

Subjectivity Politics in *Sorrow Mountain*: Transnational Feminism and Tibetan Autobiography

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Article:

It has become a commonplace to describe growing Western engagement with Buddhism as a search for relief from spiritual vacuity and deep dissatisfaction produced by modernity. Buddhism in this narrative figures as either pre-modern or timeless, with Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns in particular symbolizing an otherwise lost authenticity. The search for "the authentic" within the popular imaginary conflates Tibet and Buddhism, simultaneously divorcing both from modernity and ironically spawning an industry devoted to what Chögyam Trungpa termed spiritual materialism: religious texts, meditation products, dating services, retreat centers, guided tours, and the like that cannot ever complete the consumers' identification with a pre-colonial, Buddhist ordained, "Tibetan." Circulating among these "enlightenment" products is an increasing selection of Tibetan autobiographies produced with spiritual, inspirational, and political goals. Looking specifically at Ani Pachen and Adelaide Donnelley's *Sorrow Mountain: The Journey of a Tibetan Warrior Nun* (2000), I analyze the confluence and conflicts of these goals through the book's paratextual and literary features. Although *Sorrow Mountain* deploys images of "authenticity" noted above, acquiescing to the seduction of the authentic reproduces the split between religious tradition and secular modernity and furthers the reader's desire for what must remain literally a lost cause. To avoid such vacating of anti-colonial political will against Chinese control of Tibet as well as to provide grounds for an imaginative affiliation with Ani Pachen, I argue for an expansion of feminist and postcolonial critical discourses to recognize the form of Buddhist subjectivity Ani Pachen represents.

In "Radical Histories and the Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of *Subaltern Studies*," Dipesh Chakrabarty, member of the Subaltern Studies collective and self-identified "male, Bengali, (Hindu) middle-class Marxist (of some kind!)," articulates the problem of conceptualizing religious identifications within an Enlightenment-inspired, "hyper-rational" modernity: "The problem is...that we do not have analytical categories in academic discourse that do justice to the real, everyday and multiple 'connections' we have to what we, in becoming modern, have come to see as 'non-rational'" (262). Limited in our ability to read either Chakrabarty or Ani Pachen's multiple subject positions simultaneously, we too often revert to what he accurately terms the "untenable and problematic binaries" – which are also gendered – of "[t]radition/modernity", 'rational/nonrational', 'intellectual/emotion'" (262). In this paper, I want to examine the ways in which a sole focus on identity, no matter how problematized, works against the political objectives of these Tibetan autobiographies. *Sorrow Mountain*, I argue, invites us to engage in a limited transnational feminist praxis, in the form of reading practice, to explore alternative conceptions of the subject and her agency. As Janet Gyatso notes in *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*: "A key question that readers will bring to Tibetan Buddhist autobiography is how such an eminently self-obsessed genre can be written by someone who believes the self to be an illusion" (xiii). In partial response to Gyatso's question, I insist on the distinction between identity and subjectivity, a distinction central both to poststructuralist feminist and Buddhist conceptions of selfhood.

I read *Sorrow Mountain* for the way Chinese colonization has produced a split between subjectivity and identity, enabling us to see Ani Pachen's embodiment of Buddhist subjectivity as distinctly and variously

modern. This split does not depend upon nostalgia for a pre-colonial, unitary, coherent subjectivity; rather, it becomes legible in the book as a product of colonial violence. Through tropes recognizable to audiences of passing familiarity with Tibet, Sorrow Mountain details Ani Pachen's life from girlhood as a chieftain's daughter in a mythic, pre-colonial Tibet through resistance to Chinese aggression, twenty-one years in Chinese prisons, and finally escape to and exile with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India (she passed away in 2002 at the age of 68). Rather than see this narrative as a production and reflection of intrinsic Tibetan-ness, however seemingly authentic or fraught, I examine the ways in which Ani Pachen's spiritual development, through which she understands and articulates subjectivity, takes place through an engagement with repressive technologies of the modernizing Chinese state during the Maoist era (1949-1976) to Chinese liberalization policies and engagement with capitalism (though not democracy) during the Dengist period (1976-1996) to her embrace by Western forces of global marketing in the last years of her life. Tibetan Buddhism is Ani Pachen's language and mode of engagement with these forces, and if we do not separate Tibetan Buddhism – as a mode of understanding one's place in the world, a set of technologies of selfhood and of liberation from desire – from that of modernity, we make it available to the contemporary subject as well as restore its political agency.

To do so requires an expansion of contemporary feminist and postcolonial theoretical discourses on subjectivity to encompass that employed by Buddhism. Through the lenses of Buddhist feminism provided by theorists such as Anne Carolyn Klein and Rita Gross and “out-law” autobiography suggested by Caren Kaplan, we can read Sorrow Mountain most productively as a contemporary colonial woman's autobiography that challenges dominant models of the genre and, thus, the subject it purportedly (re)presents. This argument might also contribute to the wider project of speaking with the subaltern by expanding what counts as academic theory to encompass other epistemologies, technologies, and enunciations of selfhood. If rationalizations of colonialism traditionally depend on the gendered binary oppositions cited above, crafting a discourse to suture that divide should recognize the religious, colonized woman as well as her collaborative text as active participants in discourses of modernity rather than its victims.

Authenticity and Autobiography

In her 2001 study of Anglophone Tibetan autobiographies, English in Tibet, Tibet in English, Laurie Hovell McMillin remarks that the majority of protagonists in (then) 30-plus such published autobiographies share common traits as exiles, Buddhists, and Tibetan nationalists that make them particularly appealing to Western readers. To achieve their often explicit goals of motivating support for Tibetan freedom from Chinese colonialism, these texts deploy images of “authentic” Tibetan-ness, such that, as McMillin notes, “to be worthy of support is another way of being authentic; to receive support is to have one's Tibetan-ness affirmed” (132-3). Non-Tibetan, Western, Anglophone consumers are ostensibly rewarded by spiritual relief from the dissatisfactions produced by modern materialism as well as a self-gratifying identification with an oppressed people. This reward depends upon a vision of Tibetan culture as spiritual, compassionate, and untouched by either the West or Chinese Communism (126), despite the fact that these autobiographies are predominantly diasporic texts, co-written by Anglophone authors, that detail the Tibetan subject's engagement with militaristic, economic, and cultural colonialism, and that circulate in the global marketplace. McMillin looks at claims of authenticity and attempts at subverting it, concluding that “disbanding the myth of the authentic Tibetan may be the only way to salvage an effective pro-Tibetan politics” (136).

McMillin's foundational study invokes and problematizes Tibetan identity as key to understanding both the genre of contemporary Tibetan autobiography and its political context. At first glance, Pachen and Donnelley's Sorrow Mountain fits easily within the models of Tibetan women's autobiography McMillin describes. With seven framing devices that offer competing claims of “authenticity” according to the terms outlined above, Sorrow Mountain, despite its skillful and moving presentation of Ani Pachen's suffering at Chinese hands and her spirituality, may appear as (yet another) autobiographical testimonial that, while attempting to galvanize Tibet support, succeeds only in obviating grounds for a truly oppositional, anti-militaristic response to Chinese colonization or in producing “Tibet fatigue.” Alternatively, when one reads in the final “Author's Note” from Donnelley that this is “a story based on Ani Pachen's life” (286, original emphasis), one may dismiss it as not authentic enough.

McMillin notes the “political conundrum” exacerbated by questions of authenticity implicit in diasporic Tibetan autobiographies: “If the situation [in Tibet] really were unlivable, then real Tibetans could not live there. Or to put it another way, to stay in Tibet means to compromise – or to be compromised” (125). Chinese military, economic, and demographic aggression becomes the necessary catalyst for the spiritual transformation of both the suffering, exiled Tibetan subject and the non-Tibetan Western Anglophone reader McMillin posits. Thus, we might see the division between identity and subjectivity I want to explore in Sorrow Mountain as a result of Chinese colonialism that underscores the interdependence of Ani Pachen’s Buddhism and her experience of modern forces of industrialization, commodification, and colonization as well as the mobility of the subjectivity she embodies.

Extrication from entanglements of identity politics requires a shift in the categories of analysis, beginning with that of the autobiography itself. The well rehearsed history of Western autobiography coincides with that of colonialism and privileges narratives of the individuation of a masculinized subject whose claim on the reader rests on narrative reliability. Turning to autobiography in a transnational context, Caren Kaplan asks how “Western feminist autobiography criticism” might avoid “postcolonial forms of cultural domination” as well as “[w]hat kind of postcolonial writing and reading strategies intersect with feminist concerns to create transnational feminist subjects” (Kaplan 1992, 116). While I am less interested in the creation of transnational feminist subjects per se than in transnational feminist reading practices and the affiliations they may engender, I find Kaplan’s reconfiguration of autobiography as an “out-law genre” that privileges “a discourse of situation” and a “politics of location” (119) a useful framework for reading Sorrow Mountain.

Kaplan defines five categories of women’s out-law autobiography relevant to Sorrow Mountain: prison memoir, testimonial, ethnography, cultural autobiography, and regulative psychobiography. All address facets of the transnational collaborative writing process that produced the text as well as the ways in which that process necessitates new strategies of reading representation: prior discursive (mis)representations of the subject, through denunciations, legal charges, prison files, and so forth, render her already over-inscribed; the question of an unmediated, pre-discursive subject is moot, and the joint authorship or other forms of mediation that “translate” or convey the text to the reader must be read in the context of a series of discursive constructions; decisions of narrative style carry aesthetic and political weight and “are tied to a struggle for cultural survival” (130); and, the text is embedded in the “colonial and neocolonial systems, where,” Kaplan insists, “subjectivity, cultural power, and survival are played out in the modern era” (133). I focus my interpretation, then, not on a fixed definition of the culture in question (who or what is endangered), but on the formal strategies the text uses to mobilize support for the culture it simultaneously produces. Sorrow Mountain incorporates multiple discourses –Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan history, Chinese prison discourse, international human rights discourse, Tibetan epic, and Western literary and cinematic tropes, among others – that collectively pose challenges for a singular interpretative methodology. I follow Kaplan in reading for, what Katie King calls, “[f]eminist writing technologies’ [that] can transform cultural production from individualized and aestheticized procedures to collaborative, historicized, transnational coalitions” (Kaplan 135).

Looking at the paratextual frames in relation to the central narrative, I show how the text as a whole deploys traces of political claims that, because they are conflicting, subvert the images of authenticity they deploy as well as, in Catherine Belsey’s formulation, a reader’s sense of herself as an “autonomous and knowing subject in a world of knowing subjects” (Belsey, 52, quoted in Chu, 13). My hope then is that a reading of Sorrow Mountain as out-law autobiography will engage readers with a perhaps unfamiliar conception of subjectivity and political agency that denaturalizes that process of subjection while enlarging postcolonial and feminist discourses.

Identitary Claims and Paratextual Frames

Sorrow Mountain addresses the reader with multiple frames that situate it politically, aesthetically, and culturally. These frames echo tropes of an idealized Tibetan defined above, but do not coalesce in a singular location or situation, nor do they fully contain the central narrative. Clearly marking this as a collaborative project, the cover attributes authorship first to Pachen and then Donnelley, an order that privileges the subject

over the narration itself. The full title suggests suffering (sorrow mountain), transformation (the journey), and a twist (the warrior nun) that engage the reader in both political and spiritual endeavors, while the cover photo of Ani Pachen smiling against a forested, mountainous background offers some assurance that the journey has a happy conclusion. The cover welcomes the reader into the realm of what Graham Huggan terms the “postcolonial exotic”: “an aestheticizing process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar” (ix). This realm is governed by contradictory politics that may both empower the subject’s self-representation and mask the effects of imperial power in producing the text (figured here as Western neo-colonial interests in Chinese modernity as well as Western consumers’ desire for narratives of cultural “otherness”) (Huggan 14).

The book jacket’s gold and red tribute to Tibetan Buddhism, as well as cover copy advertising the Foreword by the Dalai Lama and Preface by Richard Gere, extend the paradoxes of the cover. Opening to the jacket flap, overlaying a political map of Tibet on the inside cover (the mapping of the Tibet Autonomous Region remains a sensitive, disputed issue for Tibet supporters), we read that “this is more than a tale of war. It is also the story of a rich culture, the growth of a strong woman. Most significantly, it’s a journey of spiritual empowerment.” The back cover reinforces the promise of an exemplary narrative of a woman’s individuation and spirituality through quotes by Alice Walker, Louise Erdrich, Sharon Salzberg, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, and Daniel Goleman, all of which suggest in various ways that “[t]o read about suffering of this magnitude is ennobling” (Masson). Salzberg, Masson, and Goleman, who work in Buddhist and Western traditions of psychoanalysis and psychology, attest to its transformative potential. The presence of Erdrich and Walker may attest to its literary merit, although their names perhaps unwittingly detract from anti-colonial expectations of the text. For if Erdrich and Walker may be familiarly characterized as “ethnic” American women writers, then Pachen may appear as an “ethnic,” Tibetan woman writing about a pluralistic Chinese state. In sum, the quotes maintain a focus on internal spiritual transformation seemingly divorced from social action, thereby defining the “value of cultural difference” (Huggan, 13, original emphasis) according to consumers’ desires.

The Dalai Lama, perhaps more easily visible as a spiritual leader than head of the Tibet Government-in-Exile, offers a political endorsement of Pachen’s story as both representative and exemplary. Calling the events narrated “typical of Tibet,” he further highlights “Ani Pachen’s unflinching patriotism, her active concern for her fellow countrymen and –women, and her deep-seated desire to retire into solitude to pursue the spiritual life. It is the kind of strength she embodies that gives me grounds for optimism that ultimately the truth and justice of our cause will triumph” (xi-xii). Here spiritual strength becomes the catalyst for a political cause (Tibetan self-determination) denoted as self-evidently true and just, presumably within the discourse of international human rights. The effectiveness of his statement depends upon his status as at best a legitimate national leader, able to represent the needs and goals of his constituency, and at worst an appeal to the commodified, smiling promise of enlightenment who might as easily exhort one to buy Apple Computers as to protest, say, Chinese dumping of nuclear waste and Han Chinese population transfers into Tibet. As Peter Bishop points out, Western fascination with the Dalai Lama threatens to “[efface] the way that the fantasy of Shangri-La has dovetailed with the requirements of western global politics” (651). In the context of Pachen’s story of resistance, imprisonment, and torture, the Dalai Lama speaks on behalf of a colonized people; however, Sorrow Mountain’s descriptions of an idealized pre-colonial Tibet and of the Dalai Lama’s face as “a radiant sun [that] has burned through the darkness” (10), regardless of how aptly it describes Pachen’s devotion, call forth a more troubling popular narrative of mythic nationalism.

The relationship between transnationalism, Tibetan Buddhism and nationalism so central to Sorrow Mountain vexes political discourse on Tibet. One may read the Dalai Lama’s endorsement as part of a strategy, developed in response to a history of Western Orientalist images of Tibet as Shangri-La and pursued by the Government-in-Exile, that plays on the stereotypical image of Tibetans whose unique compassionate spirituality and ultimate passivity (they want to “retire into solitude to pursue the spiritual life”) make them deserving of and non-threatening to Western support. Such “idealized cultural politics” (Bishop 654), based upon claims of “cultural, religious, or environmental specialness” (Barnett, “Violated Specialness,” 275) threatens to collapse distinctions between Chinese and Western rationales for intervention. As Robert Barnett argues, these two

“views of Tibet as virginal and as special mainly differ, therefore, in whether the imagined or inexperienced Tibet or Tibetan is recognized as a barbarian or as an innocent, as requiring civilizing or as needing protection and preservation” (“Violated Specialness,” 277). Both views position Tibet and Tibetans as in need of modern ideologies conveyed through state military, juridical, and economic apparatuses. This use of mythic nationalism on behalf of the Tibet cause more successfully creates “political effects by engaging people in a shared image or representation” than “political debate, since it does not address the political interests of other social forces” (“Violated Specialness” 279).

In Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West, Donald S. Lopez, Jr. reads this strategy as consistent with the explicitly political proposals put forth by the Dalai Lama in the Five-Point Peace Plan (1987) and Address to the European Parliament in Strasbourg (1988) – both ultimately abandoning full independence in favor of “internal” autonomy within a greater China – that guide present day policy. Despite the Dalai Lama’s success in raising global awareness of Tibet, the affiliations engendered through this strategy remain constrained by the images through which they are produced. Tibetans within Tibet remain largely excluded, by language, social and economic viability, and access to a wide public sphere, from these political debates. Despite this shift in official rhetoric, Pachen vowed in political demonstrations, “As long as I’m breathing, as long as I have blood running in my veins, I will never stop fighting for the independence of Tibet” (Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion). On the state level, the shift in Chinese rhetoric from earlier calls to reunite the motherland to an ostensibly humanitarian one for “modernization” (read as economic and social progress) exacerbates the vacating of oppositional political will particularly among China’s trading partners and forthcoming Olympic guests.

Given this web of discursive constructions, it is difficult to imagine the forms that a transnational anti-colonial movement would take and how it would circumvent or oppose on a pragmatic level state policies driven by the desire to invest in or trade with China. Certainly the transnational circulation of images dependent upon mythic nationalism, particularly when it rarely includes the voices of resident Tibetans, makes suspect any easy affiliations between Tibetans-in-exile and their supporters and thus between Ani Pachen and her readers. At the same time, the book exceeds the narrative described above in multiple ways, making possible other forms of imaginative affiliation.

To return to the book’s ostensible borders, Richard Gere offers a Preface seemingly addressed specifically to non-Tibetan, non-Buddhist readers. Gere writes as a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner, Chair of the International Campaign for Tibet, recognizable American spokesperson, and primary catalyst for the publication of Ani Pachen’s autobiography in this form. Yet the Preface itself calls upon tropes of Judeo-Christian religion, Western fairy tale and testimonial literature. Comparing Tibetan suffering under Chinese colonization to the Jewish Holocaust (an estimated 1.2 million Tibetans, or one-sixth of the population, were killed, imprisoned, or exiled during the Chinese invasion), Gere insists Tibetans’ stories “[n]eed to be told” (read: never forget). He adds, “There is an old saying that God created man because He loves stories. Herein is one of His most extraordinary ones” (xvi). This reference to a monotheistic tradition foreign to Tibetan Buddhism has the dual effect of placing Ani Pachen’s spiritual story on familiar ground for non-Buddhist readers as well as effacing the collaborative work of Pachen and Donnelley in favor of Gere’s own role as intermediary between, presumably, the God that loves stories and Pachen herself. He notes, for example, that he recognized the lack of a “great Tibetan novel” which would galvanize support for the Tibet movement, and, that, having been introduced to Pachen as a potential subject for such a book, “I liked her immediately. That was the beginning of this book” (xvi). He describes the need “for a Western writer to become involved” and his “luck” in finding Donnelley. How we should read the narrative following the Preface, or Donnelley’s contribution itself, becomes increasingly ambiguous. Gere describes Pachen as a “princess” whose story is “wildly fantastic,” though “not unique” (xv) and praises the “storybook simplicity” of Donnelley’s writing, concluding: “Her writing is a miracle of truth” (xvi). He has, finally, fostered the emergence of this truth for broad secular and spiritual ends: “May this book help to dispel the darkness of this darkest night of Tibetan history and be of benefit to all beings everywhere. May the hearts of our Chinese brothers and sisters be opened and may they quickly come to their senses” (xvii). Even as the Preface collapses boundaries between novel and autobiography in potentially

productive ways, it reaffirms the implicit and problematic connection between the reader's potential spiritual transformation and (therefore) political efficacy, and it does so through the elision of collaborative writing process itself. The erasure of the women's collaboration as political work (he says Donnelley "soon became Ani-la's friend, confidante, and co-conspirator" (xvi), a description that characterizes their political activism and authorship as adolescent) in favor of his own patronage, however laudable, reinforces a gendered representation of "traditional" Tibet and Tibetans in need of modern and masculine Western intervention.

While both the Foreword and Preface present Pachen's story as simultaneously exemplary (in its spirituality) and representative (in its suffering), significantly what appears "wildly fantastic" to Gere is merely "typical" to the Dalai Lama. Yet both insist on its status as truth, a claim to which I return below and one which creates a peculiar set of expectations for what follows. The next "introduction" to Pachen's own story appears after the title page, but without its own heading. Written in mythic voice and presented in italics, it draws on the national oral epic of King Gesar (the longest known national epic, and one traditionally told over days and weeks by itinerant bards, although there are also multiple written versions) to present a common history of Tibet: In the ancient time of King Gesar, Tibet was a place of the gods. But during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the area stretching from the western region known for its nutmeg trees to the eastern region known for its brocade was brought under the administration of the Tibetan government. Since that time, a succession of lay and monk district officials carried out the land's administration in accordance with the Buddhist principles of compassion and justice. (xxi)

Once again linking national and religious concerns, this opening paragraph connects Tibet's territorial enlargement during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama with Tibetan Buddhism as a benevolent political force that incorporated many of the traditions and gods of the earlier Bon religion. The appropriation of the epic offers a longer, albeit mythologized, national history that again underscores the uniqueness of the culture. The inclusion of King Gesar similarly destabilizes the expectations of the reader by moving from a "true" story vouched for by the Dalai Lama and Gere to a mythic one.

The multiple forms of the epic of King Gesar legitimize its appearance in the book, while positioning Sorrow Mountain as at once an example of protest literature and "ethnic" literary fiction. In the first instance, we can read the inclusion of King Gesar within an evolution of contemporary Tibetan secular culture. Samten G. Karmey, for instance, analyzes current circulations of the epic of King Gesar within Tibet for the ways in which it, coming from outside of monastic tradition and especially given Chinese suppression of that tradition, constructs a more viable national identity than traditional religious narratives (114). Increasing popularity of various forms of the epic, much like the genre of contemporary Tibetan autobiography, reflects a national culture evolving in response and resistance to Chinese domination. Both genres also develop through a complex process of translation between oral and written discourses, and I address below the specific conditions of that process in producing Sorrow Mountain.

If we read the inclusion of King Gesar alternatively as a mark of ethnic literature within a global literary marketplace, then the value of its cultural difference (from a hypothetical Western reader's culture(s) as well as from its "local" forms) again faces competing claims. The debate within Asian American literature between Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston over who may represent Chinese classics to a Western audience and in what form offers a stark, more familiar example of these claims. While Pachen and Donnelley's invocation of King Gesar within Sorrow Mountain, like Kingston's use of Chinese heroic texts in Tripmaster Monkey, favors "an interactive reading strategy that emphasizes the texts' collaboration with various communities of readers" (Chu, 171), as opposed to one that fixes cultural difference through reference to a single, authoritative text, it unwittingly reproduces the gendered terms of the Chin/Kingston debate. In Sorrow Mountain, the potential political benefits of the text as a collaborative, Buddhist feminist out-law autobiography must emerge through the conflict between material patronage and political truth claims offered by the Dalai Lama and Gere and testaments to the merit of literary cultural difference offered by Walker and Erdich.

At the same time, because King Gesar stands liminally between the paratextual frames and central narrative (Ani Pachen's own, short rendering of her life story also includes a reference to the epic), it problematizes the idea of a singular narrative voice while providing a heroic model the story that follows presumably will seek to appropriate in sly ways. King Gesar is both an elected king and "the personification of the ideal Tibetan man, that is to say a man who can perform super-natural feats when engaged in battle," who otherwise prefers a life of meditation (Karmey 114). His story establishes a model of anti-colonial national heroism that resonates politically and religiously, heroically and selflessly. The epic songs coalesce around the "conflict between the protective and morally just powers of Buddhism and the destructive and demonic power of egoism in its various forms" (Samuel 363). The decision to include King Gesar alerts readers both to a tradition of Buddhist nationalism and of the heroic Buddhist pursuit of "non-self" (*anātman*) which here overlaps with an egolessness that remains politically engaged. We are asked then to turn our attention to what such a model of subjectivity entails.

Subverting the Postcolonial Exotic – The Central Narrative

We first hear Pachen's voice in her Prologue, which weaves biographical data ("My name is Lemdha Pachen," "I was born in 1933"), mythic nationalism ("My country was once at the roof of the world, a place where the great spirits lived"), collective suffering ("Now the forests are gone, the animals killed, and the great teachings scattered to the winds"), individual suffering ("There are days when my stomach aches from the long years in prison"), and spiritual renewal ("My prayers are answered, I am blessed"). The Prologue continues the narrative begun on the front and back cover of the ideal Tibetan as an exiled, Buddhist nationalist who, through her own suffering, offers a model of spiritual strength for others. That "I" appearing at last in chapter one, however, offers a much more complicated representation of her own critically conscious, Buddhist praxis. Her spirituality does not denote the beliefs adopted, held, or deepened by an already-existent subject; rather, they are mutually constitutive. Through representations of what we might, for argument's sake, separate as her spiritual beliefs, we witness the reflective or critical development of her subjectivity. The process and praxis of subjectivity, then, becomes as important as the individuations it assumes in given contexts.

Chapter one begins with the memory, in present tense, of footsteps approaching her prison cell, then the torture room and her hands being tied behind her back: "They hoist me up by my wrists. Once again flame shoots through my shoulder, bile fills my mouth. I swing, senseless, and the room fades into darkness" (3). The narrative emerges out of that darkness and moves in the metonymic, fragmentary way of dreams through waiting to meet the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, childhood memories, Buddhist teachings, old friends, to a final injunction to tell her story: "You have seen Tibet's tragedy, [the Dalai Lama] once said. 'You have lived its suffering. You must tell your story so others will know'" (10, original emphasis). This progression establishes an expectation of witnessing, of narrative truth that speaks to the darkness and silencing of torture, even though the discursive images through which it is conveyed are overtly novelistic and cinematic: "In a darkened corner of my mind [paralleling both the memory of the prison cell and then the small nun's quarters in which she awakes and now lives], a small patch of green appears. I watch it grow brighter, larger, until a vast green meadow stretches out at my feet" (4).

This combination of truth claims and a novelistic style troubles many reviewers. Mark Zimmerman calls Sorrow Mountain the latest in a series of Third World women's stories of political oppression that are located at "a messy and paradoxical confluence of personal integrity, multiculturalist politics, capitalist media, and postcolonial ideology." He credits Donnelley for her use of flashbacks, dreams, and interior monologues that have their "own stylistic weight"; yet, he concludes that Donnelley's ambiguity in the Author's Note about the status of the text as "as much narrative as strict biography" (Sorrow Mountain, 286) "throws the veracity of the entire book into question, at least for those who are after something greater than unsubstantiated exploits" (Zimmerman, 15). John Crook in the London Times Literary Supplement, comments at the end of an otherwise favorable review, "We are invariably left wondering how far the political intent of this work may have remoulded actual history," and suggests a trip to the Tibetan archives in Dharamsala for the curious (6). Though the details of these criticisms seem overstated (can survival of twenty-one years of imprisonment and forced labor be called an exploit? is there reason to doubt the kind of data one might verify in the archives?), the

premise of their arguments rests on the familiar, if out-moded conflation of autobiography with empiricism. More productively, we might follow Kaplan's advice to read the novelistic elements as part of the overall strategy of conveying to Western readers an anti-colonial message and as one of several means of conveying the constructions of identity rather than as indicators or reflections of Pachen's "true" self. Pachen and/or Donnelley's use of such generative language (literary, poetic, rhetorical) which privileges metaphor and other figurative devices also corresponds to this tradition in Buddhist scriptural literature as a technique underscoring the making rather than finding of meaning.

My own attempt to understand the book's "narrative invention" (Kaplan) began when I taught it in a Contemporary (Post)Colonial Women Writers class at the George Washington University. Although I do not know Donnelley personally, I asked her through e-mail for greater insight into the collaboration, and she generously responded with a detailed description of the interview process as well as excerpts from Pachen's initial 15-21 page written record of her life (crafted in exile at the prompting of the Government-in-Exile) that formed the foundation for the questions Donnelley posed. Pachen's account features primarily the names and lineages of fellow prisoners who did not survive. That account became the basis for Donnelley's long interview process, mediated by a translator whose regional dialect differed from Pachen's, to draw out the subject of the autobiography. Sorrow Mountain functions as a palimpsest of these articulations, beginning with a subject who wishes to speak as a representative witness rather than individual, and constitutes an evolving Tibetan cultural form constructed in exile.

According to Donnelley, she, Gere, and Pachen agreed on the goal of the book: to produce a "good read" that would "reach beyond those who already knew and supported Tibet – beyond those who were interested in Tibetan Buddhism" to broaden understanding of the situation in Tibet and, specifically, to "raise money for the Tibet cause." Despite these common goals, establishing the storyline necessitated a laborious (on both women's parts) process of daily translation over three months in India and six months at Donnelley's home in California. The collaborative process of constructing that narrative, requiring international airfares, a book contract, translators, living expenses, and so forth, took place within a system of patronage that, McMillin persuasively argues, reifies images of the authentic Tibetan (132). In contrast to that reinforcement of the protagonist/subject's identity, she notes the various identificatory positions the reader may take up in relation to the "I" of the text, movements that both enable and subvert the kinds of spiritual transformations promised the reader by the text's various frames. In either case, the reader's multiple subject positions themselves "[become] a kind of resistance of notions of essential selfhood" (135). The multi-faceted process of translation itself encourages that resistance by deconstructing the authority of any ostensibly originary text.

Donnelley highlights four categories of difficulties: literal and cultural translation, filling in where Pachen's memory failed, providing historical context without sacrificing narrative flow, and providing insight into Tibetan Buddhism. Donnelley describes the process of translation during the interviews as "like the game of telephone," in that after she posed and re-posed her question to ensure the translator understood it, the translator repeated that process in asking Pachen the question, confirming the answer (especially difficult given their different dialects), and then translating it back to Donnelley, for whom "often...the answer had no bearing on what I had asked." As an example of the cultural differences that needed bridging, she provides the following: "How did you feel about your father? – 'He was tall' 'Were you close to him?' – 'He was loved by his people' 'What did he look like?' – 'He was tall' 'You say your father treated you like a boy, what did he do?' – 'I was his son and his daughter.'" Such examples do not invalidate the narrative. The painstaking dialogic process here is defined by the desire to have one's position understood by the other, and thus through the shared process of making meaning. Although I, too, am beholden to the translations that have come before, by comparing brief passages of Pachen's record with Sorrow Mountain, we see Donnelley's close attention to conveying Pachen's "voice." The final text, she writes, had "to be both true to the musical quality and rhythm of Ani la's actual way of speaking and at the same time read in a way that was culturally familiar to the western ear" (this was enhanced by writing down the translator's English as well as having another translator provide a transcription of Pachen's Tibetan). For instance, while Pachen describes being given tea as she awaits her audience with the Dalai Lama as, "For me this was pure nectar and I felt that my body speech and mind had been purified,"

Donnelley writes: “The tea was fragrant and sweet, like nectar. As its warm liquid flowed down my throat, I felt as though my body were being purified and my mind began to clear” (277). Although Donnelley’s strategy adheres to codes of the postcolonial exotic defined above, the correspondence of Pachen and Donnelley’s tones cautions us against reading what is seemingly novelistic, descriptive, or emotive as explicitly Western. Within the frame of Huggan’s postcoloniality (the globalized conditions of the literary marketplace), this passage domesticates the unfamiliar (the political import of telling the Dalai Lama about decades of imprisonment attributable in part to loyalty to him superceded by the comfort of a cup of tea); yet, it hints at the continued possibility of colonial resistance (how might joining of mind and body in a sense of clarity be empowering or agenic and to what ends?). The textual correspondences do not confirm an authentic self so much as mobilize the narrative in multiple ways that attest to and exceed the terms of the patronage that enables it. That mobilization continued when the book was translated into Tibetan and broadcast into Tibet by Radio Free Asia.

Despite Ani Pachen’s earlier characterization as a “warrior princess,” her “heroism,” like that of King Gesar, emerges between the narrative “I” and a Buddhist sense of “non-self,” a space which is also, like that constructed in other testimonios, necessarily collective as well as individual. The story continually shifts between the singular and the plural. In one of several references to the title, for example, Pachen tells of her pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, where she will, after circumambulating the mountain, launch her escape to India. As her party first glimpses the sacred mountain, “it felt like we were entering a timeless place, approaching the center of the universe.” Nearing the peak, however, the spiritual renewal it promises is replaced by a feeling of sadness: “I thought that if all the sorrows we had suffered the last thirty years could be put on top of one another, that is how tall they would be.” Finally, she hears her father’s voice and sees her mother’s hand reaching toward her; “I saw Dekyong [her closest spiritual companion] walking away, a soldier behind her. Sorrow upon sorrow...” (270). In these passages, the “we” of the pilgrimage party becomes a national “we” of suffering before perspective slides back to the familial. Such kaleidoscopic shifts destabilize easy associations between subject and reader since the subject itself, and thus the potential affiliations it engenders, is continually reconstructed.

Reading the “heroic” subject is most problematic in relation to Pachen’s actions in resisting the Chinese. Whereas the title and cover photo suggest a positive resolution to the paradoxical identity of the “warrior nun,” the text evades directly addressing that paradox. The written text does not acknowledge that she wears the traditional chupa, rather than nun’s robes, in the cover photo (as well as in the photo of both Pachen and Donnelley on the back flap). In The Tibetans: A Struggle to Survive, photographer Steve Lehman includes Pachen in his section on former political prisoners. The caption under her sober portrait reads, in part: “Currently, Ani Panchen [sic] practices as a nun, she does not wear robes because she has killed people.” This will come as a surprise to anyone who knows Pachen solely through Sorrow Mountain. What might have stood as the central conflict in the book, the impact on the individual’s development of her attempt to reconcile Buddhist precepts of nonviolence with military struggle and even killing, is suggested in the paradoxical title, though elided in the story itself.

As Chinese aggression grows in Kham, Ani Pachen’s father dies and she reluctantly assumes his political role as chieftain, organizing with other local leaders resistance to the Chinese. Her father’s death marks her transition from childhood to adulthood: “In a moment, I knew that my dream of a life devoted to meditation and prayer was no longer possible. Unable to follow my heart, I was bound by duty to carry on my father’s work. With my country threatened and my family in danger, I set about making preparations for war” (123). What initially appears as a conflict between heart and duty, prayer and war, is reconciled for her by a lama who encourages her to fight to ensure “the survival of the teachings.” At that point, she feels a “new sense of purpose,” vowing, “If I can contribute something to protecting the great teachings of Buddha [...], I will do whatever is asked. Even kill” (128). Although this slippage from political and familial to religious duty corresponds to the vision of Tibetans as invariably Buddhist, it takes place through a curious evasion of individual agency. One wonders, for instance, given Pachen’s role as a resistance leader, who will do the asking.

The following year, 1959, the situation further deteriorates, and with Tibetan troops losing battles and the Chinese army a day's march away, Pachen's household joins others in fleeing to the hills. The first time Chinese troops attack, she fires the gun she inherited from her father, recites the Buddhist mantra Om Mani Peme Hum, and is relieved to discover "[n]o one was killed" (143). A couple of days later, after escaping another Chinese attack that killed many in her party, she reunites with Dekyong, whom she has greatly missed from earlier days in the monastery. Both agree that the current situation necessitates their violent contribution, understood once again through the conflation of nation and religion: "'Everyone has to fight until Tibet becomes free again,' Dekyong said sadly, 'to protect Buddha's teachings'" (148). A new Chinese attack tests this resolve, and here again Pachen's action is sublimated to Dekyong's and ultimately ineffective. As five soldiers approach and both women draw their pistols, Pachen "nod[s] at Dekyong to go first." "Dekyong's pistol sent one, two, three, four bullets down to the road" and "two men fell," then Pachen says, "I shot, but the bullets fell short" (149). The two women quickly mount their horses and rejoin the rest of the group. Weeks of hardship in the hills follow, they are forced to head in different directions, and Pachen's responsibility turns to caring for her mother and grandmother as they trek over 6,000 meter passes in the snow toward India. In her final encounter with Chinese troops, moments before they arrest her group, she sees soldiers approaching on all sides and tries quickly to bury her pistol in the snow.

I dispute neither the rationale for taking up defensive arms here, nor Pachen's desire to avoid killing; however, I am interested in the ways in which the narrative displaces the question of what it means for her to (be willing to) kill. Rather than the crux of the individual's psychic organization or political or spiritual development, it appears as a philosophical argument materialized and resolved through the actions of another (or more circuitously, her pistol). The sympathetic portrayal of Dekyong, as Pachen's spiritual companion, offers a justification for killing that simultaneously releases reader and author(s) from having to reconcile the opposing narratives of the "warrior nun" into a singular narrative of the heroine, though it does represent an argument for collective resistance. While I, too, have raised the question of historical record, I maintain that the book's silence on the question of whether or not Ani Pachen has killed people (an identity question in terms of the photographs), especially when combined with the multiple subject positions created throughout the text for both the narrative "I" and the reader, redirects our attention to problem of subjectivity itself.

A Strategic Invocation of Buddhist Feminism

For Chakrabarty, reuniting affect and reason, and thereby refiguring modernity to account for religious belief, necessitates a poststructuralist reading of subjectivity to "move away from the monomania of the imagination that operates within the gesture that the knowing, judging, willing subject always already knows what is good for everybody." Its goal is to resist the imperial fantasy to know and control the other: to develop "the capacity to hear that which one does not already understand" (275), without attempting to wholly assimilate it. In this final section I want to bring together my desire for anti-imperialist readings of Sorrow Mountain in terms of both valuing, without coopting, the subjectivity produced by the text as well as recognizing its potential for activating anti-colonial politics (or in terms of both postcoloniality and postcolonialism (Huggan)). Rita Gross and Anne Carolyn Klein bridge Buddhist and poststructuralist conceptions of inessential subjectivity, both from feminist perspectives, in ways productive for this argument. Insisting that both traditions share an understanding of subjectivity as constructed and socially mediated, Gross and Klein provide Buddhist feminist vocabulary for interpreting the subject and her agency for those of us trained primarily in contemporary Western theory.

From a Buddhist perspective, according to Gross, we might understand constructedness as interdependent co-arising, the understanding that "nothing exists independent of its matrix, but only in interdependence with it" (BAP, 159). While self and other are mutually defining, they need not be fundamentally oppositional; rather, the "'other' is not really extrinsic to 'self' but the raw material that confirms and constitutes self" (SS, 27). Because not just our epistemologies are situated, but their objects are as well, Buddhists refer to the "emptiness of inherent existence": things "do not exist in and of themselves, but only relative to their matrix, dependent on causes and conditions" (BAP, 174). What we recognize as self, then, Gross describes as "any style of habitual patterns and responses that clouds over the clarity and openness of basic human nature" (BAP, 162). This "basic human nature" is not, itself, essential in a conventional sense, but the capacity humans have to recognize

the condition of emptiness defined above. Buddhist practice, in other words, takes place through the cultivation of a critical consciousness capable of reflecting on its own work. Self meanwhile most easily appears through the “styles of ego” we create (BAP, 158), or what we might loosely call identity.

In order to move beyond identity in a Western sense to understand better the nature of subjectivity itself, Klein emphasizes the cultivation of awareness and mindfulness. She defines awareness as a “non-oppositional mental posture that is at the same time self-empowering” (“Finding,” 196). Awareness arises from close, nonjudgmental observation of how one negotiates one’s own existence. By focusing particularly on strong emotions, one gains a clearer understanding of the workings of the self, of what Buddhists call inherent existence which corresponds to the deepest operations of a Western sense of identity: “It is precisely when strong feelings arise – for example, when one is defending against an unjust accusation, in a state of fright or exultation – that one can detect the self that one will defend, rescue, or to which one will give pleasure” (“Finding,” 200). By observing the self at a distance, as it were, without either condemning or idealizing it, one learns to recognize its inherent emptiness and, thus, its mutuality with the other. This recognition, Klein suggests, works against oppression and on behalf of compassion as “[t]he unthinking attribution of status to others, and the appropriation of it for oneself, is considered by Buddhists to be the lived ontology that underpins all oppression” (“Finding,” 201).

From awareness, one may deepen one’s inquiry into subjectivity through mindfulness: “the ability to retain clear and stable attention on a chosen object” (“Presence”). The goal of mindfulness as a practice is to “develop new subjective states and to discover hitherto unnoticed aspects of oneself” (MGBQ, 62), both of which clarify the constructed nature of self and, thus, one’s mutuality with and necessary compassion for others. In other words, mindfulness, although ostensibly directed inward, incorporates social agency. As Klein summarizes, “mindfulness, and the mental focus that develops from it, is described as a unifying dynamic and seen as lending coherence to the subject even as it reveals the endless flux of self and world. Put another way, mindfulness and the dimensions of concentration related to it simultaneously demonstrate the self’s constructedness and its fully viable agency” (“Presence”). Unlike Western theories of inessentialism that privilege discursive constructions of the “real,” mindfulness and awareness, with their focus on posture, breath, and observation, do not recognize the mind/body duality girding Western subjectivity, encompassing instead the intuitive, visceral, and mental knowledges and experiences the subject accumulates (including discursive constructions). Klein emphasizes that because mindfulness and awareness are understood as embodied, they work with Western feminisms in validating alternative forms of knowledge and experience as opposed to a singular definition of knowledge tied to a disembodied, yet masculinized reason (“Presence”). Perhaps most significantly in differentiating Western feminist from Buddhist conceptions of subjectivity, Buddhist recognition of an expanded realm of embodied subjectivity is directed not at epistemological accumulation (defining the subject by what she knows), but ontological process (how she knows or the state of that knowing).

As a practice or method of inquiry, Buddhist subjectivity responds to the problem of narrating, representing, and conversing with the subaltern, particularly the subaltern female, in innovative ways for Western feminism and postcolonial theory; it opens another path for transnational feminist affiliation alongside, just to name a very few, those established on grounds of common struggles against forces of “racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, and monopoly capitalism” (Mohanty, 46); “the politics of location” (Kaplan 1994, 137); postmodern, diasporic identities (Grewal); and, unlearning class privilege combined with deep language learning and deconstructionist reading practices (Spivak). Buddhist feminism provides a language for recognizing and valuing mindfulness of human experience ranging from the most overtly embodied (physical pain) to intellectualism to mysticism. As such it contributes to transnational feminisms a non-universalizing inquiry into sentience that traverses the binary oppositions often foundational to lived oppressions. It gives us a language of affiliation that, in focusing on the process and effects of perception -- rather than on a shared material or geographic locations or identity claims -- does not attend to divisions between mind and body, tradition and modernity, the non-rational and rational. As do other transnational feminist theorists, Klein and Gross insist on the worldliness of this practice. Whereas Gross defines the subject’s goal of enlightenment as freedom *in* rather than *from* the world (BAP, 146), Klein argues, “The ability to connect one’s cultivation of

insight, calming, or compassion with an embodied awareness is...a crucial element in ensuring that one's insights – Buddhist or non-Buddhist, contemplative or administrative – are, in fact, concretely directed at the well-being of other embodied beings" ("Buddhist Understandings," 24). Thus, I want to ask in conclusion how might we connect a Buddhism-informed reading of subjectivity in Sorrow Mountain with its overt political goals, or more simply how we might incorporate mindfulness into our reading practice.

Because of the "need to include among our categories of subjectivity a dimension of mind that is not primarily linguistic or conceptual, and yet...is capable of being cultivated, and therefore is to be included among 'higher order' and 'cultural' human activities" ("Presence"), it follows that conventional patterns of narrative will not suffice in representing that subjectivity. Arguing for "narrative strategies that literally incorporate that embodied state," Klein also suggests that "[m]ythic dimensions, syllogistic logic, and an epic sense of history are matrixes in and through which Authenticity emerges," matrixes that, in a Tibetan Buddhist worldview, include the fantastic ("Buddhist Understandings," 26, 31-2, original emphasis). Sorrow Mountain provides us with close descriptions of Pachen's cultivation of her own awareness and mindfulness practice, particularly when she faces strong emotion, within multiple narrative modes of fiction, autobiography, and epic. Examination of these passages will not tell us "who she is" – a desire for knowledge that can only, given the political and material conditions out of which the text arises, be colonizing; it may, however, provide insight into how the text deploys culturally constructed subjectivity with liberatory political ramifications.

Klein suggests that the process of understanding subjectivity begins with adulthood, and the central narrative opens by counterposing Pachen's awaiting torture while in prison against awaiting the Dalai Lama in exile. These two experiences come together as Pachen glances in the mirror on her way to greet the Dalai Lama. She contrasts self-recognition ("I see a parched landscape...I pull the skin taut at the corners of my eyes and squint, trying to see some sign of the face that was once there") with the idealizing glance bestowed by foreigners she meets: "The foreigners bring me pictures. 'There!' they say. 'Aren't you beautiful!'" (6). Klein writes that mindfulness may "suggest ways to avoid treating the self as a territory to be conquered, governed, or colonized by ideals" ("Presence"), and Pachen turns to embodied knowledge – "I feel a heat rising in my chest," "My mind softens, but the heat in my chest remains" (6-7) – as she acknowledges the appropriative foreign glance and attempts to move beyond it: "My beauty has faded, my youth has gone. But I'm free" (7). Freedom resonates in several ways in this passage, referring at once to her ability to lock the door behind her as she leaves her small room in Dharamsala, to know herself outside of the idealizing view of the foreigners who wish to meet and photograph her, and to exercise critical awareness in shifting from the "heat rising" to her mind softening in response to their patronizing gaze.

When the book follows more closely a chronological narrative, though one continually interrupted by dreams, memories, and Buddhist teachings in ways that underscore its own construction, it reveals the development of mindfulness from its tentative and sporadic beginnings in girlhood to its cultivation through advanced practices toward the end of her life. As a seventeen-year-old girl, suffering initially appears to Pachen in familial, gendered terms. She watches her mother age and bow under the strain of running a chieftain's household, while she recognizes "a pull...a sliver of feeling, a sensation too fleeting to voice" (20) of her spiritual calling. Learning that her father has, without consulting her, arranged a politically advantageous marriage for her, she forces a servant to assist her in running away. Her refusal to conform to the gendered and class norms expected of her is simultaneously bold and immature. Once her father sends additional servants to convey his promise to nullify the marriage contract, she returns home in "embarrassment, anger and relief" and senses her body stiffening (37). Focusing her mind on the words of her teacher about "right speech" (speaking without anger or lies), she comments, "The words began to fade, and for a moment my mind was free of thoughts and feelings. My anger slowly dissolved. I felt myself softening" (37-8). She experiences similar regret after whipping one of her father's aides who initially refuses to acknowledge her local authority upon her father's death. In both cases, assertion of her will in gendered terms brings her only additional suffering (though it also achieves its aims), and she ultimately rejects that style of selfhood (which we might label "hard") in favor of accepting her familial duties and cultivating mindfulness. Through the latter, developed particularly in response to the hardships of

imprisonment and torture and advanced Buddhist practices, she emerges most explicitly as a Tibetan Buddhist heroine, as her advanced practices distinguish her even among Tibetan Buddhist nuns.

In The Body in Pain, Elaine Scarry effectively argues that torture works to silence and to erase the subject through physical pain that “does not simply resist language but actively destroys it” (4). The subject may attempt to (re)create herself through a narrative of pain, though “the verbal strategies for overcoming that assault are very small in number and reappear consistently as one looks at the words of patient, physician, Amnesty worker, lawyer, artist: these verbal strategies revolve around the verbal sign of the weapon or what will eventually be called here the language of ‘agency’” (13). Sorrow Mountain may be read as a form of individual and collective “self”-creation to resist the obliterating forces of torture; yet, as Scarry notes, the language of agency she describes always carries with it ambiguity: “for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that ‘having pain’ may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to ‘have certainty,’ while for the other person it is so elusive that ‘hearing about pain’ may exist as the primary model of what it is ‘to have doubt.’ Thus pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed” (4). The “unsharability” of pain rests at the center of debates over the status of Sorrow Mountain and other such testimonials and witnessing of violent political oppression. If “unsharability” results in part from the failure of narrative (or of language in general, as a social construction) to convey the “presence” of pain to those absent from it, then the reader remains continually caught between a voyeuristic desire to “know” another’s pain and doubt about its “true” nature. The Buddhist doctrine of non-self further complicates the issue of representation: how can an ultimately illusory self both know and represent “having pain” (“having certainty”)?

The language of mindfulness offers a potentially productive perspective on this conundrum, as it conveys a deep sense of presence without reifying the self. However, the narrative at once acknowledges mindfulness, yet refuses to countenance full embodied “knowing” during these passages. Descriptions of Pachen’s girlhood in pre-colonial Tibet are suffused with mythic, romantic, and metaphoric literary discourse. As the story shifts to her imprisonment, however, the discourse itself becomes sparer. Passages concerning torture include brief descriptions of the physical actions such as “they hit my face with a board” (169) or “[a]s they beat me I jerked to the side so forcefully I often hit their legs with my head” (184) and sometimes, though not always, the accompanying physical sensations (“[p]ain like a burning iron shot through my shoulders” (169)). In each instance, Pachen insists on the separation of the physical experiences she cannot control and the mental ones that she can both observe and try to shape. In a typical passage, describing her first experience with sustained torture when she was imprisoned with her mother and aunt, she says:

After a while I no longer felt anxiety when I heard the steps on the walk, no longer cared what they did. At times I saw my body lying on the floor, but my spirit was somewhere else.

In the moments I was able to think, I thought of the terrible karma I must have had in a previous life to be beaten like that, and prayed that the pain I was feeling would eliminate all sins that had been built up. (170)

By gesturing toward a language of mindfulness here, while insisting on the necessity of withdrawing from representation, of maintaining strategic separation of body and “spirit,” the text denies the reader’s desire to know another’s pain. At the same time, the description ascribes agency to Pachen that, because it is so limited, as when she mentions “the moments I was able to think,” posits her critical consciousness as the antithesis to an omnipotent, destructive pain. “Having certainty,” then, comes from mindfulness rather than the representation of pain for another. If, in Scarry’s terms, the book as artifact is “a projection of the human body” that as such reconstitutes the subject and the world out of the obliterating forces of torture (281), then it functions most effectively when it follows “the structure of a perception” (289, original emphasis). The example above focuses attention on how Pachen perceives pain rather than on precisely what that unsharable pain “is,” making the inanimate book the site of mindfulness and the “awareness of aliveness” (289). For Scarry, Klein, and Pachen, embedded in such mindfulness and awareness is compassion.

The restraint governing the portrayal of physical torture enables limited identification not solely dictated by exoticism. Neither fully described nor completely defamiliarized, the torture passages ask the reader to become conscious of the ways in which she is reading and the stakes of that reading: does one read from a particular religious vantage point, one defined by community, or perhaps one attributed to a universalist view of human rights? In my experience teaching the text, the various ways in which readers answer this question bring analysis back to both the production of the text and its stated goals, thus underscoring the constructions themselves. Compassion, then, does not arise from full identification (a process that can only be coercive given the material distance between Pachen and her readers) with a knowable subject or her pain, but from the text's ability to activate imagination to recreate the subject perceiving pain.

Although Pachen remarks that she feels no fear when she hears the prison guards approach, it is only after her release from prison, when she has the opportunity to pursue more fully her spiritual training, that she learns to conquer fear through the esoteric Chod practice of cutting through attachment and surviving on essence. Pachen's experience with Chod receives lengthy and distinct treatment toward the end of the book. Matching neither the romanticization of the opening chapters, nor the restraint of the prison sections, it appears in explicitly Buddhist language that emphasizes mindfulness practice within its more mystical context, yet remains grounded politically. Establishing the parameters of colonial degradation, upon her release from prison Pachen returns to her village to witness the tremendous suffering of ordinary Tibetans over more than two decades of Chinese colonization. She visits Lhasa and then proceeds on a long pilgrimage to witness the destruction of various great monasteries of pre-colonial Tibet, working to rebuild one before beginning an eight-month retreat in a mountain cave. There she meets an 84-year old hermit, Amdo Jetsun, who becomes her teacher and introduces her to Chod practice. The narrative makes little attempt to bridge the cultural divide between advanced Tibetan Buddhist practitioners and the "typical" Western readers I have been positing, as Pachen relates, "I existed in a state of abiding calm," Amdo Jetsun "taught me to exist on a spoonful of finely ground rock boiled in water, twice a day" (254), and most dramatically, "we performed a Chod practice, visualizing our bodies being cut and offered to the demons" (257). The test of her practice comes that night as the rising river threatens to drown them as they sleep in a burial ground, and Amdo Jetsun encourages her not to flee. The section on Chod concludes as Amdo Jetsun tells her: "Fear... is often an illusion formed by thoughts in our mind," and urges her not to allow either physical or psychological "obstructions" to break her meditation (285). Pachen concludes, "I never felt fear again in quite the same way" (258). From there the narrative follows her briefly to Lhasa where she helps organize the 1987 demonstrations and then into exile. The representation of cultivating advanced states of subjectivity takes place in fantastic, seemingly esoteric language. It conforms to the reader's desire to gaze upon a rarefied world, yet does so in terms that emphasize one's distance from it; it refuses the return through the familiar. One wonders, for instance, how many of Donnelley's target audience will wish either to visualize the flesh being peeled from their limbs or to financially support the Tibet movement because of reading this section.

At the same time, the framing of the Chod section with political awareness and activism indicates how cutting worldly attachments and conquering fears of death may underscore one's commitment to social action. The subject constituted and motivated through her practice does not exist apart from the modern forces of state aggression, environmental degradation, or global forces of patronage and marketing, but in relation to them. The political hope of the book rests on its status as artifact. As a product of the imagination that foregrounds awareness and mindfulness of the suffering of material bodies, it creates the possibility of future imaginings and, therefore, compassion. What the narrative reveals through mythic history, novelistic and cinematic tropes, references to the fantastic, and references to its own overtly collaborative construction, is a different kind of truth: not a depiction of authentic Tibetan-ness, although those tropes circulate throughout the book and are partially reconstituted even through the arc of this argument, but of another perception of subjectivity and sentience developed, in Ani Pachen's case, through the clash between Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese colonialism. That subjectivity directs its energies toward anti-militaristic and anti-colonial ends, although it expresses those ends in the language of compassion, emptiness, and interdependence largely unrecognizable in global political or academic discourse.

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