas illness is a cultural construction looking at the emic view of culturally recognised causes and symptoms of illness of a patient (FutureLearn, n.d). Inhorn (1995) similarly says illness encompasses the cultural meaning and social relationships experienced by the patient. My paper will hence help us to look at the causation of illness influenced by people's beliefs, their understanding of illness, economic, and social factors in the community at Kabesa. I will slowly demonstrate how the people of Kabesa are involved in more than one health care systems. This is called medical pluralism. According to Kleinmein, medical pluralism refers to the coexistence of more than one sector of the healthcare model. This include; 1.The Popular Sector, 2.The Folk Sector, and 3.The Professional Sector (Baer, 2018) which you will later see in the paper.

¹ Monasteries

² Sacred place

1. Causation: Perception of Illness.

This section will deal with the ethno-etiology of disease in order to understand people and their cultural beliefs and practices in the community at Kabesa. I will be using Arthur Kleinmein's explanatory model of illness to explore health, illness, and care. Explanatory models (EM) for specific sickness episodes can be elicited from practitioners, patients, and family members. It contains explanations of any five issues that is, etiology, symptoms, pathophysiology, course of illness, and treatment (Kleinmein, 2019). The use of explanatory models will help explain how illness and treatment can be tied to knowledge and values of different sectors of the health systems. The community at Kabesa consists of diverse health practices which can be categorized into traditional and modern health practices. I found that the health seeking behaviours depend largely on the cause of their illness. It should be noted that people have their own perception of what causes a disease or illness within their family. In Kabesa, I found that people define illness as caused by spirits, witchcraft or enemies, violation of social norms, one's own negative *karma*³, and finally socio-cultural factors. Pelzang (2010) similarly argued that many Bhutanese identify sickness as caused by demons, evil spirits, black magic, or bad actions, making them decide to seek traditional practices, including rituals, to appease the spirit that has harmed them. Kleinmein's explanatory model of illness will help us to understand the multi-causal theory of illness in Kabesa. This recognizes the existence of various possible explanations to what caused a disease amongst the people (Najman, 1980).

1.1 Illness caused by spirits

My grandmother used to conduct *lu choed*⁴ to the spirit who lived near our house whenever I became sick. She claims that if the non-human spirit is not given offerings on a daily basis or its surroundings dirtied, the spirit would harm the family. In the *lu* ritual, the spirit is offered food or a piece of cloth which has symbolic meaning to the family. For example, if someone in the family gets sick, they have to offer something of value to the spirit. Now, whenever someone in my family is sick, my grandmother does her duties back in our village in PemaGatshel. Since all members of our extended family live away from them and my grandparents are often busy in the fields, *lu choed* is conducted once in a while, especially when someone in the family is hospitalized. Similarly, the elders of the Kabesa community firmly root the causes of the disease or illness to angering spirits or being seen by evil spirits. According to the 78 year old Meymey Gangkar, some common spirits who harm people are *shi'dre* and *gson'dre*. *Shi'dre* are malevo-

³ Good or bad luck, viewed as resulting from one's actions.

⁴ Ritual to appease the naga or serpent

lent souls of the dead whereas *gson'dre* are malevolent souls of the living. He said *Shi'dre* can be further categorized into *pho shing* (male) and *mo shing* (female). When the cremation rite is not performed properly, the deceased loses his path to rebirth and becomes a *shi'dre*. He said that he saw a lot of cases where children were harmed by some of the evil spirits living nearby and they were subsequently taken to ritual specialists to be cured. *Gson'dre* on the other hand, are described as evil spirits residing within the bodies of certain living people. These spirits cause a wide range of harm, from destroying the fermentation process of grains for alcohol to human and animal deaths; from superficial scratches on human bodies to the rotting away of internal organs (Choden, 2008). Furthermore, many people believe that when an individual violates a social, spiritual, or moral law, he becomes the victim of various severe sicknesses.

"My neighbor's daughter had this habit of sleepwalking in the middle of the night. Her parents could not sleep at night because the girl had a high chance of harming herself from walking down the steps. They requested me to do 'divination' and I found out that the daughter has been harmed by the gson'dre of an old woman living next door. They had a bad relationship together ever since they moved in and did not get along," said Meymey Gangkar.

Another 65 year old man shared, *"My daughter could not turn her head like other children. I spent 2 million ngultrum taking her to hospitals in and outside Bhutan. One of the lamas later told me that she was being harmed by an evil spirit from a tree next to my house. He conducted the necessary ritual and the next day, she was completely fine. She now has children of her own."*

Although many young people are now going to modern hospitals before deciding to conduct rituals, they still believe it is important to look at what actually caused the illness simultaneously with the diagnosis from the hospital.

Sonam, a 23 year old male said, *"My mother was half paralyzed and could not eat at home. We took her to all kinds of hospitals but still could not diagnose the real disease. We approached a tsip⁵ from the local community and he said that an evil spirit of an old neighboring woman who died a year ago was angry and jealous of the bountiful harvest. Her children did not do any cultivation after she was gone."*

⁵ Astrologer

When a polluting individual crosses his line by not respecting the surrounding area of the deity citadel, he offends the deity or spirit knowingly or unknowingly. The individual is hence more likely to face dangers (Douglas, 2003). He either gets physically sick or becomes mentally ill. I remember urinating near a *lu* stupa when I was a child. The next day, I found that I had small wounds on the lower parts of my body. Later, my grandmother warned me not to step on stones or pollute areas near small stone stupas because it was disrespectful to the nagas who live there and will eventually cause us sickness. Similarly, we can find a lot of *lu* stupas beside houses in Kabesa which need to be cleaned constantly to appease the naga. My participants often reminded me to be careful not to step on any stones that are near their house because most of them are citadels of the nagas and stepping on them will make me sick. Breaking such norms by stepping on the citadels of the nagas can anger the nagas thereby causing illness to the people who violated it. People in Kabesa believe that a person who pollutes the area where *lu* resides will suffer from sores and festering wounds. The people clean the *lu* stupas every month and offer milk to appease the nagas so that the nagas will not harm them.

Jabchu, a 64 year old male said, *“The affliction by a lu can be confirmed if you have wounds and experience dreams of serpents after defecating and polluting near an area where naga resides”*.

In conclusion, health and spiritual beliefs are connected, and together they are believed to reveal the true origin of illnesses (Lhamo & Nebel, 2011), especially if people vomit, feel dizzy, and numb without any physical causes or fractures.

1.2 Illness caused by enemies: black magic and malicious gossips

1.2.1 Black Magic

The belief of black magic is common among various cultures and religions including the community at Kabesa although such practices are at a much smaller scale. It used to be practiced in communities who followed *Bon nag*; a form of religion which included magic, poison, and sacrificial aspects. However, the practice declined as Buddhism started to flourish in Bhutan (Pommaret, 2014; Rahul, 1980). In Dzongkha, black magic is referred to as *ngyen ngag*, and the common term for it is *ngyen*. There are historical oral records of the existence of black magic.

82 year old Gaytey Sangay recounts one famous account, *“We all have heard about the famous Buddhist yogi Milarepa from a wealthy family who practiced sorcery to take revenge against his aunt and uncle who*

deprived them of their wealth after his father's death. This kind of practice was there even during his time in the eleventh century."

I found out through my interviews that black magic has been used for a variety of purposes, but most people use it with malicious intent due to their own jealousy and anger. Although a person harmed by black magic experience symptoms similar to someone harmed by a virus or bacteria, people can identify it because they become sick for no apparent reason. The people of Kabesa claim that if a person becomes ill unexpectedly, such as puking, feeling nauseous, protruding abdomen, or numbed body, it is due to black magic.

"Black magic has the power to destroy or harm another person, My wife was a pawo neljorm and went to different places to treat sick people. She left for Mongar with one of our landowner's daughters looking for a misplaced item for the family. She just hopped in the car and did not tell me where she was heading to. I believe she was despised and misunderstood by the people of Mongar. After returning home, she died in her bed in the middle of the night. She had asked for water late at night, saying she awoke with a severe headache. She did not even drink that night. She was fine in the evening. When I returned, she was completely still, not moving an inch. We did everything we could and took her to the hospital. Later, we consulted an astrologer and found it was black magic. I lost my wife to black magic!" says 63 years old Agay Karma.

Agay Karma identifies the cause of his wife's death as black magic by a person from Mongar out of jealousy. In fact, he says she was an outsider who just bossed around other pawo neljorms.

A 22 year old female, Choki, shared, *"My brother became sick because of black magic. He was excellent in studies and did extremely well. He was in the East at that time. I think many students were jealous of him. He became disabled and could no longer walk."*

I could see that many people often associated illness to black magic if an individual became sick suddenly. Another reason is malicious gossip, which the people of Kabesa often considered as a cause of sickness amongst the family and friends.

1.2.2 Malicious Gossip

After a casual talk with one of the oldest lamas in Kabesa, I heard that malicious gossip or *kha ram* is also believed to cause sickness in people. It is widely referred to as *mi kha* or *kha ram* by the people from the Eastern, Central, and Western regions. When I went for interviews, I saw a lot of people wearing thick *sungkays*⁶ around their necks and they said it is to ward off misfortunes, the evil eye, and sickness caused by wrathful deities. The black cord is often used for fierce rituals and suppression of harmful spirits that cause a person to fall sick. In Dzongkha, such rituals are called *drakpoi ley*. According to Agay Karma, there are four kinds of activities involved in the making of sungkay; zhiwa is peaceful, wang is magnetizing/controlling, gyepa is flourishing or prospering, and drakpo is fierce.

The malicious gossip of neighbors and enemies can bring sickness to the person. Besides this, people say gossip can interrupt their workings because they believe business or ideas do not go well. Gossip and the evil eye can also bring sickness to a newborn child. Some of the signs which indicate the presence of *mikha* according to my participants are: weight loss, constant ringing of ears, and dreams of snakes, leeches, and bees. The illnesses and misfortunes may be caused by high levels of unseen evil energy that occur during interactions between two individuals. Agay Karma claims that gossip contains energies that can cause a person to become ill. It is also the reason why some houses have phallus art on their walls to ward off evil energy, misfortune, and malicious gossip. We can then see how people claim that illness can be caused by malicious comments from the neighbors and the enemies. Based on their own knowledge and experiences passed from the older generation, people have started to use their own creativity to produce blessed cords and wall paintings of phallus to ward off any evil misfortunes within the family.

1.3 Illness caused by economic conditions

The notion that illness is caused by factors like an unbalanced diet, sanitation, contaminated water, and lack of nutritious food is often brought up among the educated population. Access to modern secular education means many young people are able to go to school. As a result, I found that my participants are more inclined toward modern medicines and practices due to fast recovery and efficacy and often because modern medicines are scientifically proven. Almost all my participants who are educated prefer modern medicine first and rely on other healing practices as a second option. Their perception of what caused a disease is directly connected to their knowledge of disease and causation. For example, those

⁶ Blessed cords or sacred threads blessed by religious figures and worn around the neck for protection

who are literate and have basic understanding of science, understand that an imbalance in body temperatures can cause cough and cold, and eating unhealthy foods like junk food can cause food poisoning. Many people associate illness with poor dietary habits. Bhutanese diet and food patterns are considered to be high in carbohydrate nutrients and low in other nutrients.

Dorji, a 27 year old male said, *“Bhutanese diet is not nutritious, especially at places like ours where there are more uneducated people. Our diet consists of a lot of carbohydrates and less of other nutrients which is not healthy.”*

His sister Kencho, 22 added, *“We keep leftover food so that we can finish it up during the next meal in the vegetable drawer. We can’t afford a fridge so the food often gets spoiled.”*

I found that people who are well off in the community have their own garden which produces fresh local vegetables. With fridges at home, and guidance from educated sources, people have a good sense of what is good for them and what is not. However, Dorji said many still do not understand the health effects of eating cold and leftover food, including his neighbors. He has been often criticized for his advice because people didn’t want to waste their food.

I asked one of Dorji’s neighbors about food and he said, *“People like us do not care because we have always been like this and acquired a strong immune system. Even if you are careful about food and you become sick, what is the use of it? It is all Karma!”*

Although the economic conditions influence their health, many still link it back to the people’s belief of cause and effect; karma.

Traditional healing knowledge is less likely to be passed down due to lack of interest among the younger generation to learn it according to Gaytey Sangay. He said he has given up teaching *lu chod* or other rituals to heal oneself because his children are not interested and they are busy with their office jobs.

I have mentioned some prominent causes of diseases/illness that the people of Kabesa believe in. The next is to identify how their perception of illness impacts the kind of health care practices they seek by looking at some of the home remedies and health care behaviors.

2. Treatment: Home remedies and health practices.

This section discusses Kabesa's treatment practices in response to the community's understanding of what causes disease. When a patient's illness is thought to be the result of evil spirits, the people consult an astrologer or *pawo neljorm* to perform the necessary rituals. When the astrologer performs the divination or *mo*, it becomes clear whether the illness is caused by any of the deities or evil spirits such as *gson'dre* or *shi'dre*. These spirits are active and elusive, with powers and characters that fluctuate but a perseverance to constantly remind folks of their reach and influence (Choden, 2008). For example, it will be difficult to identify which *gson'dre* or *shi'dre* made a patient sick because we cannot see them. However, their influence is felt when people fall sick if the malevolent spirit is angered. Following the confirmation of the spirit who is causing the illness, people begin a ritual to appease the spirit and have it leave the sick person. Performing a ritual is one way to maintain a positive relationship with these non-human forces.

One of the common practices to appease the spirits is offering *sur*. *Sur* is the practice of offering food, through the sense of smell. *Sur* offerings are made for the benefit of both the sick person and the spirit. It not only appeases the spirits but also enhances the health of the patient. *Sur* is prepared with flour, butter, sugar, yogurt, honey, nuggets, dried fruits, and all types of cereals including different types of crushed sacred *rilbu*; a traditional substance like a pill used for purification and cleansing (Wang, 2021). The spirits and the people have a very strong relationship.

According to 43 years old Lopen Sonam, "*If you want to be friends with the spirits, you must either burn incense or offer them sur. Sur is the only way you can satisfy their hunger.*"

Meymey Gangkar told me that *sur* is classified into two types: *kar sur* and *mar sur*. *Kar sur* (vegetarian *sur*) is generally offered to the Buddhas or wandering spirits, whereas *mar sur* (non-vegetarian *sur*) is offered to the protecting deity or ghosts every evening. People believe that spirits usually help you if they are appeased with food offerings.

“You have to convince them to leave the patient in a nice way. If the spirit is satisfied, he will leave immediately”

Meymey Gangkar, 78.

Another activity in which a *pawo pamo* usually performs a ritual includes summoning of the evil spirit. Meymey Gangkar briefly described to me a ritual he witnessed when he was young. Everyone, including the patient, was made to sit silently in a dark room. The *pawo pamo* goes outside and whistles until he hears the spirit approaching. He invites the spirit in by telling him that there is delicious food and drinks inside the pot kept at the center of the room. If the patient is born in the ox year, the *pawo* will say there is ox meat inside and it will be repeated constantly while summoning the spirit. He will whistle and keep calling the *gson'dre* till the spirit is convinced to accept the offer. As soon as the spirit enters, the *pawo pamo* will close the lid and the ritual will commence. He will make the spirit leave by torturing him in the pot. The patient will start to get better the next day which will mean the spirit has decided not to harm the person and left the area.

Specific rituals and offerings are conducted according to people's belief of what caused the disease or illness. If a person is afflicted by a naga or *lu*, someone from the family has to appease them by offering milk. *“We also erect lu bum to appease the lu”* said Karma, 73, female. If people think that illness is caused by black magic or mikha, rituals are conducted by *pawo pamo* accordingly. They will conduct annual rituals that break the evil gaze from the enemies or neighbors who are jealous.

One of the prominent healing practices is healing using water; *menchu*. A famous practice at Kabesa to heal body aches, hemorrhoids, stomach problems, stiff body, joint pains, drangzhi, and tuberculosis is *menchu*. *Menchu* is fresh water mixed with herbs like *Artemisia* leaves or *puti shing*. The main wooden tub will contain a chamber which is used to put river stones that have been roasted on fire. The temperature of the water increases as more hot stones are put in the chamber. Kabesa *menchu* is a 30-40 minutes' drive from Thimphu.



Figure 1 Wooden tub connected to the chamber

Wangchuk, P (2021) found in his research that healing waters belong to three main categories; 1. Hot springs and mineral spring water, 2. Herbal bath therapy, and 3. Spiritually empowered water. So, *menchu* is categorized as a healing water in Bhutan. The Kabesa community claims that the *menchu* was once open to all and healed most people right in front of their eyes, now however the *menchu* is for commercial purposes and is maintained by tenants on a four-year lease. Due to government restrictions on cutting down valuable trees and bushes, the law prevents the people from harvesting herbs in large amounts. Some of the herbs that were used in the earlier days are *chutha* and *pinpu meto*, found in high altitudes. They are cooked and made into a pulp before adding to the water. Kabesa *menchu* has great healing properties especially for women with delivery complications according to one of the caretakers of the area.

Sowa rigpa

Sowa rigpa is the term used for traditional medicine of Bhutan. Under the command of the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the sowa rigpa system was formally introduced into the national healthcare system in 1967 (Lhamo & Nebel, 2011). Many elderly people agree that although modern medicine guarantees a fast recovery, they still feel comfortable seeking traditional medicine to cure chronic diseases related to digestive and nervous systems. Some of the services provided in the traditional hospital include blood-letting, acupuncture, gold and silver needle therapy, herbal steam bath, and moxibustion. The traditional medicines are in the form of pills, tablets, capsules, powder, and syrups (Lhamo & Nebel, 2011).

When I asked Dorji, a 57 female, why she preferred traditional medicine and whether it was effective, she said, she believes that traditional medicine is effective in the long run and that she did not fall sick for a year with its aid, whereas she finds biomedicine ineffective and that she is constantly becoming sick.

I went to the Traditional Medicinal Hospital (TMH) located at Kawa Jangsa, Thimphu. Although the number of people visiting the TMH is comparably less than Jigme Dorji Wangchuk National Referral Hospital, they still receive many patients, both young and old. I observed a patient undergoing



Figure 2 Silver Needle Therapy

silver needle therapy on the fingers. The *dungtsho*, i.e. the traditional medicinal doctor, told me that traditional silver needles are used to treat patients with pain on the tender points. The patient had long suffered from finger twitching and the needle therapy was helpful in reducing the pain and constant shivering of her fingers. Several young people, however, feel that although they have heard about the benefits of traditional medicine, they prefer biomedicine because it helps them recover faster.

For example Sangay, a 29 male said, *"I prefer modern medicine because it helps me recover much faster which is what I need because as a working person, I cannot spend days on the bed. I would rather take the other alternative."*

Another male informant who is a farmer, 27, said, *"My mother has been long under traditional medication. They have to take the medicine for months to get better. I have to go to the fields to work. I don't have that time. I find biomedicine better"*.

Traditional medicine is mostly taken by elderly and those who fear the repercussions of biomedicine in the future.

Uncle Sonam, 54 said, *"Biomedicine will cure you instantly but also harm your body whereas traditional medicines are beneficial even though it takes time to heal"*.

Owing to recent education and modernization, preference of biomedicine is greater than traditional medicine according to Agay Sonam, 54. He said the knowledge of older traditional practices is more confined to older generations like his parents. Young educated people are more prone to using modern medical practices. Many think that biomedicine is effective and treat patients much faster than traditional medicine. Young people are more knowledgeable about general biomedical health care, such as what to do if a person has a cough and cold, diarrhea, constipation, stomach pains, cancer, or other serious diseases. For such diseases, health services from the hospital are considered effective. However, many of my participants still feel the need to combine modern and local healing health care services for a holistic approach to illness and treatment.

3. Medical Systems: Pluralistic modality

Kleinman (1984) classified healing practices into three broad categories: 1.Popular Sector; 2.Folk/Traditional Sector; and 3.Professional Sector (as cited in Agrawal, 2005). The popular sector includes relatives and friends who help the patient to cure illness, based on their own ideas about what helps or hinders healing. There are local healing practitioners in the folk sector such as *pawo pamos*, *bone setter*, *astrologer*, and *tsip* who treat the sick person with their own knowledge and skills but are not professionals. Finally, the professional sector includes the professional health caregivers especially those working in hospitals, traditional medicinal hospitals or BHUs (Agrawal, 2005). It is significant to note here that these health care systems overlap with each other providing people with a holistic approach to health care and illness. Health-seeking behavior is a dynamic process involving more than one medical modality for a single illness (Pelzang, 2010).

For example, Khachab, a 51 year old female said, *“We took our sick daughter to every hospital in Kolkata only to realize that she was not getting well. Her body organs did not function well. The doctors did whatever they could. Later, a tsip dropped by saying a luchod should be performed to the naga living next to our house saying it has been harming my child. After performing the lu ritual, we were surprised to see my daughter walk as normal from the next morning. The lu chod is performed by preparing a torma with threads of different colors attached to it and each time, you cut the thread in order to stop the naga from harming the patient”*.

This is precisely why Bhutanese say ‘*mencho dha rimdro chikha*’ meaning rituals and medication should go hand in hand. Many Bhutanese believe that, if rituals are neglected, it disturbs the web of life, resulting in calamities and diseases (Wangchuk, 2010).

Ngawang Dema, a 33 year old female said, *“We lost our mother to black magic. If we had consulted a tsip earlier, we could have saved her. Instead, we took her directly to the hospital which only killed her”*.

Many Bhutanese therefore believe that one should use both traditional local healings and modern medicines for efficiency and fast recovery. Health care in Kabesa shows the medical pluralism of more than one health care system which includes self-care where families or the individual depend on each other’s knowledge on healings. Their ideas on the causation of illness influences who they decide to consult first. If the symptoms show that the patient is afflicted by a malevolent spirit, the family is likely to consult a

tsip first and then go to the hospital. However, if the patient is hit in a car accident, they are more likely to take them to the hospital and conduct rituals simultaneously for smooth recovery. Since some diseases and illnesses can have similar symptoms, it is considered useful to use all the systems at the same time.

Denkar, a 44 year old female said, *“There is a high chance of death if a person possessed by a spirit is taken to the hospital and given a shot. That’s why medication and rituals should go simultaneously”*.

Another 77 years old female Pema accordingly said, *“The symptoms like headache or nauseas can be either from pollution or migraine. Therefore, it requires correct treatment to heal. A headache from migraine can only be taken care of if you do what is necessary like taking pills or sleeping in a dark room. However, the headache from pollution or black magic could require performance of specific rituals by local healers”*.

Although the quality of the medical system cannot be determined, it is more usual to say that the perceived efficacy of the local healing practices can be subjective. While some totally believe in healing rituals like *luchod* and *pawo neljorms*, there are still others who do not believe in such mythical beliefs. It also depends on one's own unique bodily reactions. Some people find certain healing practices to be effective, while others believe they are ineffective.

Conclusion

With my use of an explanatory model of Kleinmein to illness and health care behavior, it provides information about perceptions of illnesses and the resulting health care treatments by patient’s family and friends. I have tried to look at the healing practices and some of the treatments carried out in different households. It is evident in my research that most of the people of Kabesa are engaged in more than one health care sector i.e popular, traditional and professional sector.

While many patients are taken to the hospital, rituals are conducted simultaneously for fast recovery of any illnesses. People of Kawang Gewong believe that if a person is afflicted by a malevolent spirit or naga, rituals like *lu choed* should be performed accordingly to appease the spirits and purify oneself from any misfortunes and ill health. The people believe that only a ritual can pacify someone from illnesses if caused by a spirit. However, people also acknowledge that medicinal treatment and ritual (*mencho rimdro*) should go together because a disease unknown to the doctors can be healed if the right ritual is con-

ducted. Therefore, consulting the doctor and conducting rituals is an effective way of healing oneself from illnesses.

Many also go to the famous hot stone bath area located in Kabesa to heal various physical ailments. My research paper hence intends to build an understanding of the wider belief systems in a society and examine the patient's view of identifying illness. Through the patient's and families' knowledge of the causation of their illness, I wish to advocate to the doctors and physicians about the social or cultural meaning a patient might attach to his illness and the need to approach patients with the most appropriate technique to console them without any conflicts.

I found out that there are no academic writings on perceptions of illness amongst the people, how it leads to their choice of health practices, and such practices' efficiency. While I have tried to answer the efficiency of the practices in a subtle way, more in-depth research is necessary. Moreover, the *dungtsho* of traditional medicinal hospitals shared that the documentation of traditional medicines and herbs in Bhutan is significant and more anthropologists should study it along with pharmacists. This is an opportunity for the field of medical anthropology to grow in the future.

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Illness Narrative

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An illness narrative is a practice in Medical Anthropology, where the writer constructs a narrative based on interviews with patients that tells stories about the individuals' illnesses, it can be used to help understand how people experience sickness and suffering. This illness narrative by Jigme Wangchuk is one such example.

The falling of leaves preludes the arrival of autumn. It is usually during the autumn season that the farmers are caught up harvesting crops.

“During one work season, I felt a surge of pain in my abdomen. A few minutes later, I began to feel giddy and nauseous. At first, I thought it was nothing serious. However, the intensity of the pain grew and eventually I had to leave work. After reaching home, I laid down on my bed. I thought that the cause of sickness was because of curse and shindray (belief in Sharchop community that illness is caused by a spirit of a deceased person who had fail to find their path to rebirth and was still loitering around). My husband performed placatory rites such as burning Sur (burning of material goods that contain barley flour, butter and meat) to appease the spirit. Later, he also consulted the community astrologers and religious rituals were conducted in accordance with the divination revealed by the astrologer.

Even after local treatment, my health condition continued to deteriorate. With the passage of time, my suffering became severe and I was bedridden. The pain felt like a chisel was penetrating my abdomen. The pain became severe during the night but faded or became less painful during the day. I lost my appetite and finally, I decided to visit the Basic Health Unit (BHU) for a checkup. At the BHU, the nurse told me to visit the district hospital for further treatment. Since visiting the district hospital required a long journey and would incur huge expenditure, I was reluctant to go for further treatment. However, my children and husband persuaded me. They had borrowed a large sum of money from our relatives and neighbors for my treatment. At last, I agreed to go for further treatment. I visited the temple and offered my prayers to alleviate my pain and for

successful treatment. When the neighbors heard about my decision, all of them came to visit me. They gave me small amounts of money with prayers to heal my sickness and return safely back to the village.

Then after all the harvesting works were completed, I visited the Samdrup Jongkhar district hospital with my husband. I was diagnosed with an ulcer and the doctor told me to avoid eating onion, garlic, and chilies. The doctors insisted that I spend the next few days in the hospital to monitor the progress of my health. They said that if my health improved, they would discharge me soon. After a week, my health started to improve, and I was later discharged from the hospital. I returned to my village the next day, and my neighbors were overjoyed to see me in better condition.”

Cultural values often shape the understanding and beliefs around the illness. Sickness not only has impinged on a sick person, but also on their children, relatives, and the community at large. The beliefs of the people in the community played a notable role in defining illness and sickness in the community. The people of my village usually believed that the cause of illness was due to the wandering spirits of the deceased. Therefore, proprietary rituals are performed based on divination pronounced by astrologers and religious practitioners. Although people have access to biomedicine, reliance on traditional healing practices are still predominant in the community. An illness also brought the members of the community together. Whenever one of the members goes through difficulties, the people pay a visit to the sick person's home and rendered assistance to the family. This assistance is either in the form of cash or goods such as food. Moreover, the members also provide moral support to the ill person and the family. Thus, the illness usually acts as a cohesive factor in the community.

Similarly, envy is also common in the community. For instance, having a bountiful harvest often attracted evil thoughts from the neighbors. They believed that the cursing resulted in all sorts of illness. To impede harm from cursing, people made large phallus from wood and installed them in the entrance to their house. It is believed that it will ward off ill thoughts and prevent the family members from getting sick. The tradition and popular sectors of medical systems is popular in the community, although they also depend on biomedicine.

The understanding of illness and the treatments are rooted in the religious and belief system of the community. Most of the people in the community depended on the traditional healing system, and their

dependence on the modern health system is minimum. Their knowledge and understandings therefore defines their illness and behaviors related to it.

The State of Anthropology as Narrated by Dr. Tandin Dorji

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Dr. Tandin Dorji, currently the President of Norbuling Rigtar College in Paro and one of Bhutan's first anthropologists, gave a guest lecture to the final year students of anthropology at Royal Thimphu College. There, he highlighted the changes he had observed and experienced regarding the discipline of anthropology in Bhutan. From being a school teacher to obtaining M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of Nanterre in Paris, France. Before taking up the opportunity to study in France, he recalls not knowing what anthropology was at the beginning and this lack of knowledge was found in the people he consulted as well. From the lack of knowledge in the past, up to introducing B.A. Anthropology as a course in RTC, he believes that the state of anthropology has changed, and he bases this claim on his personal experiences. Below is a brief recount of the guest lecture he delivered on his perspective on the state of anthropology in Bhutan.

It was while working as a school teacher in Trashigang that he first encountered the term 'anthropology'. He was given the opportunity to pursue a Master's in Anthropology under the scholarship of the French government. Although at the time he did not have any idea what the term meant and what the discipline entailed, he decided it was a great opportunity and happily accepted. Upon reaching France, he faced some problems as he had no academic background in anthropology, and he was then told to acquire a Bachelor's Degree in Anthropology in order to enroll in the Master's program. Upon request from his supervisor, Dr. Françoise Pommaret, he was able to enroll in both the Bachelor's and Master's program at the same time. It was there that he got exposed to a different style of education than he had been used to. After failing his first exam, he was told that, aside from just reading a number of books and listening to classes, he needed to offer his personal perspectives on topics and issues, and this was an important

lesson he learned. Going through several trials and errors, he completed his studies and returned to Bhutan.

Returning to Bhutan, he started to notice an increase in the interest Bhutanese had in anthropology. Different from the past, people were now showing an interest in learning what the discipline was about. He gave an example of the Director-General of the Education Ministry being curious to know what it was before placing him as a teacher in Sherubtse College. Moreover, by that time Dr. Sonam Wangmo, a teacher in Sherubtse, had also acquired a Master's Degree in Anthropology. Yet, despite the growing interest, anthropology had still not been established as a discipline and as a result, he had to teach history in the college.

Dr. Tandin Dorji recalls doing research in Merak Sakteng as instructed by the president of the college where he first worked. During the research, he regretfully recounts how he was still not fully versed in standard research protocols and ethics, and how to best integrate such perspectives while eliciting information from interviewees and research participants. He was young and inexperienced, and felt pressured by deadlines. He advised that this was the wrong way to conduct research because of ethical issues and also because it did not bring him proper information and data. However, he learned from this and the research he conducted for his Ph.D. thesis in Wangdue Phodrang followed ethical research protocols and as a result, gave him all the required information, thus, completing successful research.

Regarding the history of anthropology in Bhutan, Dr. Tandin Dorji echoes similar remarks to that of Dr. Françoise Pommaret, as they both believe that most of the academic works in Bhutan were published by monks in the past. Another important source of historical information were those written documents by foreign researchers and missionaries who had visited Bhutan. For Dr. Tandin Dorji, while they are valuable historical records, these records only explain Bhutan to some extent. He believes that the real research began when Ashi Kunzang Choden collected folktales from all over the country and started documenting them. This, according to him, was what led to people realising the amount of unrecorded oral traditions that existed in the country. Scholars such as Dorji Penjore, Karma Ura, Sonam Kinga, and others made contributions in recording these traditions. From the first efforts to record such traditions, up to introducing anthropology as a discipline in Royal Thimphu College, Dr. Tandin Dorji believes that compared to the past, anthropology is slowly but surely taking shape in Bhutan.

First Year Students Event Report (2020)

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Royal Textile Academy Field Trip

Royal Textile Academy (RTA) was founded in May 2005 under the patronage of Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck. It is a non-profit government organisation and it was registered as a Civil Society Organization in June 11, 2011. *Thagzo*, or weaving, is one of the thirteen traditional crafts, and is ubiquitous in every region of Bhutan. It has been a significant means of livelihood of Bhutanese people from generation to generation. It is an embodiment of the culture, history, and social values of Bhutan. With this conception, RTA endeavours to revive, preserve and promote the cultural heritage, and create awareness of its importance in Bhutan. The field trip was arranged by Karma Yeshey, tutor for the module Heritage Studies, and the objective of the trip was to allow students to learn about how the textile academy operates and further study in-field about the class lesson on museums and heritage. Generally, it aimed to allow students to explore, observe, and widen their knowledge through visiting this textile museum.

Royal Textile Academy is a systematised institution with abundant human resources that assume key responsibility in the operation of the organisation. The tour to the Royal gallery room was the most fascinating experience because we could walk down the history of the Bhutanese monarchy. The heritage object that I write about my observation about is *Chagsi Pangkheb*⁷, or multi-purpose ceremonial cloth. The museum had a *Chagsi Pangkheb* donated by Her Majesty the Queen Grandmother Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck. In my inference, *Changsi Pangkheb* symbolises the existence of social strata in the past where only the high-status people had the luxury to use such cloths. The gradual disappearance of its usage may signify the decline of values ascribed to social status in Bhutan. Therefore, it might simply be a multi-purpose cloth but it reveals more about the history of our society.

⁷ In Dzongkha honorific terms, 'chag' means hand, 'si' means to wash, 'pang' refers to lap, and 'kheb' means to cover.

In conclusion, we learned how museums plays a prominent role of collecting, appreciating, promoting, interpreting, and maintaining the important heritage of the country. We observed the different kinds of textiles in Bhutanese culture. The exhibition included the intricately woven national dresses, the shoes, and the clothes of the sub-ethnic groups, ancient accessories, religious pieces and other items that delineated the art and skills of Bhutanese textiles. The two administrators guided us through all of the displays and explained every detail of the exhibit. Therefore, I feel I have broadened my knowledge and changed my perception of museums as having a vital purpose in the society.

Guest Lecture by Dr.Norbu

This guest lecture was organised by Dr. Dolma Choden Roder, our tutor for the module Medical Anthropology, and was held on the 27th of May. The guest speaker was Dr. Norbu, who is the first and only forensic medical specialist in Bhutan. The objective of the lecture was to introduce the students to forensic anthropology, especially in the Bhutanese context, and also relate to the concepts learned in the module. This report will encapsulate the main ideas of the speaker, followed by the analysis and course concept application, and a conclusion with reflection on the speaker's talk.

First, Dr. Norbu explained the definition of forensic anthropology as a meticulous examination of human skeletal remains in a legal context. We were taught that the scope of forensic anthropology ranges from investigating bodies from mass disasters to mass graves for providing justice to the dead people. Then, he elucidated the objectives of skeletal examination as forming the identity of the dead person, estimating its time since death, along with the reason and manner of death. For this investigation, there are three general methods which include assuming sex, race, and age of the person. It is followed by the presumptive method and definitive processes such as DNA or odontological analysis (study of teeth). The most interesting part of the lecture was when he shared the case in the Bhutanese context. His fascinating account started with how the heap of the human body was found in the forest above Chamgang. In his narration, he explained how he applied all the methods of identifying the body and the period of death. In conclusion, he shared the result of their investigation and being successful in returning the body back to their family.

Forensic anthropology is a sub-discipline of biological anthropology. The methods used for the examination are related to the biomedical concept that focuses on the scientific approach. For example, the use of osteological and odontological analysis requires the students to comprehensively study the bones and teeth complying with the principles of biology. A forensic anthropologist is also a legally sanctioned profession because they should complete necessary training and studies for many years. The lecture made me realise how biomedical insiders consider lay people's interpretation as subjective and unscientific. For instance, he mentioned second-hand reports of a man who was possessed by the spirit of one of the victims in a double murder case from Trongsa, and named his purported murderer in the process. This account was admitted as evidence to partly support the conviction of the murderer. He euphemistically described the court's decision to accept such evidence as 'funny', implying that it was not an appropriate process. He continued by explaining the importance of forensic anthropologists in solving such legal cases by providing concrete evidence through examining bodies.

Forensic anthropologists also require the training of the 'eyes' and learning body from the medical gaze. They need the skills of differentiating and determining the identity of the dead body through scientific procedures. Dr. Norbu mentioned the Bhutanese cultural belief that views the dead body as dirty and having qualities of *dip* (impurity/pollution). Moreover, he said he had gotten used to his work which indicates how he had eliminated such beliefs and trained himself to look from a medical perspective. The case report that he presented about a heap of a human body discovered in Chamgang forest reflects the importance of case presentation for the medical profession. In his account, the body parts were scattered and he had to gather them for analysis. He applied the methods of forensic anthropology to identify the body and establish the cause of the death. The findings of the case investigation that he presented were conclusive with logical reasoning and evidence. Thus, it demonstrates how biomedical experts organise a messy case into an immaculate story and the significance of speaking while presenting the case reports.

The lecture, overall, was helpful in enhancing our knowledge about forensic anthropology and its practice in Bhutan. The guest speaker highlighted the scope, objectives, and methodology of forensic anthropology with a case analysis. Furthermore, the lesson from the talk was relevant to the course concept of biomedicine. As a person who enjoys watching detective shows, I had a preconceived notion that forensic anthropologists are people who can instantly catch the culprit and solve the problem. However, after at-

tending this lecture, I realised that it takes a long process to examine the body. In the cases Dr.Norbu presented, I learned that it is not always possible to establish the cause of death and the perpetrator. At the same time, it has also helped me appreciate and recognise the need for more forensic anthropologists in Bhutan.

Internship Experiences for Applied Anthropology

Anita Poudel, Apsara Gurung, Deki Yangzom, Jampel Zangpo, Kesang Chuki, Pem Denkar, Pema Yangchen, Sonam Palden and Sonam Pelden

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Introduction

Applied anthropology is one of the core modules for BA Anthropology final year students. As its name suggests, applied anthropology is applying anthropological knowledge and methods onto practical, real world problems and settings. The module comprises of classes where the theory of the module is taught in order to understand the why's and how's of the field. Then, the module requires students to apply the anthropological knowledge they culminated over the years to help the CSOs chosen by them to complete a mini project. In the beginning of the year, the students were presented certain organisations, namely VAST Bhutan, Nazhoen Lamten, Druk Literary Festival, and Bhutan Media Foundation from which to choose from. Below are personal narratives of students from each group, talking about their internship experience.

Jampel Zangpo

VAST Bhutan

I had the great opportunity of working with VAST Bhutan due to which I learnt several new things in terms of interacting with people and then writing about those interactions. We were assigned to interview artists and write artists' statements. As we interviewed the artists we asked them about things such as their artwork, what they signified, and their journey as an artist and how they felt being a part of the contemporary art scene in Bhutan. I faced challenges in contacting a few artists since they did not reside in Thimphu, some did not respond to my messages or receive my calls. Yet, somehow I managed to in-

interview all the artists assigned to me by the deadline. All the artists were really friendly and this allowed me to open up more and learn new things. The artist statements that we wrote were for the Paro Beautification Project, which plans to hang the artworks and with a small QR code for the visitors to scan beside it. Through this QR code interested individuals would be able to see a description about the artist and their artwork. Overall, this internship experience helped me in improving my interviewing skills and my writing skills as well.

Kesang Choki

Nazhoen Lamten

For our Applied Anthropology project this semester, we worked with Nazhoen Lamten to provide them with data related to youth in conflict with the law and NOC (No Objection Certificates) issues they face. The organisation's main aim is to reintegrate the youth, who are released from the rehabilitation centre, back into the society and to create a sustainable livelihood and a friendly environment for the vulnerable groups of children/youth.

Even though the CSO has been working towards bettering the quality of lives of these children since 2013, they are still struggling to highlight the urgency to revise the Child Care and Protection Act (2011) in Bhutan. They were concerned regarding the lack of awareness about the existence of these policies and the failure to implement the Act in practice. Therefore, they believed that conducting a survey would help them to bring forth this issue to the OAG (Office of Attorney General) and the society at large. In addition, the survey would also provide the CSO with a valid and precise data of who exactly falls under the category of "children in difficult circumstances". According to past data, they said there has been high cases of recidivism in Bhutan among the youth, most probably due to stigmatisation and lack of proper support and awareness.

Thus, the organisation asked our team to design and conduct a survey of around 25 youth who had been in conflict with the law within the past few years. Our team further proposed interviewing the organisation's stakeholders, to get a more holistic anthropological perspective on NOC issues. This was wholeheartedly supported by the organisation.

Here's what each member has to say about their experience:

"While interviewing the youngest participant, who was 16 years old, I realised just how difficult building rapport can be. He was shy and gave short yes/no answers. I truly understood that building rapport requires much more time and effort. However, if one is short of time, as I was, I did find some solution to that — start the interview with mundane conversations, for instance asking what his favourite dish was really helped me with the flow of the survey." - Sonam Pelden

"Interviewing one of my informants, helped change my preconceived notions and biases. As a third year anthropology student, we learn to never make judgements, but as a human I think some biases are inevitable. When I met my informant, I had these unconscious biases and judged him based on his physical appearance. I thought he looked rowdy. However, talking to him and knowing his struggles and circumstance, helped change my perception. Now, I try to be more conscious of judging people based on appearance. I try to be more reflexive and constantly check my own biases. In that way, I think we are always learning, and having actual experience in the field helped me understand that." - Apsara Gurung

"I faced some challenges trying to reach my informant. It took me almost a month to finally schedule a phone interview. Initially, I thought he might be dodging the interview because he may be ashamed of his crime. However, after actually talking to him, I realised he really was busy and his circumstances had made it difficult for him to be able to talk to me before. Similar to Apsara, I also learned not to make assumptions because you never really know the other person's perspectives and situation." - Sonam Pelden

"Since this survey deals with issues of crime, it helped me understand how to work around issues that have strong ethical implications. I made sure to assure all my informants of confidentiality." - Anita Powdel

"My experience was interesting and smooth. I didn't face any difficulty with any of my participants and I also feel like I learned a lot in terms of applying anthropology to collaborate with an organisation." - Pem Denkar

"We were lucky because our organisation was very passionate about the cause and so they were highly cooperative, understanding, and responsive to all our messages. Working with them made me realise just what I could do to actually apply my anthropological training to help people in the real world." - Pema Yangchen

Drukyul's Literary Festival

Bhutan Echoes: Drukyul's Literature Festival (DLF) initially started in collaboration between India and Bhutan as an independent and a non-profit organization under the Royal Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk. Today, the organization is solely operating as a Bhutanese production and it annually celebrates literature and art in Bhutan. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the organization. DLF aims to nurture literary culture in Bhutan through stories. Moreover, it intends to inspire Bhutanese people to widely read and write.

For our project with DLF, we proposed to collect and document various oral based spiritual and cultural stories from across Bhutan. We collected vernacular stories based on spiritual landscape which demonstrated the interaction between humans, deities and the environment. By collecting those stories, we hoped not only to preserve them for the future generations but also educate, enlighten and stimulate both Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese people to be enthusiastic about Bhutanese cultural and religious literature at large. Moreover, we aimed to further literary culture in Bhutan through creative measures such as storytelling and writing.

Given the duration of the on-going project for only about three months, we focused on collecting one oral story each. Thereafter, we invested a time period of one month to identify the theme of the story and a story teller. Subsequently, we adopted structured and semi-structured interview as our methodology to collect our stories, and transcribed the recorded interviews thereafter. Next, we created a visual story using a stop motion app. The motive behind it is to ensure creativity and attractiveness of the story content, which will stimulate young Bhutanese people to be interested in listening to old age oral stories, which is an intangible Bhutanese heritage. Moreover, making the stories digitally accessible, will invite people from all countries to hear Bhutanese oral stories which are embedded with social, spiritual, political and moral messages.

My internship at Drukyul's Literature Festival gave me an opportunity to practically apply my anthropological knowledge and skill in the field. The project to collect oral based spiritual and cultural stories allowed me to realise the urgency to document indigenous Bhutanese stories which are at the peril of disappearance as the stories are only known to very few older people. Therefore, through our project, we

were able to document at least ten indigenous stories, contributing to the preservation of local oral stories and narratives which behold religious significance and cultural values.

This internship also helped me understand the importance of being engaged in collaborative project. It enhanced my ability to work in a team since I observed that the project progressed only when all the team members contributed equally in their own field of expertise. Moreover, I learnt a lot about visual and digital art while creating the visual story. This experience has helped me enhance my project work for the module 'visual anthropology' as well. Ultimately, I am content that our visual story will serve an 'edutainment' purpose for a wide range of audience.

Deki Yangzom

Bhutan Media foundation

I had chosen Bhutan Media foundation(BMF) as the organisation I wanted to work with. The reason behind this was my personal interest and the prior knowledge in media I had. The four of us, who had chosen BMF, travelled from the college to their office in Kawajangsa (which we initially had a difficult time finding as the BMF sign and logo was still attached to their previous office and google map also directed people to their previous office). Once we arrived at their office, a representative of BMF welcomed us and introduced the organisation's plans and what he expected from us. As they dealt with media, BMF planned to start a report on the influence of media and youth and in this plan, our work was to conduct the necessary survey required to get the data as well as to write a report detailing the data finding

All of our group members were eager to start this work as all of us were equally invested and interested in the contingency plan presented to us. As the weeks passed, our group finished planning the necessary questions and methods for the work and contacted the representative of BMF to get his feedback and approval for proceeding to the next step. After our attempt to contact him, we were unable to reach the representative, and so received no response from him. This could have hindered our project but our team, under the guidance of our module tutor, decided to move on to the next step — conducting our survey. After a month without a reply from the representative, we had still not heard from the representative despite our continuous attempts, since the lack of communication from the organisation meant we

had no direction our team felt lost. However, we proceeded with our work receiving feedback and direction from the module tutor instead.

While my experience was not the best, I believe this was a learning experience and a glimpse into the life of an applied anthropologist. Organisations and their members may not always be prepared to give us the necessary aid required and sometimes they do not fully understand what an anthropologist's role is in their organisation in order to utilise our skills properly. Furthermore, lack of communication can be a hindrance to project completion, and this miscommunication can be caused by several issues such as the organisation's representative being busy with the organisation's other work, or emails getting lost.

Soon after, we learnt in class about an anthropologist who went through something similar. Due to miscommunications and lack of cooperation from the organisation, he felt discouraged and ultimately never finished the job. Thus, I realised that this was simply part of the experience and that in real world settings one may encounter several situations such as these, and it occurred to me that when working with organisations, there is a need to inform them about what anthropology is and how it could benefit them from the very beginning of the collaboration.

Jampel Zangpo

The Art of Not Being Governed

Scott, J. C. (2009). *The art of not being governed an anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, ISBN: 9780300152289

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Zomia (ꠘꠟ- remote, *Mi*-people), as defined by James C. Scott, includes all the lands at elevations above 300 metres, stretching from the Central Highlands of Vietnam to Northeast India. That encompasses parts of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, India, Myanmar, and four provinces of China, an area of 2.5 million square metres. He argues that these ‘hill people’ which includes minorities of Akha, Hmong, Karen, Lahu, Mien and Wa, among others, have deliberately managed to remain state-less for the past two millennia, to flee the projects — slavery, conscription, taxes, corvee, epidemics and warfare — of the nation-states societies that surround them.

Scott claims that, until the last one percent of human history, living in the absence of state structures has been the standard human condition. He attributes the difficulties of transportation, the state of military technology, and demographic realities as the limits in the realization of state-building until the early nineteenth century. He describes this phenomenon as the friction of terrain. However, for the past century, in pursuit of establishing the architecture of modern states, the efforts of the state center to integrate and monetize the people, lands, and resources of the periphery so that they become ‘rentable’, or in other words, colonizable, is known as the ‘last enclosure movement’. These zones of periphery, described by him as ‘shatter zones’, composed as much of refugees as people who had never been state subjects, culminated in “regions of bewildering ethnic and linguistic complexity” (2009, p.1).

Other historians and political researchers termed Zomia as a region left behind by the evolutionary sequence of history that moved from non-state to state society. However, Scott further argues that contrary to the popular belief that inhabitants of the ungoverned margins are remnants of an earlier social formation left behind, or in lowland folk terms, ‘our living ancestors’, are instead a society with purposefully

crafted culture intended to thwart incorporation into nearby states and to minimize the likelihood that state-like concentrations of power will rise among them (2009, p.8).

Scott asserts that “these stateless people were not, by and large, easily drawn into the fiscally legible economy of wage labour and sedentary agriculture” (2009, p.10). These groups of people wanted to escape the state because their state experience was in the mode of oppression, that is, of the pre-modern state. This oppression came in the form of slavery, conscription for military services, labour, taxes, and general wars. Being unable to witness that, the people deliberately sought refuge in the stateless hills.

Even in the history of Bhutan, before the third king Jigme Dorji Wangchuck ascended to the throne in 1952, slavery existed. Among this slavery was corvee labour, or *woola*. Each member from a family was required to serve the state for free occasionally. However, in 1958, the slavery system was abolished. Additionally, Scott claims that hill communities had an anti-state design. He notes that most people practiced (as they still do) a kind of “escape agriculture.” Shifting cultivation presented a moving target, and enormous mixes of cultivars made systematic taxation practically impossible. Their crops matured quickly, could be harvested on a staggered schedule, or were grown underground to prevent confiscation by the state.

If an aggressor thought to force changes on a hill community or perhaps to appropriate its labour, he would encounter “escape social structure” where neither the individuals nor particular lineages owned noticeably superior status, thus, there were no obvious persons who might serve as an authority’s agents. Regarding literature, because records and writing skills would have aided any collaborators who managed to emerge, Scott speculates that the highlanders’ lack of sophisticated writing was intentional. Inspired by Pierre Clastres’s idea of societies averting/avoiding state, Scott has successfully argued that the people of the Zomia region had organized their political establishment, geographic location, and subsistence strategies to forestall state control.

In my opinion, Scott’s argument was convincing because he has richly shown the evidence of highlanders’ strategies of resistance to various dominations. He has reasoned why the people of the lowlands have fled to the highlands and decided to have a society without a state. Accurately, he states that Zomia

had the largest area of people in the world who have not yet been incorporated into the state and were outside of the controlling mechanisms of power.

Their strategies of resistance, such as scatter settlement to avoid the state from taking them as slaves, planting of root-based crops to prevent the state from seizing their products, and their intentional lack of sophisticated language are concrete evidence that these people do not need a state to govern them and are not backwards or 'primitive'. 'The Art of Not Being Governed' gave me a new perspective of the non-state societies and the societies that lived away from modernization/state institutions. His book illustrated the general idea that the societies that lived in isolated areas throughout history have not been behind or uncivilized; rather, they have developed strategies to make a functioning society on their own terms.



*2018, 2019, and 2020 Anthropology cohorts
with the module tutors*