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# Tibetan Range Wars: Spatial Politics and Authority on the Grasslands of Amdo

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## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on one of the most disturbing features of life on the Tibetan grasslands today: intractable, violent conflicts over pasture. The author argues that understanding spatial and historical dimensions of the process through which Amdo was incorporated into the People's Republic of China (PRC) helps us make sense of these conflicts. State territoriality attempts to replace older socio-territorial identities with new administrative units. However, histories remain inscribed in the landscape and lead to unintended consequences in the implementation of new grassland policies. The author draws on Raymond Williams' insight into residual formations to theorize the relationship between range conflicts and secular state officials' lack of authority. At the same time, dispute resolution by religious figures challenges both triumphalist readings of state domination and romantic notions of Tibetan resistance.

## INTRODUCTION

In stark contrast to the ideology of self-sufficiency which led to forced collectivization almost half a century ago, China's integration into the global market economy now necessitates that the Tibetan plateau be transformed into 'a prosperous modern livestock base' (Lobsang, 1998: 77). Minority pastoralists in China's economic periphery are seen as an obstacle to the achievement of the wealth and status China deserves. This is particularly true in Amdo, one of the three major ethno-linguistic regions of Tibetan cultural geography, referring to parts of present-day Sichuan, Qinghai, and Gansu provinces. A television programme aired in Hongyuan county, Sichuan, in 1998 announced the need to 'smash the traditional pastoral ideas' and 'liberate the herders' thoughts', in order to 'force herders to learn to turn their assets into market goods'. The narrator further asserted that Tibetan pastoralists are enthusiastic about fencing and division of household pastures, one of the cornerstones of a new 'grasslands construction' programme.

Chinese policy-makers call for not only the leasing of rangeland use (but not ownership) rights to individual households, but also the assignment of carrying capacities to each piece of grassland and the implementation of incentives and sanctions to induce herders to limit herd sizes to these capacities (NRC, 1992: 33).<sup>1</sup> These programmes assume a highly problematic ‘tragedy of the commons’ model, in which only privately-held land provides enough incentive for herders to adequately invest in and maintain their otherwise overgrazed pastures. The timing and form of implementation of these programmes have varied across China, with Inner Mongolia beginning to allocate household use rights in the early 1980s while much of the rangeland of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) remained undivided in 2002.<sup>2</sup>

Provincial officials interviewed in Sichuan and Qinghai cite Inner Mongolia’s experience as a model for their own ‘four allocations’ programmes, despite the many social and ecological problems of the former (Williams, 2002). One typical programme, implemented in Hongyuan in 1997, included not only the leasing of pasture use rights to individual households for fifty years, but also fencing, and the construction of livestock sheds, barns for hay storage, and houses. Sedentarization is another major goal (Dondrup, 1997: 6). Underpinning these programmes is a pervasive discourse that conceptualizes the Tibetan Plateau as degraded by the ‘irrational’ herding practices of pastoralists, including their religion-based refusal to increase livestock offtake or to kill rodents.

The programmes have had many unintended consequences. Because the pasture allocation process is often unfair, some families have received pastures with no water access, and must consequently rent pasture from others. Fencing and shed building impose a heavy financial burden which is too much for many families.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, ecologists Wu and Richard (1999: 7) report a localized decline in grass production and diversity in areas surrounding enclosures in Hongyuan two years after the programme began, for reasons similar to those documented by Williams (2002) in Inner Mongolia.

Most disturbingly, the division of grasslands, subsequent rentals, and the visual fixing-in-place effect of barbed wire fences have exacerbated and increased violent conflicts over pasture. When I interviewed herders in several Tibetan pastoral counties of Amdo in 1998, the vast majority were

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1. Livestock were returned to private ownership in the early 1980s. The 1985 National Rangeland Law allowed leasing of rangeland use rights to individual households.
  2. In parts of Golog, winter pasture allocation occurred in 1994, but summer pastures were not divided until 1999.
  3. In Hongyuan, herders were charged 8 yuan/m (approximately US\$ 1) for barbed wire and then ‘subsidized’ to the tune of 4 yuan/m — although the market price was only 4 yuan/m. At 80 m<sup>2</sup>, winter livestock sheds are far too small to hold more than a few animals, yet cost hundreds of dollars.

critical of the grassland construction programme. All cited increased conflicts as a reason for their opposition. My interlocutors said repeatedly that household grassland allocation had 'destroyed our unity'. Conflicts erupt not only because of the visual effects of the fences — which embody, symbolize, reflect, and reproduce social divisions (Peters, 1994: 1–2) — but also because of decreased flexibility in livestock movement, as well as the unfairness of the allocation process. Government officials have been unable to resolve the numerous conflicts. Most surprisingly, where disputes have been settled, religious leaders rather than secular officials are usually responsible. This has been the case not only with conflicts between households, but also those between villages, townships, counties, and provinces.

In this article,<sup>4</sup> I pursue two related arguments in the examination of these disputes. First, I argue that the intractability of these conflicts is an unintended consequence of the imposition of new grassland policies on a landscape already thick with the history of confrontation between multi-scaled socio-territorial identifications and state boundary-making strategies. Second, the role Tibetan religious leaders play as mediators in grassland disputes calls into question triumphalist readings of state capacity as well as Tibetans' autonomous resistance to the state. This essay also suggests that grassland politics must be considered both historically and at a variety of spatial scales.

### **Grassland Conflicts**

Violent pasture conflicts are one of the most disturbing features of life on the Tibetan grasslands today. One example is a dispute between Ngulra township herders in Machu county, which lies in Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP), Gansu province, and neighbouring Arig herders in Henan county, which is in Huangnan TAP, Qinghai province. This conflict resulted in the deaths of at least twenty-nine Tibetans between 1997 and 1999 (HRW, 1999: 13; TIN, 1999b). The armed conflicts began when Henan county authorities officially assigned approximately 20 km<sup>2</sup> of pasture on the border between the two counties to the Arig. Although Arig herders had been settled in that area for several centuries, the official allocation and fencing of the land made their presence more visibly permanent, provoking the Ngulra Tibetans to assert their land claims. The dispute escalated into periodic armed fighting, involving some 2000 fighters on both sides, using smuggled automatic and semi-automatic weapons. At the time, government officials did not mediate, and nobody was arrested. In December 1997, after

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4. This article is based on fieldwork in the area. I conducted semi-structured interviews with forty herders, township, county, and provincial officials in July–August 1998. Subsequently, I also interviewed seven Amdowas from pastoral families who now live in Beijing or the US.

the abbot and other senior lamas (religious teachers) of nearby Labrang monastery intervened, the two sides agreed to come to a peaceful resolution. However, the conflict resumed in March 1998. Both sides reportedly petitioned authorities at the county, prefectural and provincial levels for help in resolving the dispute, but officials only told the petitioners to submit their appeals elsewhere. According to one recent exile from Ngulra, disputants also petitioned central authorities for settlement, but to no avail (*ibid.*).

Such disputes are neither uncommon nor entirely new. Between 1985 and 1991 there were forty-seven armed rangeland conflicts between counties within Gansu and on the border of Gansu and Qinghai, leading to more than twenty deaths and eighty serious injuries (Wang, 1997: 117). There are two points to note here. First, violent disputes have proliferated since the incorporation of these areas into the PRC, for reasons discussed below. Although even Chinese sources suggest that the pasture conflicts in the period preceding 1958 were 'relatively quiet' (*ibid.*: 116), I am not trying to portray an idealized, harmonious past without conflict. Instead, the specific historical processes that have encouraged the more recent proliferation of grassland conflicts and exacerbated their intractability form part of this discussion. Second, although systematic statistics on grassland conflicts are unavailable, interviews with herders and speeches by officials in Amdo (for example, rGya, 1993: 69) suggest that privatization of household use rights, which divides rangeland into smaller parcels, has not only intensified larger-scale disputes, but also brought grassland disputes to a smaller, previously uncommon, inter- and even intra-household level.

The situation of grassland conflicts in Tibetan areas contrasts with reported cases in other parts of China such as northern Xinjiang, where Banks (2001: 729) finds that disputes are uncommon, and that mediation by village leaders 'nearly always leads to a satisfactory resolution'.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, scholars have not analysed the numerous Tibetan conflicts. Only a few brief magazine articles, and the Tibet Information Network (TIN), an independent news and research service that collects and distributes the best currently-available information on events in Tibet, have covered the disputes. One such magazine article provoked officials of one Tibetan prefecture to prohibit local residents from talking about grassland conflicts to foreigners, a move that belies government sensitivity to the political implications of these disputes.

Nevertheless, in the course of interviews about the privatization of pasture use rights, Tibetan herders repeatedly expressed frustration with the disputes. By using interviews together with government reports, speeches, and historical sources, I hope to add nuance to the account of Tibetan range

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5. As this is not a comparative study, I do not want to make too much of this contrast. However, I would speculate that different histories of state incorporation, forms of religious authority, and a Tibetan cultural ethic of vengeance contribute to differences in both extent of conflicts and their style of resolution.

conflicts as presented by TIN, according to which, 'the traditional role of influential religious figures has been taken over by the state . . . contributing to a breakdown in the sense of affinity among the nomadic population'. The implication that the breakdown of a static 'tradition' is responsible for grassland conflicts and their lack of resolution can be challenged by exploring the processes of hegemony and 'residual' politics as they are inscribed on a multi-layered landscape of meaning, authority, and use. This challenges reflexive assumptions among scholars and policy-makers that pastoral disputes in developing countries are no more than 'straightforward clashes between statutory and customary institutions'.

### **Hegemony, History, and Landscape**

In Western popular imagination, Tibetans suffer uniformly from Chinese state domination, which has completely eroded their culture and traditions. The images that circulate through the transnational 'Free Tibet' movement also romanticize Tibetan resistance to the state. This portrayal resonates with strands of work on 'everyday resistance' and 'resistance studies' in which subalterns seem to resist domination from a space of pure autonomy. Scholars have recently critiqued this implied spatial separation between pure domination and pure resistance (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Mitchell, 1990; Moore, 1998), reminding us that 'resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power' (Foucault, 1978: 96). Gramscian formulations of hegemony are particularly useful for rethinking simplified dichotomies of resistance and power. Subaltern groups are 'always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up' (Gramsci, 1997/1971: 55). Yet, there is also potential for resistance within structures of domination. Rather than arising out of a position of pure opposition, resistance emerges out of a discursive space shared by both the dominant and the subaltern. This Gramscian concept of hegemony is useful for understanding why secular officials often call upon Tibetan religious leaders to settle range disputes.

The authority of Tibetan religious leaders is part of what Raymond Williams (1977: 122–3) calls 'the residual', an element that is formed in the past, but which works actively in the current cultural process to express experiences, meanings, and values that cannot be articulated in the dominant culture. The dominant culture tries to incorporate the actively residual, but even so, the active presence of alternative politics has significant effects on the hegemonic process. Residual elements are clearly affected by hegemonic limits and pressures, but can also lead to significant breaks beyond these limits. They 'may again in part be neutralized, reduced or incorporated, but [...] in their most active elements nevertheless come through as independent and original' (ibid.:113–14).

Analysing contemporary grassland politics requires a historical understanding not only of authority but also of what Gramsci called 'historical

sedimentation' — the way in which state policies, historical practices (hegemonic as well as subaltern), memory, and evocation leave traces on the landscape. These traces, also a type of 'residual', include socio-territorial identities — identities conceived of both in terms of association with a territory and a language (Merlan, 1998: 23). Boundaries, zones, and territories created by techniques of modern state territoriality such as mapping (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995) define new political identities that overlap and compete with earlier socio-territorial identities.

The next section explores the social consequences of the imposition of the state's new territoriality. This is followed by two sections that examine how large and small-scale socio-territorial identities have changed with incorporation into the PRC. After a brief discussion of historical grassland management and dispute resolution, the paper moves on to show how the drawing of new administrative boundaries rearranged 'tribal' territories. It then returns to the question of hegemony, and the role of religious leaders in the mediation of conflicts. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the argument and discusses ways in which this case confounds some accepted wisdom of grassland policy implementation.

## STATE TERRITORIALITY

In marked contrast to herders' lived experiences of space, the territoriality of modern states, including China, is premised upon abstract, homogeneous space, in the sense that any unit can be rendered equivalent to any other unit (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995: 388–9). The arbitrary nature of this space is reflected by the frequency with which administrative boundaries and names have changed since the founding of the PRC. State redefinitions of territory are particularly common on the pastoral landscape, given traditional Han views of the range beyond the frontier walls as *huang*, connoting uninhabited wasteland, an emptiness waiting to be tamed by civilization (Williams, 2002).

In the 1950s, the state tried to simply replace one land use type (pasture) by another (agricultural fields) in Qinghai and other frontier, pastoral areas, through resettlement and the establishment of state farms. In the words of one youth volunteer from Beijing in 1955: 'we will build . . . a new life on the desolate and uninhabited wastes; with our own hands we will wake the land that had been sleeping' (quoted in Rohlf, 1999: 250). The putative emptiness of the frontier grasslands was to be the stage for a 'war on nature', with rallying cries to 'attack the grasslands' (Shapiro, 2001). According to *China Youth* magazine in 1955, 'Young people . . . have thrown themselves into fiery hot struggle with Great Nature and are courageously going to the virgin lands of the Motherland that have not yet been plowed up. [They] will turn the empty lands into an earthly paradise' (quoted in Rohlf, 1999: 252). The goal of 'opening up wasteland' was that highland pastoral communities

should become self-sufficient in grain production, a task that was doomed to failure and led to a great deal of pasture degradation (now blamed on the herders).

According to the logic of state space, just as one type of land can be replaced by another, so too can boundaries be drawn and redrawn, regions merged, partitioned, and merged again without consequence. However, the fixing of arbitrary administrative boundaries and the spatial immobilization brought on by the privatization of use rights have worked together with historical contingencies to produce hardship for local herders. Two examples illustrate these unintended consequences.

Dari county in Golog TAP, Qinghai, was recently the site of a major international grassland rehabilitation development project focused on serious problems with 'black beach', the local name for the exposure and eventual erosion of organic material after vegetative cover dies. Rehabilitation plans were based on the assumption that herder ignorance of proper pasture management led to uncontrolled rodent infestations and overgrazing, which in turn triggered 'black beach'. However, this common narrative obscures the role of historically specific administrative boundary-making.

In fact, Dari historically had some of the richest grasslands in Golog. In the early part of the twentieth century, a chief in Serthar-Golog gave about 70,000 ha of pasture as a dowry to a chief in Dari. When the administrative boundaries of Qinghai and Sichuan were drawn several decades later, Golog was fragmented, with Serthar-Golog (now called Serthar) drawn into Sichuan. However, the dowry land was allocated to Qinghai province. In the 1980s, a fierce shooting battle occurred over rights to this pasture. Following casualties on both sides, Beijing intervened and gave the disputed land back to Serthar in 1986 (Levine, 1998: 72; Yang and Lobsang, nd). After losing a significant amount of prime pasture in this way, Dari county officials lobbied to have their losses distributed throughout the prefecture. Their request was denied, leaving Dari county with a significantly increased stocking rate.

According to county officials, the result of the increased stocking rate has been the tripling (to over 574,600 ha) of 'black beach' area in the county (Yang and Lobsang, nd). In fact, the relative effects of grazing pressure as opposed to abiotic factors (including long-term climate change, interannual variations in precipitation and temperature) on rangeland degradation (however defined) and vegetation (species, biomass, cover, etc.) can only be determined precisely through rigorous ecological studies. While the ecological effects of state range policies are extremely important, a detailed examination is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, recent studies do suggest 'that a continuum of systems exists rather than a stark dichotomy between equilibrium and non-equilibrium rangelands' (Fernandez-Gimenez and Allen-Diaz, 1999: 882). Thus, it is reasonable to believe that while some decrease in rangeland productivity results from a long-term trend towards a drier climate (Zhang, 1996), a sudden severe increase in

stocking rate can also have contributed to real, if localized, effects on vegetation cover (such as 'black beach').

As a result of the increased area of 'black beach' in Dari, more than 1100 families with 130,000 head of livestock are forced to travel to neighbouring provinces, prefectures, and counties to rent pasture each year (Yang and Lobsang, nd: 14). Households pay a yearly average of approximately US\$ 82 in rental fees, a very significant expenditure on par with per capita annual income.

Imposition of state territoriality has had similar unintended effects in Changmahe township (also in Golog), a windswept area situated at 4500 metres altitude, amongst extensive sand dunes. It was not historically a place of permanent residence for herders, serving instead as a summer way station between lower pastures. Grasslands here have the least precipitation, lowest average temperatures and shortest grass growing period of pastures throughout the county. However, in 1962 seventy families were resettled from Dawu, when the latter became the prefectural seat. According to one narrative, these families moved from Banma to Dawu after a conflict between two tribes, whereas another has it that the move was punishment for participation in rebellions against the government. Either way, the pastures of Changmahe have proven unsuitable for continuous grazing. Residents are now plagued by serious desertification from encroaching sand dunes and a severe lack of usable winter pasture.

Herd sizes have declined significantly since the 1970s, with average livestock per capita dropping from 40 in 1984 to 20.35 in 1997. Each winter, families must migrate to other townships, counties, or provinces in search of pasture. Because all grassland in the region has been divided and allocated, these families can only rent pasture on a temporary basis. As in Dari, this is a source of insecurity and a significant drain on the families' financial resources, especially because Changmahe is the poorest township in the county. According to a former township Party Secretary, one family was forced to move seventy times during the winter of 1993 in search of affordable pasture.

The human population of Changmahe has also decreased, as those who are able to negotiate means to leave, do so. Families who are able to mobilize networks of political patronage are the first to go. Twenty families (out of about 160) left in the period between 1991 and 1997. Local officials initially implemented the prefectural fencing policy but have since stopped, submitting reports about its ineffectiveness to higher levels of government. They have also petitioned for resettlement, which they see as the only solution to the livelihood problems of local pastoralists. Ironically, the vertical (that is, decreased scope of seasonal transhumance patterns) and horizontal fixing-in-place accomplished by modern state territoriality has led to the need for more (costly) movement for these pastoralists.

The inflexible way in which the commons were divided has other disadvantages. Dramatic climatic fluctuations result in localized grass growth,



making a mobile grazing strategy advantageous (Clarke, 1998: 25–6). Flexibility is also needed to avoid localized but severe snowstorms. Elderly herders explain that in the past, they often simply moved their livestock from the shady to sunny slopes of mountains to avoid storms, thus lowering livestock mortality rates. This is not always possible now with household allocation. Furthermore, whereas chieftains historically had the power to readjust pasture allocation in accordance with animal numbers (Chen, 1995: 153–5), making pasture use quite flexible, under current policy there are no mechanisms for buying, selling, or reallocating pasture in accordance with actual livestock numbers.<sup>6</sup>

Loss of flexibility in pasture allocation is part of a larger transformation of space. Earlier in the century, pastoral groups that migrated because of conflict or other reasons were able to splinter off and settle in geographically distant locales. For example, in what is now Hongyuan county, Sichuan, all residents of one village in Longrang township moved from what is now Tongren county, Qinghai. Most residents of Mewa township moved from what is now Ganzi prefecture in Sichuan. In both cases, migrations to what was then the sparsely populated Hongyuan area were motivated by disputes between tribes in the sending areas.

Several Golog men interviewed during the course of this study denied that there were any grazing disputes at all before 1958 ‘because there was so much space’. There is little doubt that this is a romanticized memory of the past and that there were in fact blood feuds and conflicts related not only to grazing but also to livestock raids and retaliation for robberies, violation of sacred preserves, and murder. However, beyond actual increases in population and livestock density, the memory of space as being more plentiful before state incorporation suggests that these herders perceived more options available for responding to conflicts and other contingencies, such as snowstorms. This representation of local history is significant: by placing the blame for present-day conflicts on state privatization policies, the fact that local identities are not transcended (to a transregional ‘Tibetan’ identity) in grassland disputes is effectively obscured. The active invention of the past as a landscape of fluid and plentiful space is part of the current struggle to constitute a collective identity.

## RENAMING TIBET AND AMDO

New boundaries do more than curtail the spatial practices of pastoral livelihoods. They also interpellate subjects by creating new administrative

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6. Of course, this was not the only principle on which leaders allocated pastures. Although the Chinese state might now prefer to privatize completely, it is constrained by its own discourse about the distinction between its ‘socialist market economy’ and a capitalist system with fully privatized land ownership.

entities through which citizens of modern states conceive of themselves. The spatial process through which Tibetan regions are incorporated into China required the renaming of peoples and places at a number of scales. At the largest geographical scale, 'Tibet' officially refers only to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), which corresponds roughly to the region under direct control of the Tibetan government in Lhasa in the early twentieth century. However, the TAR covers less than half of the total area occupied by ethnic Tibetans. The Tibetan government-in-exile claims an alternative geography, in which Tibet is comprised of three 'provinces'.<sup>7</sup> U-Tsang (roughly the present-day TAR), Kham<sup>8</sup> and Amdo. After the break-up of the central Tibetan kingdom in the ninth century, Amdo and Kham retained close cultural and religious links to central Tibet. Politically, however, they were organized as small kingdoms and tribes nominally under Chinese and Tibetan authority but actually controlled by leaders who held allegiance to neither.

The Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911) greatly expanded the Chinese empire by conferring a charter of investiture and a seal upon local hereditary elites in peripheral areas. These elites were thus 'confirmed' of their right to rule their own people according to local laws and traditions, in return for collecting taxes and keeping order.<sup>9</sup> The Qing began to formally administer Qinghai around 1723–25. However, its rule was mostly nominal, not even including tax collection or tribute in some areas. For example, only one of the many 'thousand-household' chiefs of the Golog 'tribes' officially received the Qing seal and investiture, and this not until 1814 (Xing, 1994: 91–93, 16–17). One explorer quoted a Golog herder as saying in 1908: 'We Golog... have from time immemorial obeyed none but our own laws' (Rock, 1956: 127). The Golog also performed their socio-territorial identity through folk songs such as this one recorded in 1951:

Against the orders of the Dharma King of Tibet I rebel! / ...  
 Against China I rebel! / Against the Chinese government's laws I rebel! / ...  
 We make our own laws! / ... I rebel, it's meat I like! (Norbu, 1997: 3)

After the fall of the Qing, the Hui (Chinese Muslim) Ma clan seized power in many parts of Amdo. The Republican government recognized

7. While the division of Tibetan cultural geography into the three 'provinces' of U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo now dominates exile discourse, this is a relatively new representation. An earlier scheme, in use in the mid-seventeenth century, conceived of the three regions as being Ngari Korsum, U-Tsang, and mDo-Kham (including both Kham and Amdo) (Gelek, 1998: 47). 'When the term first appeared in Tibetan histories, there was no general agreement about the range of territory it referred to, or how the name itself originated' (Makley, 1999: 94). Clearly 'Amdo' comes from the 'mdo' part of 'mDo-Kham', but beyond that its origins are difficult to ascertain. Usage is both pervasive and completely unproblematic in contemporary accounts of Tibetan history.
8. Diqing TAP, Yunnan; Ganzi TAP, Sichuan; Yushu, Qinghai; and Chamdo, TAR.
9. The Chinese empire recognized and enfeoffed Tibetan tribal leaders as their representatives from the Yuan dynasty. However, the 'native chieftain system' became more institutionalized during the Ming and was further modified in the late Qing.

Ma Qi as the local ruler in 1915, replacing nominal Qing control over Tibetan tribes with closer control and burdensome tributes. After Qinghai was officially established as a province in 1928, new districts were established, borders rearranged, and new place names given (Rock, 1956: 4–6). Between 1918 and 1942, Ma Qi and his son and successor Ma Bufang, waged a number of bloody and brutal campaigns against groups including the Golog. In addition, Ma Bufang invested himself with the power to grant pasture permits and draw boundaries. Ma created a number of disputes between Tibetan and Mongolian groups by giving grassland certificates for the same pasture to several groups simultaneously. These deliberately overlapped boundaries led to armed conflict, creating or exacerbating existing disputes (Chen, 1995: 309, 313). Disunity among various tribes — that is, allegiance to socio-territorial identities on a smaller scale than an imagined community of all Golog-pas — helped Ma practise his ‘divide and conquer’ strategy, which was not unlike the PRC’s gerrymandering of ethnic minorities that followed.

The entire region officially became part of the PRC in 1949, although formal incorporation did not translate instantly into practice. Golog, for example, had a period of armed resistance in 1958. The PRC used many techniques to incorporate peripheral areas, including military control, the forging of tight economic links with the rest of China, government-sponsored movement of technically skilled Han personnel, and political gerrymandering, the drawing of borders of ‘autonomous’ minority regions, prefectures and counties to ensure a Han majority. The TAR is currently the only ‘autonomous region’ in China in which a minority group actually outnumbers the Han. The drawing of the other half of the Tibetan population into four provinces assured ‘minority’ status within each and facilitated integration and control. This partitioning and renaming of Tibetan territories was a key spatial process of incorporation.

In addition to gerrymandering, the transformation of Tibetan socio-territorial identity (marked by tribal, regional, and religious affiliation) into Chinese national identity (marked by Chinese citizenship registered to counties, prefectures, and provinces) was also accomplished through policies which interpellate Tibetans as but one of fifty-five bounded and regulated ‘minority nationalities’. Many Tibetans, especially those with secular education, refer to themselves as ‘people of China’ (*zhongguoren*). However, the new spatial order did not simply replace ‘people of Tibet’ with ‘people of China’. In fact, before the twentieth century, Tibetan identity was defined primarily by regional and religious affiliation. The current appellation for ‘Tibetan person’ (*Bod-pa*) referred only to non-nomadic inhabitants of central Tibet. Until quite recently, the ‘imagined community’ of Tibetans was based far more upon aspects of religion, genealogy, myth and folklore than on modern notions of nationhood (Kapstein, 1998: 140). Ironically, recent campaigns to instil Chinese patriotism have strengthened Tibetan nationalism and a transregional pan-Tibetan identity.

## TRIBAL SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND AUTHORITY

Nested within regional identifications such as Amdo were other levels of socio-territorial identities, woven together in a complicated mosaic on the landscape. At the lowest level, encampments typically consisted of five to ten patrilineally-related households and constituted the basic pastoral economic unit. Encampments were usually aggregated into higher-order groups or ‘tribes’, referred to below as *tsowa*.<sup>10</sup> Consisting of several patrilineal clans, these were in turn aggregated into ‘confederacies’ or ‘unions’. According to Ekvall (1939: 50), a missionary-anthropologist in Amdo in the early twentieth century, encampments were quite independent: ‘although [the encampment] can hardly establish its rights to grazing privileges without the consent of the tribe as a whole, it can, being nomadic, always secede and go somewhere else’.

Patterns of authority varied greatly through space and time. Some *tsowas* had groups of elders who acted either as advisers to a chief (*ponpo*),<sup>11</sup> or in place of one (Ekvall, 1939: 68–70). Some chiefs had such extended power that they were known instead as king. Most chiefs were hereditary, but some were also elected. In addition to secular group leaders, religious authority also shaped the lives of pastoralists. Important monasteries throughout Tibet controlled large tracts of land as well as some tribes, known as *lha-sde*. The monastery and its *lha-sde* were closely tied by religious as well as economic relations, and the monastery often appointed leaders (usually a rotating position), who mediated disputes within the *lha-sde*.

Even in *tsowas* that did not belong directly to a monastery, lay–monastic relationships were usually close. Herders supported monasteries economically, in exchange for religious and other services. Family members of secular chiefs often held important positions within the monastery, further strengthening ties. Some groups had a religious leader (*Lha-dPon*) who exerted authority in parallel with the secular *ponpo* (Gelek, 1998). This dual system of secular and religious rule was considered the ideal throughout Tibetan regions.

Monasteries in Amdo competed with each other by building up alliances of pastoral tribes. One of the most powerful monasteries, Labrang, is said to have had 108 branch monasteries during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>12</sup> These branch monasteries formed a patchwork of territories across the landscape whose allegiances and social identities were primarily centred around Labrang. Furthermore, although the well-defined territory of each *tsowa* was generally contiguous, territories of some tribes were

10. Encampments were sometimes grouped into *Shog-Pa* (wing), a term which was often further aggregated in larger groups called *Tsho-Ba* (*tsowa*) or *sDe-Pa*. However, in some places, *tsowa* referred to a smaller level of organization than *shog-pa*.

11. More specifically, they were known as *Shog-dPon*, *sDe-dPon*, *Tsho-dPon*, or *dPon-Chen*.

12. Most sources actually list 94 — 108 is a sacred Buddhist number (Makley, 1999: 134).

divided into different areas sandwiched between the territories of other tribes, reinforcing the picture of a patchwork (Carrasco, 1959: 75–6).

Not all *tsowas* existed as part of larger confederacies. Many were independent for periods of time. Large *tsowas* split into smaller ones, small encampments grew into large *tsowas*, and migrants fleeing from one *tsowa* joined others (Xing, 1994: 91–94). To give one example, increasing Mongol settlement into what is now Qinghai during the Yuan dynasty led the Washu clan to split off from the rest of the Golog confederacy and move, divide, and settle in a number of places including present-day Nyarong, Baiyu, Lithang, and Serthar. Even after several hundred years, new *tsowas* formed from this original move kept ‘Washu’ as part of their names in conjuncts, as in Washu Serthar or Washu Choskor (Gelek, 1998). This was practised in other parts of Amdo as well, where groups that had split off and migrated nevertheless retained an affiliation with their former clan, chief, or monastery. This created a complicated mosaic of socio-territorial identities. Many present-day rangeland conflicts are related to the ways in which new PRC boundaries were overlaid on this mosaic.

#### HISTORICAL GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Historically, grassland in Amdo was held as common property, with pasture allocation rights in the hands of *tsowa* leaders (Chen, 1995: 153–5). Methods varied in time and place, and allocation was not always smooth or without conflict. At a very general level, however, leaders typically assigned grazing grounds to encampments within larger tribal territory either seasonally or in one-time allocations. In the former, a higher-level chief gathered together lower-level chiefs at the beginning of each season to discuss the timing and destination of the next move. The lower-level *ponpo* drew straws to determine the extent of his group’s pasture for the season. This process was repeated for encampments and households (ibid.). One-time pasture allocation was similar, except that each encampment had several seasonal grazing locations that were valid over several years. Generally, summer–autumn pastures were subject to more frequent adjustments than winter–spring pastures (Carrasco, 1959: 76). Leaders retained the right to confiscate pasture from herders who had lost all of their livestock, or who had no descendants. Even in one-time allocation, outsiders and families without sufficient grassland could apply to leaders for reallocated pasture (Chen, 1995: 153–5). Nevertheless, herd ownership was far from equitable. Many poor households owned no livestock and worked as servants for wealthy families.

Although territory in pre-PRC Amdo was not conceived of as abstract, mapped space, there were well-developed senses of territorial rights embedded in *tsowa* membership, and (unmapped) boundaries between the pastures of different tribes (Carrasco, 1959: 75–6). Conflicts occurred when members of one tribe herded their livestock on another’s pastures (Gelek, 1998; Levine,

1998; Xing, 1994: 74). There was a distinct identification of *tsowa* with certain geographical territories. On the other hand, if a group lacked sufficient pasture for one season, it could often rent pasture from neighbouring groups after giving gifts and receiving permission from the appropriate leader. More permanent land transfers between groups also occurred through livestock sales and other arrangements (Carrasco, 1959: 77; Chen, 1995: 154).

My interviews suggest that inter-household grassland conflicts within *tsowas* were not very common historically. Reasons for this include greater flexibility in pasture allocation adjustments as well as the legitimacy of the authority of both secular chiefs and religious officials. Furthermore, strong social pressures mitigated against theft, robbery, and other conflicts against members of the same group, whereas the same acts directed against other groups were approved of and even encouraged (Norbu, 1997: 70). In Serthar, young men demonstrated their courage and prevented others from dubbing them 'spinster[s] grown old at the hearth' (ibid.) by travelling to distant territories to make incursions against strangers. As one elderly man in Golog put it, 'in the past if you wanted to rob someone, you'd always go somewhere far away to do it'.

On the other hand, there were many inter-tribal disputes. The most serious conflicts involved murder. These were perpetuated through a powerful gendered ethic of defending honour through revenge (*drag-sha-glan*), which remains a strong cultural element in Amdo and Kham today. If one does not somehow avenge the murder of a family member, then 'one is not worthy of having been born as a man'. However, grassland disputes did not necessarily involve killing.

Disputes within or among encampments within a single *tsowa* were generally settled by higher-level leaders. Carrasco (1959: 76–7) discusses cases in which encampments cut off the manes and tails of livestock from other encampments the first time; 'if found again they are held and their owners have to ransom them'. In other cases, chiefs punished violation of grazing rules by fining livestock owners a certain quantity of butter. In disputes between groups that did not fall under the same higher-level authority, third party mediators were often called in. These mediators, who were usually renowned for their sharp wit, honesty, and other mediating skills, were elders, chiefs from other *tsowas*, or lamas (Ekvall, 1964; Levine, 1998; Norbu, 1997). However, if disputing parties were unwilling to come to terms, mediators or chiefs often had disputants take an oath in front of the gods: it was assumed that no one would dare break an oath made in this way (Gelek, 1998).

## REARRANGING TERRITORY

As the PRC incorporated Tibetan areas, new administrative units were created. In some cases local leaders were consulted and units were created

based on historical precedent, but in other cases, new units split former *tsowas* into different jurisdictions, often precipitating conflicts. Furthermore, the exact boundaries of these new administrative units were often not clarified to local residents. In the past few years a number of disputes have erupted between Qinghai and the TAR over what was formerly the territory of the Surmang *tsowa*, which was split between the two. Similarly, the parts of Golog that were partitioned out of Qinghai, into Ganzi and Aba prefectures of Sichuan are now the sites of multiple conflicts. These include not only the Dari–Serthar conflict discussed above, but also a dispute that began in the late 1980s between Jiuzhi in Golog and neighbouring Aba in Sichuan. Where new boundaries are not isomorphic with historical socio-territorial units, conflicts are difficult to resolve for two reasons. First, there are no historical borders on which to base resolutions. Second, the traditional area over which one family or individual exercised authority has been fractured into several administrative units, none of which are necessarily very meaningful to local residents.

Rearrangements of space continued even after provincial boundaries were set. In the early 1960s, large communes conjoined numerous formerly separate *tsowas*. These communes were internally divided into many production teams, which often did not follow lines of prior social organization. Other areas became state pastures or farms rather than communes. Some state farms began as reform-through-labour camps, while others were staffed by thousands of resettled Han youth from eastern China. In addition to straddling *tsowa* territories, the state farms (many of which attempted to grow grain on the grasslands), were characterized by a linear organization of space ‘with wide, straight roads and long brick walls’ (Rohlf, 1999: 289) that distinguished them from the surrounding landscape.

In addition to the imposition of state territoriality through the rearrangement of space, the commune period had another implication for current grassland disputes. The fighting of the two major factions (known in Tibetan as Gyenlog and Nyamdrel) during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution resulted in considerable killing. Often, entire villages joined one faction without any understanding of what (if anything) it stood for. The unavenged murders of this period created an explosive situation later in which small infractions (such as livestock grazing) could trigger large-scale conflicts.

After communes and most state farms were dissolved in the early 1980s, some *tsowas* were returned to their traditional grazing lands (one *tsowa* now corresponding roughly to one or two townships), but a large number were not. In Golog, some *tsowas* that were severely depopulated in 1958 remained conjoined with other groups after decollectivization. Others were settled in less dense regions; and others simply moved to new locations. Levine (1998: 71–2) found members of one *tsowa* who were moved five times after 1958 before being returned to their previous territory, twenty-eight years later. The impetus for their return in 1986 was the return of land from Dari to Serthar after the major conflict described above. The

regaining of this land led to yet another massive reshuffling of *tsowas* across Serthar.

Although many Tibetan place names were translated into Chinese and made into administrative districts, it is rarer for *tsowa* names (when different from place names) to have been kept. The three largest confederacies of Golog, for example, are still commonly referred to by their Tibetan names (*dBang-Chen-'Bum*, *Ah-sKyong-'Bum*, and *Pad-ma-'Bum*), but no administrative units take these names. Despite these rearrangements of lived space, Tibetans generally identify themselves by their *tsowa* membership, indicating their continued cultural and political significance (Levine, 1999). When inter-township grassland conflicts occur, families volunteer to fight with their former *tsowa*, regardless of which side of the township boundary it is on. By contrast, I was told that if the government tries to motivate herders to fight, 'the local people will not listen. They will say, "this is of no benefit to me, why should I go?"'. Loyalties and sentiment remain largely with the *tsowa*, rather than with new administrative boundaries. (At the same time, they are not usually subordinated to larger socio-territorial identifications, as in 'we're all Tibetan, so let's stop fighting'.) This makes range conflicts difficult to resolve. When disputes occur, herders would find it much easier to obey the injunction of a former *tsowa* leader to stop fighting, than a similar injunction coming from a secular county official (especially because the latter are often appointed from other areas). However, historical territorial authorities have been fractured and rendered ineffective.

Rather than locating the intractability of conflicts in the contradictions between different spatialities, the Party has boasted about its enlightened efforts to resolve centuries-old conflicts (Makley, 1999: 268), ignoring the ineffectiveness of secular state cadres. While there were certainly patterns of inter-group violence and conflict over many centuries, current pasture conflicts over newly-drawn boundaries are not the inevitable unfolding of primordial battles. Instead, they are historically-specific phenomena that have emerged out of the clash between new administrative units and the sedimentation of particular loyalties, identities, and memories in the landscape.

#### **DISPUTE MEDIATION: THE POLITICS OF AUTHORITY AND RESIDUAL FORMATIONS**

With the official abolition of the system of tribes in Amdo in the late 1950s and the official discourse of the Chinese Communist Party — which relegates religion to the private sphere — grassland boundary disputes became an administrative matter to be resolved by secular officials. According to a 1988 State Council order:

Article 5: The responsible parties of the People's Governments of both sides border disputes must take responsibility...[they must] immediately settle border disputes without letting them drag on.



Article 6: The Ministry of Civil Affairs is the main division of the State Council for the resolution of border disputes. The department of civil affairs of the People's Government at each level is the main department responsible for the resolution of grassland disputes at that level (for example, county). (State Council, 1988: 65)

Yet when these officials have tried to resolve conflicts, they have been ignored. Typical coercive measures for discouraging range disputes have also been ineffective. One person pointed out to me, 'it's hard to put a whole township into jail at the same time', as a way of explaining why local authorities do not imprison grassland disputants. Around Labrang, elders and lamas mediate village and encampment conflicts according to traditional customs of compensation; the Public Security Bureau rarely intervenes (Makley, 1999: 285). Herders who do try to amicably settle pasture disputes usually skip the township government office and go directly to the nearest monastery.<sup>13</sup> The importance of religious authority in dispute resolution is clearly expressed in the following quotation from the tenth Panchen Lama's last speech:<sup>14</sup>

In the various areas, religion has a great influence on the mental attitude of the lay people... For example, when we travelled through the areas of Qinghai... everywhere murder, theft and robbery were common. Likewise, there were many ready to provoke arguments and fights. When they were given advice from a political point of view to stop doing what they were doing by explaining that committing murder is a violation of the State Criminal law and that they would be punished in accordance with the law, they wouldn't heed our advice. They would say things like, 'If I could take revenge and kill the other person, I don't mind dying. They could sentence me. I wouldn't be frightened.' However, when I explained from a religious point of view that murder is wrong because it entails accumulating demerit [*sdig-pa*] and that they would later suffer in hell, then they were more receptive and amenable to advice. Some would be moved and made commitments through vows like, 'Henceforth I will make commitments not to do such things [murder]'. Murdering a person and committing theft are two of the ten negative actions according to the Buddha Dharma. (Panchen Lama, 7 January 1989)<sup>15</sup>

The government's lack of moral authority to settle disputes, and its reluctance to step in and try, have become mutually reinforcing. Many herders complain that the government is doing nothing to stop conflicts (and even accuse officials of providing weapons). Such complaints do not question the state's legitimate role in settling disputes but instead ask it to

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13. The concept of 'forum shopping' among herders noted in other contexts is less relevant here. Herders rarely turn to state officials for settlement (except where large numbers of casualties have ensued) because secular officials lack religious and moral authority. More often than not, herders do not try to settle disputes at all. Herders do not 'shop' for the decision they want, partly because religious figures are not powerful enough to declare different borders than state officials do.
  14. The Panchen Lama is the second highest lama in the dominant Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism.
  15. Tibet Information Network Document Reference 15(VN); unpublished translation (from Tibetan) of the tenth Panchen Lama's last speech, made 7 January 1989 to the China Tibet Centre for Advanced Buddhist Studies.

fulfil its own mandated duty. A woman in Labrang told me that the local government's policy is to not 'show its face' (*chumian*) when herders are killed in grassland conflicts. Instead, the state enlists religious leaders to help settle disputes. For example, two respected lamas from Golog helped settle the conflict described above between Dari and Serthar, and several lamas from monasteries in both Golog and Aba were asked to help mediate disputes between Sichuan and Qinghai over pasture near present-day Jiuzhi (in Qinghai). Another example is that of Gungthang Tsang, the second most senior lama at Labrang monastery. Government and Party officials requested that he mediate several violent grassland disputes very soon after he was released from twenty years of imprisonment and rehabilitated in 1979. After Gungthang Tsang successfully resolved three disputes in 1981, the Gansu provincial government made yearly requests that he continue this work, thus 'allowing all levels of government to let go of their burden' (Wang, 1997: 124–5). Gungthang Tsang is quoted as saying, 'some county and township leaders even distributed guns to the masses, inciting everybody to fight' (ibid.). Wang (ibid.: 116–20) reports in his biography that when Gungthang Tsang appeared in front of disputing parties 'enemies immediately prostrate themselves [before him] and quietly listen to the *rinpoche*'s [title for incarnate lamas] words'.

Gungthang Tsang was politically able to play a major role in mediating disputes because of his position as the Vice Chair of the Gansu Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). An institution of representatives of non-Party organizations who are recruited to support the Party, the CPPCC in Tibetan areas includes leading religious figures as well as former aristocrats. The CPPCC is often considered a powerless rubber stamp organization whose members have been totally co-opted. Gungthang Tsang was active in resolving disputes until late 1995 when he began to experience repercussions for refusing to recognize the Beijing-approved eleventh reincarnation of the Panchen Lama.

The tenth Panchen Lama's role in mediating grassland disputes is also instructive. Historically, the Panchen Lama was the second highest *rinpoche* in the dominant Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, and as such was revered throughout Amdo, Kham, and U-Tsang. However, unlike the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama's secular authority was recognized only in the region around Tashilhunpo Monastery in Shigatse (U-Tsang). After the Dalai Lama fled into exile in 1959, the tenth Panchen Lama became the highest Tibetan religious leader in the PRC. The state actively sought to incorporate and contain his religious power by appointing him Vice Chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC), and Vice Chairman of the national CPPCC. However, in 1962, he submitted the famous '70,000 character petition' (which Mao denounced as a 'poisoned arrow aimed at the Party by reactionary feudal overlords') to the government, detailing conditions of starvation, imprisonment, and religious persecution in Tibetan areas (TIN, 1998). He was later struggled against placed under house arrest, and imprisoned for nearly a decade.

After his release in 1978, the Panchen Lama was reinstated as the Vice Chairman of both the national NPC and CPPCC. From then until his death in 1989, he often tried to quell large-scale range conflicts, including one between Gansu's Xiahe county and the counties of Henan, Zekog and Xunhua in Qinghai in 1983,<sup>16</sup> and another between herders in Tongde and Guinan counties in Hainan TAP, Qinghai. On 6 August 1985, the Panchen Lama sent a telegram from Beidaihe (in north China) to the government and local residents of both sides, stating:

I was extremely surprised and deeply regretful about the fighting between nomads from both counties over the border, which has led to the grave situation of deaths and injuries. This type of polluted [sinful, *dme-yi-bya-spyod*] behaviour among our brethren is not only not in accordance with the relevant policies and laws of the Party and government, but is also a grave violation of the principles of our Buddhist religion. (Panchen Lama, nd: 94)

Here, his reference to Buddhist principles invokes his religious authority. Although he also admonishes the herders to follow the law, it is the Panchen Lama's religious arguments that are most persuasive, because it is precisely his religious authority rather than secular position that appeals to herders. The same day, he said in a telephone call, the contents of which were transcribed and broadcast to herders: 'My tutor, *rGya-yag-tshang* (who lives at sKu-'bum Monastery) said: You should hurry and invite him [*rGya-yag-tshang*] to the place of the grassland conflicts, to offer prayers to the dead. He will then help the government decide the situation fairly and give counsel (teachings) to the local people' (Panchen Lama, nd: 95). Thus, the Panchen Lama urged Tibetan government cadres as well as ordinary herders to invite his own personal religious tutor to assist in the resolution of the grassland conflicts.

In another telephone call, transcribed by the (Tibetan) Prefectural Party Secretary and a high-ranking lama, *sKu-'bum-dGe-bshas*, on 4 January 1986, the Panchen Lama explicitly suggested a solution: 'Regarding the grassland situation, it would be good if the border is drawn from *Kerab-lungpa* [place name] along the mountain ridge. Also, the side of *Ga-rgya* [village], Guinan must take care of [its livestock] and the side of *Nigu* and '*Be-bzas* [villages] of Tongde must have tolerance' (Panchen Lama, nd: 96). In this same message, he added, 'The people of *Ga-rgya* must listen to the Party and the Government. *sKu-'bum dGe-bshas* will take the responsibility to counsel and advise the masses, and [they] must accept the decisions and plans' (ibid.).

In both of these cases, the state used former religious leaders to accomplish its goals, but kept them under tight control so that they were unable to threaten the state's hegemonic position. Gungthang Tsang was stripped of his CPPCC duties during a 'Patriotic Education' campaign in 1998 (Makley, 2000). The tenth Panchen Lama spent much of his time in Beijing, returning

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16. He was also involved in resolving grassland disputes in pastoral areas of Kham such as one in Lithang, Sichuan in the mid-1980s.

to Shigatse only days before his death in 1989. Both the Panchen Lama and Gungthang Tsang constantly invoked the Party and the Government, portraying their roles and, in the case of the Panchen Lama, that of his representatives, as one of 'counselling' or 'educating' herders on the decisions of government officials. The situation seems to be one of simple co-optation of these religious figures, where resistance exists only in pastoralists' refusal to heed government officials.

Nevertheless, the Gramscian understanding that hegemony, far from being totalizing and static, must be continually fought over at different sites, leads to an alternative analysis. Two 'residuals' are significant as sites of contestation. First are socio-territorial identifications that live on in the present even as state administrative practices seek to replace them with new identifications. Second, just as traces of previous spatialities remain inscribed in the landscape, so too do older practices of authority, particularly the authority invested in Tibetan Buddhist leaders.

The incompleteness of the project of transforming Tibetans into particular kinds of political subjects has forced the state to rely on religious officials to perform its work in certain spheres. Whether this is done openly or (more commonly) in private, and despite the limitations placed upon these figures, the state still undermines its own rhetoric about religion and the proper bases of authority. In fact, the director of the Qinghai Provincial Administrative Boundary Management Bureau even announced that his unit, 'should analyse the examples of situations in which grassland disputes have been successfully and correctly mediated through the use of the power of religious personnel' (Yan, 1993: 68).

The state tries to neutralize the threat of this active residual element by making religious officials part of the state apparatus. This move itself betrays the contingency of hegemony. Most importantly, however, Tibetans view these figures first and foremost as religious leaders and not as part of the state. The use of lamas to solve problems that secular representatives of the state cannot solve suggests an ongoing struggle over incorporation. In fact, many Tibetan officials refer pasture disputes to lamas partly because they too invest them with moral authority. Both the need for the CPPCC and the fact that many Tibetan government and Party officials themselves engage in religious practice highlight the blurry boundaries of the state.

Raymond Williams (1977: 114) asserts problematically that it is necessary to distinguish between aspects of the residual which are truly alternative and oppositional from those which have been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture. Unfortunately, it is difficult to see what kind of criteria might help make such a distinction when living in the moment in question — especially in the PRC political context where anything too obviously oppositional is eliminated. I would argue that it is the *effects* of the residual — rather than its 'true nature' as oppositional or incorporated — which are significant. In this case, the effect is to maintain order, but also to call into question certain aspects of hegemonic authority.

Herders are probably aware that the *rinpoches* have very limited political power, and that the state is stepping up its efforts to control and even appoint (reincarnated) *rinpoches*. The respect that Tibetan herders show figures like the Panchen Lama or Gungthang Tsang is less a conscious political statement than part of a sedimented reality which the Party has tried to replace: a reality invoked by a herder who claimed that the grasslands around his home were degraded by rodents until a visit by the two highest ranking lamas of Labrang monastery — when the rodents suddenly disappeared. Yet by showing respect to these figures, pastoralists demonstrate where they stand on state religious discourse. According to the latter, religion can easily be used to dupe the masses into dangerous (anti-state) thinking, thus, ‘we must insist on indoctrinating the peasant and herdsman masses in the Marxist stand on religion’ (TIN, 1999a). Though the state co-opts religious figures for its own ends, it does not control the meanings which pastoralists ascribe to their *rinpoches*.

Nor can the resolution of grassland conflicts be interpreted only as an interest of state domination: it is certainly not in the interest of Tibetan pastoralists to keep killing each other. In fact, the resistance of herders to half-hearted government attempts to resolve disputes is a resistance that is itself colonized by power, because these conflicts work against efforts to form a pan-regional Tibetan identity. Indeed, while the state tries to co-opt religious leaders into having a stake in controlling the population (that is, in being part of the state apparatus), those religious leaders may have different goals for resolving conflicts, such as the formation of an imagined Tibetan community. (They may have other interests and goals as well.)

If grazing conflicts are not timeless remnants from the past, the obvious alternative is to assume that ‘conflicts over pasture [are] of increasing concern today because of the lack of successful arbitration in such disputes — a duty which in the past was fulfilled by lamas who had the authority to settle land usage issues’ (TIN, 1999b). As I have discussed above, however, pasture conflicts were historically settled by lamas only under very specific circumstances — when disputant households or groups were *lha-sde* which belonged to a particular monastery, or when a *lha-dpon* shared authority with a secular leader. In other circumstances, authority to solve disputes rested with secular chiefs. In cases without clear authority, disputes were handled by a group of mediators who may or may not have been religious officials.

Furthermore, even when lamas did settle disputes in the past, they were much more limited by political jurisdiction than lamas resolving conflicts are now. Historically, for instance, the Panchen Lama would not have interfered with range disputes in Amdo; his authority was concentrated only around Shigatse (TAR). It is his overarching religious stature (augmented by the absence of the Dalai Lama) that is appealed to now rather than his prior particular political authority in Amdo. The moral authority of religious figures may be thinner than it was in the past, but it is spread

across more of the landscape. Thus, the 'use' of religious figures to settle disputes is not simply a tradition carried over from the past, but also an innovation of sorts. These religious leaders shape the residual into an effective element of the present. In exercising their agency, however, they are simultaneously inhabited by the structures of domination.

The agency of herders is also contradictory. They complain about lack of intervention by government officials but are much more likely to listen to religious leaders, encouraging the state to keep using these figures. Herders sometimes quickly forget the teachings of lamas and continue to fight with each other, thus privileging older, smaller-scale socio-territorial identifications over the newer transregional Tibetan identification, which was itself forged in response to PRC state-building efforts. Neither violent range wars nor the intervention of lamas should be read romantically as resistance to the state if resistance is understood as being outside of and removed from power. They do, however, indicate continuing struggle over the process of incorporation.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this essay, I have linked the spatial politics of Amdo's incorporation into the PRC with present-day range disputes. This case is instructive on several counts. First, the case confounds assumptions that the state is unencumbered by its own past. Recent grassland construction programmes assume a clean historical slate and a uniform, undifferentiated space on which new, efficient livestock production units can be created. In fact, histories are inscribed in landscapes in which new policy implementations are then embedded. The intractability of increased grassland disputes in Amdo can be traced to two historical moments. First, members of former tribes were moved around. Some *tsowa* territories were divided into two or more new administrative units according to the logic of state territoriality, including the need to 'divide and conquer'. This helped to break traditional patterns of authority, but did not completely eliminate the relevance of older socio-territorial identities. Contradictions between these socio-territorial identities and state territoriality precipitated boundary conflicts which might not otherwise have occurred, or which would have perhaps been easier to resolve.

More recently, use rights privatization and especially fencing have precipitated new conflicts by increasing inequality of access to pasture and decreasing flexibility. Thus, the imposition of state territoriality which began at large spatial scales with the gerrymandering of former *tsowa* into different political units is extended downward in scale to the household. Very few elders or former *tsowa* leaders who remember pre-1949 territorial boundaries are still alive. Those who are do not have political authority to settle disputes. However, herders maintain their loyalties to socio-territorial identities and authorities that have no legal existence in the PRC. As a

result, secular government officials are often completely ignored when trying to solve conflicts.

Another point has to do with hegemony and the imbrication of domination and resistance. Herders fight against each other and complain that the government does not do enough to solve conflicts. This seems to be a 'colonized' response, a lapse in the simultaneous struggle to forge a trans-regional Tibetan identity that would transcend smaller differences. Yet, they are swayed to lay down their arms only by religious authorities, if at all. If the former is partially a product of state domination, then the latter — rejecting secular forms of authority — might be read as resistance. The state co-opts religious leaders to perform its dispute-settlement tasks, but in the very act of co-optation, weakens claims that the only legitimate authority in the PRC is secular and atheist. Domination and resistance are found together in religious leaders and herders alike.

Taken together, these points suggest that the unintended consequences of projects to develop peripheral areas are not limited to those that strengthen and depoliticize state penetration into the lives of its citizens. Rather, failure to consider how historical choices and spatial practices have already been inscribed in the landscape of policy implementation necessitates further decisions that may simultaneously call into question state hegemonic discourses and foster violent conflict.

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