

## 9 History, marriage politics, and demographic events in the central Himalaya

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Anthropology's contribution to the study of population processes has crossed many watersheds in the years since John Caldwell's pioneering development of micro-demography. No longer is it unusual to find village studies on the graduate reading lists of our population training centers. The issues of familial context, intergenerational relations, and, to a slightly lesser extent, relationships between household and family groups give entry to discussions in which anthropologists and more sociologically trained demographers share common ground. At the same time, the mutually reinforcing strengths of community studies and larger representative efforts are well recognized. Examples of the best of this work by non-anthropologists are found in Caldwell's research in Africa and South India where attention to local sociocultural contexts provide greater explanatory texture (Caldwell 1982; Caldwell et al. 1988). Related work by other non-anthropologists also hints at the explanatory possibilities of relatively localized studies (Cain 1982).

In spite of these developments, however, direct borrowing from anthropology has centered mostly on the methodological innovations in micro-demographic data collection (Caldwell et al. 1988; Axinn et al. 1991) or a small range of theoretical contributions from British social anthropology most amenable to stressing intergenerational relationships. Powerful as these innovations have been, this chapter shows how more recent attention to political economy may bring additional value to the merger of anthropology and the understanding of demographic events in pre-transition settings. I view this enlargement of theoretical common ground between disciplines as a furthering of the prospects initiated by many from within the demographic tradition (Caldwell et al. 1987; McNicoll 1980).

The theoretical motivation for this analysis emerges from two strains of political-economic inquiry in anthropology, one recently surveyed by Greenhalgh (1990) and the other not yet applied to demographic data, but embodying a somewhat different approach to social transformation

(Ortner 1984; 1989). This analysis forms part of a larger investigation into social and family transformation and their implications among a Himalayan people known as Tamang. Here I am concerned with the village of Timling, a setting in which fertility was not consciously controlled through the 1987-88 field period.

Most current anthropological treatments of the political economy of fertility deal with societies that are undergoing or have recently undergone a demographic transition, and approach the transition in terms of class-differentiated processes (Kertzner and Hogan 1988) or in terms of state-local relationships with respect to population policy (Greenhalgh 1994). Greenhalgh's 1990 review itself most explicitly focuses on fertility decline. Here I argue that many of the same political issues that color connections among local, regional, and national levels and which are linked to fertility transition in these other settings are properly implicated in the variation that exists within non-contracepting populations, too. This is especially true if the meaning of political is taken to include "all relations in which the relative power, authority, agency, legitimacy . . . of actors is negotiated and defined . . . [S]uch issues are at stake not just in formal institutions defined as 'political' or 'public,' but in most forms of relationship, and in most contexts of interaction" (Ortner 1989:194). Taken this way, political-economic approaches to population processes open the possibility of merging the intrafamilial and intergenerational foci of Caldwell's work, the more explicitly class-conscious work surveyed by Greenhalgh (1990:86-87), and the ethnographic history of more recent anthropological theory (Ortner 1989).

### Political economy and fertility

Greenhalgh's 1990 review and her discussion of a "cultural and political economy of fertility" in Chapter 1 of this volume are useful starting places since they so clearly outline one proposal for a political-economic approach. She begins by asserting that such an agenda is a variant of other institutional approaches, differing in its tendency to begin with regional, national, and international historical forces impinging on local contexts and individual fertility behavior (1990:87). Methodologically, an anthropological political economy relies on the long-term residence and techniques that have come to define more general ethnographic work. It combines these with an interest in quantifying dependent variables of interest to demographers: the timing and nature of life-course transitions such as marriage, birth, and death. At the same time, it suggests the possibility of quantifying independent variables novel to most demographic inquiry (Dahal et al. 1993; Fricke and Teachman 1993). Underlying the kinds of explanatory data collected, however, is the assumption that local processes

are penetrated by larger events, notably those related to the process of state formation and global systems of relationship. Thus, as with political-economic anthropology more generally, a political economy of fertility must turn toward history to avoid past assumptions that local systems developed in isolation from a larger world (Wolf 1982; Roseberry and O'Brien 1991). The political economy of fertility is "concerned with the social, cultural, and political and economic forces underlying demographic change" (Greenhalgh 1990:95). It follows, finally, that demographic political economy be equally concerned with both the structural forces implicated in population processes and the concrete behaviors that emerge from human agency.

Stated this way, the political-economic framework makes use of narrative forms of explanation associated with historical analysis in addition to the proximate explanations centered on mechanisms. Narrative explanation allows us to ask which groups in a particular setting may be differentiated demographically by actions based in their relations of inequality. It directs attention to the historical processes giving rise to group differences while suggesting the historical depth of relationships of inequality. In the contexts typically studied by anthropologists, the bounds of these groups can only be known through an unusual degree of immersion in highly localized settings. Narrative reconstruction of historical process tells us which groups may be relevant for exploring behavioral differences related to inequality. Social theory and the understanding of these contexts in their own terms guides the attention to specific details in that narrative (Lloyd 1986; Macfarlane 1986).

At the same time cultural analysis informs us about both the worldview motivating and framing behaviors and the structure of local relationships channeling strategies (Hammel 1990b; see also Kertzer, this volume). It is here that proximate mechanisms for the expression of demographic processes are explained. From the point of view of culture theory, the extent to which the motivation for actions extends to a conscious manipulation of numbers of children born is an empirical issue (for elaboration see Carter, this volume). Irrespective of the real effects that behaviors may have on fertility, numbers of children ever born may be an unintended consequence of decisions made for other culturally relevant ends (Lesthaeghe 1980) and it is here that the anthropological political-economy framework permits an extension to those societies characterized as "seamless":

In relatively unchanging societies no one sees these separate bonuses conferred by fertility. The society is made of a seamless cloth. . . . Indeed, the respondents' ability to see clearly the separate aspects of children's value show that the old system is already crumbling and that children's roles are not as certain as before. (Caldwell 1982:139)

In such societies, often organized by kinship, local relationships between families and larger groups are inherently political. While sophisticated analysis of these relationships and their implications for particular forms of marriage dates from the work of Leach (1961), their incorporation into the political-economic framework argued for by Greenhalgh has lagged. I argue here that such a connection enlarges the scope of a political economy of fertility by drawing attention to the reproduction of relations in pre-transition settings.

Procedurally, then, a political-economic perspective within anthropology is concerned with the multiple dimensions that structure relations both within societies and outside. It draws together a wider set of considerations than those found in more typical demographic study. As with demography, the primary variables to be explained are numerical and have to do with individual behavior (Greenhalgh 1990). Unlike much demographic research, however, investigation begins with internally relevant categories of social difference, the relationship of these local status hierarchies with encompassing regional and state systems, and the strategic behaviors that constitute social reproduction. Recent ethnographic work demonstrates that these strategies are also embedded within the local systems of meaning that link family relationships with wider politics.

### Objectives

This chapter examines the demographic consequences of culturally motivated political strategies implied by relationships created and maintained by marriage within a natural fertility society. It explores the creation and maintenance of stratified groups as an outcome of historical patterns of migration buttressed by the needs of authority during the consolidation of the Nepali state. Once these groups are defined, it demonstrates that their members manipulate culturally given possibilities of marriage with a view to orchestrating advantages in the flow of obligations and labor.

While the goals motivating individual marriage behavior are not consciously related to fertility in the population examined here, the relationship between marriage timing and fertility is well-established (P. Smith 1983; see also Kertzer, this volume). To the extent that differential strategies relate to women's age at first marriage, they may be expected to affect exposure to the risk of childbearing and will be investigated in that light. A second exploration will focus on the relevance of marriage-linked political dimensions to the timing of childbearing. Since age at first birth is directly related to the total fertility of women in a non-contracepting population, this variable is worthy of independent investigation.

Following this logic, then, I first provide a narrative history of status-group formation in Timling. Subsequent sections explore the implications of these hierarchies for marriage strategies, age at marriage, and age at first birth.

### Timling and the Tamang

In 1988 Timling was a nucleated village of 142 households and 669 people in north central Nepal. Located near the Tibetan border on a narrow shelf of land at about 7,500 feet, its residents are Tibeto-Burmese language speakers whose social structure and agro-pastoral economy bear broad similarities to other Tibeto-Burmese language groups forming large segments of the Nepali population. Like these other groups, Timling people are notable for their exchange ethic, their organization into exogamous patrilineal clans, their expressed preference for various forms of cross-cousin marriage, and their incorporation into the Hindu-dominated monarchy of Nepal in the closing years of the eighteenth century. Today's population includes two groups, the Tamang and Ghale, who see themselves as distinct in spite of their speaking the identical Tamang language and over two centuries of intermarriage.

Timling's location within encircling ridges formed by the Ganesh Himal range kept it from the main routes of travel between Nepal and Tibet and sufficiently marginal to be ruled through intermediaries. During the 1987–88 field period, Timling continued to be a remote site relative to the capital, lying some five to six days' walk from the nearest roadhead.

The Tamang are one of many peoples of the Nepal Himalaya claiming ancestral origins in Tibet (Holmberg 1989; Fricke 1994; Höfer 1969). In their general relations with the Nepali state, the Tamang have had the misfortune of residing in the mountainous country surrounding the Kathmandu Valley. Urban elites living there have always considered them a ready source of corvée labor; proximity to the valley has long been associated with heavy labor extraction by dominant Hindu peoples. Early nineteenth-century British reports already recognized the Tamang as laborers without "any share in the government" (Buchanan 1971[1819]). Not long after the unification of the contemporary Nepali state in 1768, a number of Tamang villages to the north of Kathmandu participated in an unsuccessful rebellion. Since that time, however, they have not taken up arms as a group and were used heavily for state labor throughout the nineteenth century (Regmi 1971, 1978).

#### *Marriage and politics within a culture of exchange*

In societies organized by kinship, marriage often structures interfamilial relations of hierarchy and equality (cf. Kelly 1993). While an earlier tradition within anthropology characterized whole societies as practicing a certain marriage form, more recent approaches have looked at the nature of concrete marriages in terms of their reproduction of social relationships (Gutiérrez 1991; Collier 1988; Bourdieu 1976). The stress is on political

behavior and the manipulation of marriage as strategy and implies variation in the forms of marriage contracted in a single society. Thus, the cross-societal implications of various cross-cousin marriage forms may be said to hold within settings for the relationships between particular families united by marriage.

Societies in which patrilineal cross-cousin marriages are preferred, for example, often allow other forms of marriage including those with matrilineal cross-cousins and non-relatives. The choice of one over another has implications for the relationship between families since these societies typically rank wife-giving families higher than wife-receivers. While patrilineal, or exchange, forms of marriage imply a good deal of equality between families, matrilineal forms indicate some kind of enduring hierarchy since they involve a continued one-way movement of women between lineages for multiple generations (Barnard and Good 1984; Fricke 1990). Marriages contracted between previously unrelated families are intermediate in terms of this hierarchy. Far from being merely symbolic, these hierarchies have practical outcomes in settings where labor and ritual obligations toward wife-giving families are an expectation of marriage.

Among the Tamang, marriage ideally unites two families in an alliance affirming multiple kinds of exchange – labor, goods, services. Wife-receiving groups owe labor and obligations to a wife's natal kin. These are affirmed at important life-cycle rituals centering on marriage, a son's first haircutting, and mortuary rituals. Other service is offered in tasks from wood-cutting to help in agriculture and pastoralism. Although the practice of bilateral cross-cousin marriage imposes a reciprocity on these obligations in time, Tamang often manipulate their alliances by marrying other than cross-cousins or by engaging in matrilineal forms as a means of maintaining unequal status between patrilineal lines across generations (Fricke 1990).

Tamang kinship terminology is categorical so that actual first cousins are called by the same terms as other orders of cousin. Categorically, they are the same and the implications of marriage to either is felt to be quite similar in its statement of relations between groups. Nevertheless, the political charge of marriage to first cousins is made distinct by drawing actual families into direct exchange undiffused by wider lineage networks. While categorical links may also be called upon to legitimate status distinctions, real social power can be diluted by the distance of apical ancestors linking people within the same category (cf. Bourdieu 1977). Power derives from the real lived experience of contact between social actors. Not only is the exchange more direct when first cousins are involved, but it ratifies concrete relations between families and turns on culturally significant relations between actual brothers and sisters. The significance of these first cousin versus categorical cousin marriages will become more clear in the empirical

discussion of marriage strategies in Timling where a mother's brother is spoken of as having a "right" to her daughter for his son.

The marriage process itself can take multiple forms with the ritually most elaborate, called *milsing bhyaa*, usually arranged by seniors and involving a series of prestations including drink, food, small amounts of money, and cloth from the groom's to the wife's family. These prestations include a widening circle of kin. First visits center on the woman's immediate household and later visits expand to other neighborhood households patrilineally connected to them. At every stage, the acceptance of drink and food implies a simultaneous acceptance of the marriage and the social relationships implied by it. These formal marriages are notable public events marked by feasting and ritual prestations of cloth to a wife, her father, and her mother.

Other, less formal, marriages are distinguished by greater autonomy of spouse choice and decreased ritual elaboration. These marriages are more likely to revolve around the wishes of the couple themselves and lack the firm, public acknowledgment of the full set of social relationships implied by the ideal Tamang marriage process. Even when retroactively formalized at the birth of a child, they seldom draw as wide a circle of kin into acknowledgment of rights and obligation.

All marriages are considered to draw affines into relations of inequality and differential obligation, but the quality of any particular marriage must be affirmed through the actions of its principal actors. Women are crucial players here, both as signifiers of alliance and as active agents in the construction of affinal ties buttressed through their continuing links to natal kin (March 1984; Fricke et al. 1993). These links endure as an outcome of cultural ideologies of descent and transmission of bodily substance common among Tibeto-Burmese groups (Levine 1981). Thus, clan membership is inalienable and transferred across generations through the patrilineal inheritance of bone (*nakhrut*). Since women receive this bone from their fathers they stand in marital homes as constant reminders of links between families. In the ideal, these close links will culminate in the request of a woman's daughter for her brother's son as a part of the exchange cycle between patrilineal families.

#### *The formation of local status hierarchies in Timling*

Although Timling people explicitly stress their egalitarianism in ways consistent with a widespread Tamang ethos of reciprocity and exchange, the Tamang clans and the Ghale are accorded ranked statuses associated with royalty, ministers, priests, and commoners in imitation of a general Tibetan state pattern (Fricke 1990). The Ghale claim highest and royal status relative to the Tamang clans.

Contrary to the longstanding tradition seeing Himalayan villages as

internally homogeneous and made distinct by their different ecologies and elevations, Timling's contemporary organization is intimately connected to the history of incorporation into the state over the past two centuries (cf. Zurick 1989). The earliest migrations to the area were a part of a continuing movement of populations from Tibet into the upper Himalayan valleys of Nepal about 300 years ago. Oral traditions suggest that ancestors of the Tamang clans arrived first, followed by Ghale conquerors from the northwest shortly before conquest by the nascent Nepal state before 1800.

Ghale dominance of local politics was, paradoxically, buttressed by their incorporation into the state. As with other northern border communities, government sensitivity to threats from Tibet caused it to grant some measure of local autonomy to Timling and to choose already established local elites to aid in administering the area. Although serving at the behest of the state, these intermediaries had a good deal of local power in gathering taxes, apportioning corvée tasks among households, and adjudicating local disputes (cf. Regmi 1971, 1978). The heavy use of Tibeto-Burmese populations surrounding the Kathmandu Valley for corvée labor comprised the most direct state intervention in local affairs (Regmi 1986, 1989). Because of Timling's remoteness, however, representatives of the Nepali state never resided in the community, preferring instead to collect taxes by bolstering Ghale authority.

Although the state elsewhere treated Ghale as just one clan among others within a common ethnic group (Höfer 1979: 144; Macfarlane 1976), within areas of ancestral Tamang habitation they were categorized as of separate and higher rank, thus helping to preserve their privilege relative to others.<sup>1</sup> Even though the Ghale validate their claims to higher status with reference to mythic charters and culture-specific theories of inheritance, their concrete status in Timling was necessarily reaffirmed by state authority looking out for its own interests. The history of other settings in which Ghale do not hold the role of "kings" (Messerschmidt 1976) indicates that traditions of kingship in the absence of state support were not sufficient to support claims to higher status.

Local Ghale were themselves segmented into antagonistic patrilineal families as a result of a land dispute in the 1870s. This dispute turned on the issue of expansion into lands set aside for the establishment of a Buddhist temple in 1804. Originally donated by Ghale brothers, the huge tract of land was closed to farming, hunting, and logging until population pressures motivated one segment of the Ghale clan less involved in the temple to encroach on it. This caused a split into distinct and named patrilineal families, the Gangle and the Chetgle. Government officials took advantage of this dispute to consistently appoint members of the Gangle as intermediaries in tax collection, thus dissipating the potential for a competitive power base to form around a unified Ghale clan.

From the time of this land dispute until the 1950s Timling's social order

was more or less stable with the Gangle clan at the top of the hierarchy. Timling's people continue to relate the stories of elite village personages from the higher-ranking patriline. One Gangle ancestor, son of the headman who originally encroached on temple lands, is remembered as establishing alliances with southern villages through the strategic marriages of his sons. He parlayed his power into monopolizing the village salt trade with Tibet and commanded enough labor to build rest houses along the trail over the high passes to Tibet.

Two events transformed this stability in the 1950s. In the early years of the decade, a revolution overthrew the old social order in Kathmandu. After experiments with various democratic forms, a new political system was installed in 1960, destabilizing the relations which bolstered Ghale power in Timling. At about that same time, the escape of the Dalai Lama from Tibet and the subsequent closing of the border between Tibet and Timling cut the salt trade which the Ghale had monopolized. The reorientation of Timling's external economic links to the south led to a substantial transformation of individual activities and allowed members of all clans to compete equally for the wage-labor jobs becoming available in Kathmandu, further destabilizing Ghale dominance in the area.

This sketch of Timling's history and marriage culture suggests some of the dimensions along which demographic differences may be found. These include elements of marriage strategy revolving on marriage formality and the nature of relationships between families, the changing nature of individual experience and its implications for relations between daughters and parents, and the nature of local hierarchies. Local status groups defined by clan and patriline membership include two Ghale patrilines – Gangle and Chetgle – and the Tamang clans. The political and economic contexts of social action, moreover, are divisible into periods centering on 1960.

In what follows I explore the relationships between politically charged marriage strategies, clan membership, and demographic events among all ever-married women in Timling aged 22 and over.<sup>2</sup> Beginning with the strategic manipulation of marriage, subsequent analyses follow the implications of social hierarchy for ages at first marriage and first birth.

### Hierarchy and marriage strategy

In order to look at the extent to which marriage strategies reproduce social inequalities, Table 9.1 displays relevant dimensions of women's experience and marriage characteristics for three ranked clan and patriline groups. The first four panels under section A explore women's premarital experience outside of Timling, the extent to which marriage involves the interests of seniors, and the extent of formality among these groups. The premarital

Table 9.1 *Selected characteristics of Timling women by natal group*

(N)	Ghale clan			
	TAMANG	CHETGLE	GANGLE	TOTAL
	84	36	32	152
	A. Percentages of women in categories at left			
	%	%	%	%
Outside experience before marriage				
None	76.2	77.8	68.8	75.0
Lived or worked out	23.8	22.2	31.3	25.0
Spouse choice				
Senior	39.3	33.3	59.0	42.1
Joint	31.0	33.3	25.0	20.3
Respondent	29.8	33.3	16.0	27.6
Cloth exchange				
None	54.8	58.3	38.0	52.0
Exchanged	45.2	41.7	62.5	48.0
Spouse choice and cloth exchange				
No cloth exchanged	54.8	58.3	38.0	52.0
Respondent & cloth	15.5	25.0	6.3	15.8
Joint & cloth	8.3	2.8	18.8	9.2
Senior & cloth	21.4	13.9	37.5	23.0
Degree of relation				
No relation	32.1	30.6	21.9	29.6
FZD/categorical	38.1	13.9	18.8	28.3
FZD/1st cousin	16.7	16.7	18.8	17.1
MBD/categorical	9.5	30.6	18.8	16.5
MBD/1st cousin	3.6	8.3	21.9	8.6
Relative land in spouses' families				
Equal/husband >	70.2	55.6	56.3	63.8
Wife family >	29.8	44.4	43.8	36.2
	B. Average ages at first events			
Age at 1st marriage	19.4	18.6	18.4	19.0
Age at 1st birth	22.5	21.5	21.4	22.0

Notes: FZD = Father's sister's daughter (patrilateral cross-cousin marriage).  
MBD = Mother's brother's daughter (matrilateral cross-cousin marriage).

experience of living and working outside of the village is an indicator of social transformation and increasing independence for these women. Here we see that Gangle patriline women are slightly more likely to have had these experiences than women of the Chetgle patriline and Tamang clans.

Spouse choice, as an indicator of strategic interest in the connections formed by marriage, can be seen to vary for these ranked groups. Women from the high-ranking Gangle are most likely to have seniors involved in their marital decisions. Only 16 percent of the marriage decisions for this

group were *left entirely* up to daughters while 59 percent were entirely made by seniors. Senior choice of spouse is, on the other hand, much reduced for the Chetgle patriline and Tamang clans.

Prestations of cloth to a woman's family at marriage indicate the relative importance of formal and public marriages for these groups. We see here that the highest-ranking Ghale families are most likely to receive cloth in the marriage process. Since senior participation together with cloth exchange are crucial elements of *milsing bhyaa*, I have joined these two dimensions into a single variable in the table. Gangle women are again shown to be the most likely to have *milsing bhyaa* for their first marriages. Moreover, when joint- and senior-decision marriages involving cloth exchange are considered together, over half (56 percent) of Gangle women are married in this way compared to 30 percent of Tamang and 17 percent of Chetgle women.

Cloth exchange and spouse choice indicate the extent to which individual marriages involve the interests of seniors and are marked by public ceremony but do not in themselves reveal the political implications of marriages. The final two panels in section A provide an entry into the content of relationships created by marriage alliance by relating the status implications of marriage form and relative family wealth to status groups. Here we find that Gangle women are most likely to be involved in matrilineal cross-cousin marriages with first cousins, marriages which least ambiguously assert a status claim. Moreover, the percentages of women involved in these marriages increase regularly with rank in the local hierarchy of natal groups, from 4 percent for Tamang women to 22 percent for Gangle women. Expanding the net of matrilineal marriages to categorical cross-cousins suggests that even Chetgle families are able to manipulate marriage alliances of this type at fairly high levels.

Finally, as an indicator of economic difference between families joined by marriage, the last panel in section A makes it clear that Ghale women are more likely to come from families of greater wealth than those of their husbands. Where 44 percent of Ghale women from both patrilines enter into marriages with families having less land, only 30 percent of Tamang women do so.

Section A in this table reveals some of the implications of locally constructed hierarchy and suggests that marriage itself is a mechanism by which status is reproduced. While Gangle ascendancy was reaffirmed by their designation as intermediaries between the village and the state in the past, their maintenance of privilege has been through manipulation of marriages in ways that legitimate rank in culturally relevant terms. Thus, their orchestration of matrilineal marriages at higher levels than other clans validates their status in acceptable ways within the village.

Section B of Table 9.1 extends the exploration of hierarchy-based

difference to average ages at first marriage and first birth. Here we see that although differences are small they nevertheless distinguish Tamang and Ghale women. Patriline differences within the Ghale clan are trivial, yet Ghale women as a group both marry and bear their first children at younger average ages.

Interestingly, many differences among the groups are consistent with their relative rank, yet there is also a fairly clear break into two groups when the most obvious indicators of status, together with the timing of events, are looked at. Thus Gangle and Chetgle differentiate from Tamang in relative family land at marriage and the same line holds if all matrilineal marriages, categorical and first-cousin are considered together. For this reason and the relatively small numbers of women in the two Ghale patrilines, subsequent multivariate analyses join the Chetgle and Gangle into their single clan identity.

While Table 9.1 suggests that marriage practice and strategic outcomes for alliance differ by the hierarchical positions of Timling's patrilines and clans, the relationships between these differences and the timing of demographic events remain to be examined. In thinking about these implications we need to be aware that unlike other South Asian societies a woman's age does not by itself have any significance for the value of a marriage alliance. As such, their age does not generally figure in the conscious manipulation of transfers cementing marital connections between groups. This lack of explicit attention raises the issue of how the differential strategies might be reflected in marriage timing. The answer lies in the overall context of Timling marriages and the different interests of the whole set of actors involved in any marriage. In the next section I develop expectations about the relation of age at marriage and first birth to the politics of marriage and test these against empirical patterns in Timling.

### Marriage politics and demographic events in Timling

As recounted above, all marriages in Timling join families into politically and economically meaningful unions, but some forms of union are more charged than others. The Ghale and Tamang of this region have long recognized multiple pathways for establishing these connections. Formal marriages, *milsing bhyaa*, draw in the widest range of family and intergenerational interests. The agreement of actors to the implied relations of marriage are ratified by cloth exchange. Less formal marriages entered into at the discretion of the couples themselves do not explicitly require the assent of this range of kin but are recognized as no less legitimate. These less formal unions may occur when seniors lack the necessary cultural and material capital to arrange a desirable alliance – in a sense, parents can choose not to choose and accept the lower level of cooperative alliance

implied in an own-choice union. Such marriages may also occur because a daughter has preempted parental strategies by marrying on her own. In such cases, her parents are presented with a *fait accompli* in which they are expected to make do with the level of services expected from any son-in-law and forego the political advantages that come when wider kin are involved in the marriage process.

Since Timling parents are aware of this possibility – that their daughters may act independently to form alternative marriages – seniors who wish to manipulate marriages toward strategic ends need to act fast. It follows that the more politically charged marriages will occur at younger ages for daughters. Thus, younger ages at marriage are an unintended consequence of the prior decision to engage in the strategic politics of marriage.

We have seen above that Ghale families are more likely to engage in these forms of marriage manipulation, that *milsing bhyaa* are most likely to involve such considerations, and that first cousin matrilineal marriages are the most highly charged of all marriages for statements about inequality. By this logic, all of these characteristics should be reflected in younger ages of first marriage.

Other marriage characteristics with strategic implications include the relative land of families united by marriage and the distance between affines. Where a wife's family has more land than a husband's, the people of Timling often give usufruct rights over excess fields to their daughters' marital families. These rights are not necessarily tied to *milsing bhyaa*, allowing even poor families unable to afford full marriage ceremonies to take advantage of such opportunities. The desirability of usufruct makes it more likely that these women will be sought as wives, with the implication that such material inequality will be associated with lower ages at marriage irrespective of marriage formality. Similarly, affinal connections outside of the village area may be sought for access to resources such as summer or winter pasture. We might therefore expect that these marriages would involve younger ages for women.

Finally, earlier discussion argues for the relevance of different eras marked by the 1960 watershed when trade links with Tibet were cut just as national political developments altered the kin context of internal village politics. In the post-1960 environment, the salience of kin for reproducing stable interclan relations was reduced and the motivation for controlling the activities of women also declined.

We might expect this transformation in the activities of women to be associated with later ages at marriage. Seniors, for their part, are less inclined to orchestrate the marriages of independent daughters because they perceive these marriages to be at higher risk of divorce.<sup>3</sup> Since divorce cancels the advantages of marital alliance while creating its own problems for interfamilial relations, the safer course is to let daughters decide for

themselves. Since these daughters are preoccupied with other activities such as wage labor and travel outside of Timling, they are likely to marry at later ages than women who remain in the village, working only in agriculture.

Following statements of the link between marriage age and fertility in the technical demographic literature, earlier analysis (Fricke 1994) has shown that the largest part of the explanation for Timling's overall fertility is explained by exposure to the risk of childbirth. Were Timling's women to be married throughout their fecund years, women would bear an average of 7 children rather than the 5.4 reported in that earlier analysis (Fricke 1994:101–105). Age at marriage is thus straightforwardly related to fertility experience since childbirth is sanctioned only within marital unions and Timling's is effectively a natural fertility population.

Because age at first birth bears a close relationship to total fertility in these populations, the exploration of the impact of marriage strategies on fertility focuses on this transition rather than on number of children ever born. Doing so allows the analysis to include all 144 women 22 years old and above who have ever borne a child, rather than being limited to the small numbers of women who have completed their childbearing. The expectations explored in the analyses below are that the timing of first births is largely an unintended consequence of age at marriage. Thus, those characteristics of marriage associated with younger ages should also be associated with earlier ages at first birth.

Expectations for ages at first marriage and first birth are examined in Tables 9.2 and 9.3 using multiple classification analysis (Andrews et al. 1973). Multiple classification analysis is an appropriate method for exploring such relationships because of its easy to understand presentation and because it allows a look at average ages at first marriage for the whole set of dimensions discussed here. In the tables below, I provide, but do not discuss, information for several levels of statistical significance. These levels, strictly speaking, relate to probabilities that statistical results from a random sample reflect true population parameters (Blalock 1972:159–166). Because these analyses include the entire population of Timling women 22 years old and above in 1987, Tables 9.2 and 9.3 present real population means rather than estimates. My argument therefore focuses on magnitudes of difference among categories. This point notwithstanding, readers who prefer may evaluate results by using the indicated significance levels.

#### *Age at marriage*

Table 9.2 presents three columns showing the average age at first marriage for women by each of the variables discussed above. The "unadjusted" column presents the simple averages for each category as we would observe them. The "adjusted" columns present the expected average ages at first

Table 9.2 *Women's mean age at first marriage by family characteristics and marriage process variables*

Variable	Mean age at 1st marriage			Number of women
	Unadjusted <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted <sup>b</sup>	Adjusted <sup>b</sup>	
Marriage cohort				
< 1960	18.3	18.7	18.8	60
≥ 1960	19.4	19.2	19.1	92
	**	**		
Natal clan				
Tamang	19.4	19.4	19.3	84
Ghale	18.5	18.5	18.6	68
	*	*		
Pre-marital non-family experience				
None	18.2	18.2	18.2	114
Lived or worked out	21.5	21.4	21.3	38
	****	****	****	
Relationship with spouse				
Not related	18.6	--	18.5	45
Categorical FZD	20.3	--	19.7	43
1st cousin FZD	18.4	--	18.7	26
Categorical MBD	19.6	--	20.1	25
1st cousin MBD	16.2	--	16.8	13
	****		**	
Marriage decision & formality				
No cloth exchanged	19.6	--	19.5	79
R's choice/cloth	19.9	--	19.5	24
Joint choice/cloth	18.4	--	19.2	14
Senior choice/cloth	17.3	--	17.6	35
	***		**	
Relative family land				
Husband ≥ Wife	19.3	--	19.3	97
Husband < Wife	18.5	--	18.4	55
			*	
Affines' location				
Same village	19.4	--	19.4	100
Different village	18.3	--	18.2	52
	*		**	
Grand mean	19.0			
Total cases	152			
R <sup>2</sup>		0.145	0.261	

*Notes:*

FZD = Father's sister's daughter (patrilateral cross-cousin marriage).

MBD = Mother's brother's daughter (matrilateral cross-cousin marriage).

<sup>a</sup> Observed mean.<sup>b</sup> Controlling for other variables in column.

Significant at: \* 0.15 level \*\* 0.10 level \*\*\* 0.05 level \*\*\*\* 0.01 level

marriage controlling for the effects of all other variables in the column. That is, the average ages in these columns represent the effect of the variable of interest taking into account the effect of other variables. The interpretation of changing averages for a variable across columns is made clear by an example. Looking at marriage cohort, we see that women who married before 1960 marry 1.1 years younger than those whose first marriage occurred in the later period. In the first adjusted column we see that this difference is reduced to 0.5 years, suggesting that some of the change is the result of changes in the other two variables in the column. In this case, we might interpret the changing age at marriage to be the result of an increase in the percentage of women who have worked at wage labor or lived out of the village before marriage. In the second adjusted column, the age difference for marriage cohort is further reduced to 0.3 years, suggesting that changes in the additional variables in that column explain these additional changes in age at first marriage through time.

This example indicates that historical changes in age at marriage are related to transformations in both the individual activities of women and the practice of marriage itself and supports the historical arguments made above. Turning to the other variables, we see in the unadjusted column that nearly all the characteristics of marriage associated with political strategy have implications for marriage age argued for above. Ghale women marry about a year younger on the average. Women in the most politically charged unions – with matrilineal first cousins – marry from two to four years earlier than those in other marriage relationships. Women in *milsing bhyaa* in which the choice of spouse is entirely up to seniors marry at least a year and often more than two years younger than women whose unions are arranged in other ways. Women who marry outside their natal village marry younger than those who marry endogamously, and women whose families own more land than their husbands marry younger than those whose husbands have more or equivalent amounts of land.

Most of the differentials, apart from that of marriage cohort already discussed in the example above, continue even after controlling for the effects of other variables in the adjusted columns. The magnitude of differences in average marriage age is most pronounced for differences in premarital experience of women, kin relationship with spouse before marriage, and the formality of marriage process. These results suggest that differences in age at first marriage among Timling women are most strongly related to the individual life-course experience of women. At the same time, controlling for the effects of all other variables, the two most direct measures of social inequality, relative land and marriage form, have the expected relation with age at marriage. In both cases, women whose natal families rank higher through material advantage and post-marital relations marry at younger ages. For land, a material indicator of relative status, the



difference is only about a year. Matrilateral first-cousin marriages, on the other hand, are associated with a two to three year difference from other forms when considered simultaneously with other variables.

#### Age at first birth

Table 9.3 uses multiple classification analysis to look at the differentials in average ages at first birth for each of the dimensions of marriage politics, village history, and individual experience examined in Table 9.2. The unadjusted averages again show the observed differences for these variables. The first adjusted column presents average ages at first birth net of all other effects in the column while the second adjusted column includes the effects of age at marriage itself and a variable for first marriage ending in divorce (not shown in the table).

I control for the impact of divorce in this last column since a broken first marriage would be expected to effect exposure to the risk of childbearing by increasing time out of the married state. By including age at marriage in this column, on the other hand, we are able to determine whether the marriage strategy variables have any effect on age at first birth over and above their association with marriage age. The persistence of effects for any variable in this column would indicate that some feature of the relationship between spouses in a given category affects a woman's exposure to the risk of pregnancy even after the marriage has been made (Fricke and Teachman 1993). Conversely, a reduction in the effect of a variable in this column would indicate that its impact on childbearing is largely a result of its implications for marriage age alone. As an example, note that the unadjusted average age at first birth for women who have lived outside of the village or worked at wage labor before marriage is 23.7, some 2.4 years later than those women who did not have these experiences. While there is little change in this difference in the first adjusted column, when the effects of age at marriage and divorce are added in the next column, the difference is reduced from 2.4 to 0.8 years. This suggests that nearly all of the impact of this variable on age at first birth is through its effect on marriage age rather than through its implications for spousal relations.

Looking at the other variables in the unadjusted column, we can see that many of the effects of these variables on age at marriage are still present, although moderated, when we look at childbirth. Measures of social hierarchy show a relationship with age at first birth. Ghale women bear their first children an average of 1.4 years younger than Tamang women. Women in matrilateral marriages with first cousins experience their first births at the youngest ages, two years earlier than the average age of 21.9 for all women and nearly three years younger than women married to categorical patrilineal cousins. The formality of the marriage process, on

Table 9.3 *Women's mean age at first birth by family characteristics and marriage process variables*

Variable	Mean age at 1st birth			Number of women
	Unadjusted <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted <sup>b</sup>	Adjusted <sup>c</sup>	
<b>Marriage cohort</b>				
< 1960	21.5	21.9	22.2	59
≥ 1960	22.2	21.9	21.7	85
<b>Natal clan</b>				
Tamang	22.5	22.5	22.4	82
Ghale	21.1	21.0	21.3	62
	***	***	***	
<b>Pre-marital non-family experience</b>				
None	21.3	21.2	21.7	106
Lived or worked out	23.7	23.8	22.5	38
	****	****		
<b>Relationship with spouse</b>				
Not related	22.0	22.1	22.5	41
Categorical FZD	22.7	22.0	21.5	42
1st cousin FZD	21.2	21.4	21.6	25
Categorical MBD	22.2	22.6	21.9	23
1st cousin MBD	19.8	20.6	21.9	13
	*			
<b>Marriage decision &amp; formality</b>				
No cloth exchanged	22.2	22.1	21.9	78
R's choice/cloth	21.6	21.4	20.9	22
Joint choice/cloth	20.9	21.1	21.4	13
Senior choice/cloth	21.8	22.1	23.0	31
			***	
<b>Relative family land</b>				
Husband ≥ Wife	21.9	21.9	21.8	91
Husband < Wife	22.0	21.9	23.2	53
<b>Affines' location</b>				
Same village	22.1	22.2	21.8	94
Different village	21.5	21.3	21.8	50
<b>Grand mean</b>				
Total cases	21.9			
	144			
R <sup>2</sup>		0.170	0.540	

#### Notes:

FZD = Father's sister's daughter (patrilineal cross-cousin marriage).

MBD = Mother's brother's daughter (matrilateral cross-cousin marriage).

<sup>a</sup> Observed mean.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for other variables in column.

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for other variables in column plus age at 1st marriage and whether first marriage ended in divorce.

Significant at: \* 0.15 level \*\* 0.10 level \*\*\* 0.05 level \*\*\*\* 0.01 level

the other hand, shows almost no observed relationship with age at birth, while the effects of other variables such as relative landed status and affinal distance are almost nonexistent or quite small.

The picture changes little when all of these variables are considered together in the first adjusted column. Natal clan is still related to age at first birth while the small difference for women in the two marriage cohorts disappears entirely. Matrilateral first-cousin marriages are still associated with the youngest ages at marriage although the magnitude of difference is reduced. Furthermore, the two youngest ages at first birth are for women married to first cousins, suggesting that when all elements of marriage strategy are considered together the differential here has more to do with kin distance than with the hierarchical implications of marriage itself.

Turning to the second adjusted column, we see that nearly all of the observed differences in age at first birth work through age at marriage and divorce. The impact of affinal distance disappears while the effects of kin relationship with spouse are further reduced. Interestingly, the impact of Ghale versus Tamang affiliation lingers on at an only slightly reduced level while the effect of marriage formality becomes more pronounced when age at marriage and divorce are considered. Ghale women in this column bear their first children an average of 1.1 years younger than Tamang women, while women whose marriages are arranged by seniors and which include cloth exchange bear their children at least a year later than others. Since age at marriage is controlled for in this column, the implications are that these two variables have an impact on exposure to risks of pregnancy apart from their impact on entry into marriage itself. Since natal clan status is a recognized indicator of status in Timling, we have evidence that some aspects of hierarchy have an impact on the quality of conjugal relations themselves, while other measures of inequality have their impact on first-birth timing as an outcome of their association with marriage age. The effect of marriage decision-making and formality, on the other hand, is likely to be a result of the Timling practice of delaying cohabitation and increasing the number of natal home visits in marriages involving formal cloth exchanges (Fricke et al. 1993).

### *Discussion*

Tables 9.2 and 9.3 together reveal the extent to which the demographic events of first marriage and first-birth timing are structured by locally relevant hierarchies and their reproduction through marriage politics in Timling. If, as I have argued, age does not by itself constitute an exchange value within the narrow ranges of difference in these tables, then the variation must be seen as an unintended outcome of strategy and circumstance motivated by other ends. The discussion of Timling's history

and culture of marriage suggests that these motivations have to do with a political economy of relationships involving state intervention in village affairs and the differential interests of social actors.

Thus, clans in Timling are hierarchically ordered with their ranking buttressed at critical periods by the needs of an expanding Nepali state. While the use of Ghale headmen as intermediaries responsible for local tax collection, delegation of corvée responsibilities, and local order created an advantage for this group, their translation of this political capital into advantage needed to be conducted in locally meaningful cultural terms revolving around concrete marriage strategies. These strategies result in younger ages at both marriage and first childbearing for Ghale women.

While Table 9.2 suggests that natal clan membership is less important to an explanation of differential marriage age than the marriage strategies themselves, the results in Table 9.1 indicate that the high-ranking Gangle patriline families are more likely to pursue these demographically significant strategies. Gangle women are more likely to have their marriages arranged in accordance with senior interests and in formal and public ceremony. Pursuit of these interests requires younger ages at marriage to circumvent a daughter's potential alternative desires. Similarly, Gangle are more likely to arrange marriages that link affines as direct matrilateral kin and these forms of marriage are associated with younger ages for their daughters. Here the value of an anthropological political economy is illustrated in its ability to uncover the composition of active strategists. The result is a more complete understanding of internal context and motivation.

External political events also have an indirect impact on the timing of marriage. The different contexts of pre- and post-1960 relations with the outside world transformed the kin-based rationality of internal village politics. Trade links with Tibet under the direct control of Ghale patriline were broken by the border closing at precisely the time when a new electoral politics was instituted in Nepal. The result was a reduced incentive for controlling the activities of young people, giving way to greater mobility and outside wage-labor participation for daughters and consequent later ages at marriage.

The implications of these statuses and processes for age at first birth are confirmed in Table 9.3. Ghale women bear their first children at younger ages than Tamang women, while marriage forms connoting the highest level of inequality between affines are associated with the youngest average ages at first birth. The analyses in this table also explore the mechanisms by which these ages are younger and confirms that much of the difference results from their association with age at marriage as we would expect in a natural fertility population. Nevertheless, the influence of hierarchy, even after age at marriage is accounted for, is indicated by the continuing difference in average age at first birth for Ghale and Tamang women. The

analysis does not reveal the proximate cause of these differences but they are likely to be due to behaviors related to exposure to the risk of pregnancy differing between the two groups.

### Conclusion: A political economy of demographic events

Recent developments in anthropological theory have converged around theories of practice that explicitly integrate concepts of power, inequality, and social reproduction into ethnographic data collection and analysis. Although the practitioners of this new agenda have arrived from various traditions within anthropology, differing on the degree of emphasis on cultural versus social analysis (Ortner 1984, 1989; Roseberry 1989), there exists a remarkable agreement on the salience of the political and historical dimensions of social action. One emerging framework in this new social theory requires that explanation consider political-economic relations at multiple levels of inclusion – within families and localized settings and between these levels and larger political entities. Nearly all practitioners agree that these relationships are mediated by cultural models which guide perceptions, motivate strategies, and define the universe of opportunities for individual actors. This framework suggests, moreover, more complexly argued models of explanation asserting no a priori primacy for either economic or cultural sources of causation. The framework also suggests a merger of once distinct interpretive and explanatory accounts of social action. Such arguments have been paralleled in recent treatments of demographic transition (Kertzer and Hogan 1989).

Although practice and political-economic models constitute a framework for understanding all forms of social action, their application to demographic events has been halting and partial. Greenhalgh summarizes the impediments to such application in her 1990 review and her discussion of the intellectual and institutional history of demography in Chapter 1 of this volume: non-anthropological demographers, even as they acknowledge the value of anthropological approaches, lack the necessary grounding in cultural theory, tend to confine their borrowing to field methods, and are less interested in local context for its own sake; anthropologists most associated with these new theoretical developments, on the other hand, are among the least quantitatively inclined in the discipline.

Nevertheless, empirical work by anthropologists and theoretically informed historians has begun to draw demographic analysis into current social theory. Much of this work focuses on the political economy and culture of class relations within state societies (Kertzer and Hogan 1989; Schneider and Schneider 1984; Gutiérrez 1991; Greenhalgh 1994). The analyses in this chapter complement these efforts by showing that social inequality and political economy structure demographic events in societies where kinship

organizes social relations. Timling provides an example in which nascent state-building bolstered local hierarchies even as their reproduction was made dependent on Nepal's bureaucratic system of resource extraction. It suggests that even "seamless" natural fertility settings have long histories of relationship with external political entities (Wolf 1982; Roseberry 1989) and that, in these societies lacking conscious strategies of fertility manipulation, the timing of births may be an outcome of the interaction between encompassing state systems and internal, politically motivated strategies.

Finally, this chapter suggests the components of a political economy of demographic events for such settings. The framework assumes that all societies include social inequalities which structure the differential interests of their members. It redefines the political to include all relationships which involve unequal distributions of power and advantage and seeks to link the multiple levels at which these are realized: between generations, between families and patriline, and between local and state levels.

While the events to be explained are the individual numerical events of demographic research, the levels of contextualization called for go well beyond standard analyses. Because the different status groups are locally defined, our understanding of their genesis and reproduction requires attention to highly localized historical processes that emerge from ethnographic investigations. Explanation in this approach joins narrative and quantitative analyses in novel ways, by giving attention to both the historical processes and the cultural logics which define the strategies of social actors seeking to reproduce their positions. Here, we find the mechanisms by which the actions directed to other ends may have consequences for demographic variation.

### Notes

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1 The codification of Nepal's Hindu caste hierarchy in the first pan-Nepal legal code in 1854 was itself part of the felt need of its rulers to legitimate Nepal's existence in response to the threat of the British Raj. By establishing a national code, the *Muluki Ain*, they saw themselves as affirming their nationhood in terms recognizable by the British (Höfer 1979; Burghardt 1984; English 1985). While the *Muluki Ain* classifies the Ghale as one clan among an ethnic group known as

Gurung, an 1874 government document found in Timling's Buddhist temple distinguishes between Ghale and Tamang.

- 2 This age limits potential truncation biases inherent in analyses confined to ever-married women (see the discussion in Appendix B of Thornton and Lin 1994). The mean age at marriage for all Timling women is 19, while about 80 percent of all women have married and 50 percent have experienced their first birth by age 22. The pattern found for women aged 22 and above is similar to that for later age cut-offs but retains a larger number of cases for multivariate analyses.
- 3 A perception communicated to me by several informants with good reason. Risks of divorce have increased markedly over the years. Within the first five years of marriage only 3 percent of marriages entered into before 1960 ended in divorce. For marriages made between 1960 and 1974, 15 percent ended in divorce in five years; for those between 1975 and 1987, 34 percent ended in divorce in the first five years.