

and Gehlawat demonstrate how and why Hindi film is far from obvious or transparent and requires diligent, rigorous academic attention, specifically transitioning into and through the twenty-first century with the unrelenting manifestations of cosmopolitanism and globalization and their ramifications for the form, content, and future of Hindi cinema.

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*Subject to Death: Life and Loss in a Buddhist World.* By ROBERT DESJARLAIS. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. xii, 295 pp. ISBN: 9780226355733 (cloth, also available in paper and as e-book).  
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Robert Desjarlais's *Subject to Death* is a deeply haunting and evocative book about the mourning rituals within Hyolmo society in Nepal. The text uncovers a collective process of witnessing and responding to death that answers a set of questions posed in its penultimate chapter. Why do Hyolmo rites invoke so many varied images of the deceased, only to dissolve them in subsequent ritual moments? Why do the rituals proceed from tangibility and graphicness to abstraction, anonymity, and emptiness? And how do these rituals transform or assuage the grief of those who mourn?

By placing these framing questions at the end rather than the beginning of the book, Desjarlais asks the reader to proceed through the text in a state of relative unknowing that is overwhelmed by the rich complexity of sensory details, characters, and narrative fragments of loss. The effect is one in which the reader experiences death as a rich source of unknowing or overwhelming dissolution, as well as a creative exercise in remaking and transforming that enables a kind of “remembering to forget” (p. 222). On the one hand, the rites seem directed at the living, who are given an object lesson in the deep Buddhist truths of impermanence, emptiness, and no-self, as well as the distant possibility of transcending an endless cycle of rebirths that all sentient beings are subject to until enlightenment. On the other hand, the rites are a guide for the deceased, who are given instructions to depart as well as assistance in gaining a good rebirth through the merit generated by their relatives. Further, the rites imply a ritual play or mastery over the uncontrollable trauma of death that suddenly and inexplicably disrupts the predictable and mundane flow of life. Rituals of mourning offer a “template of grieving” (p. 221) that allows relatives to move from the sharp, raw pain of early grief to more manageable and subtle forms of sorrow that reestablish a more predictable flow of time through ritual repetition and a periodic structure of linked rites. The reader learns how Hyolmo mourning rituals digest and manage the pain of death while fashioning new images and effigies of the deceased that move away from discrete tangible life towards more abstract notions of impermanence and emptiness.

Desjarlais describes the rites of mourning using the Greek term *poesis* to indicate the humble process of transformation that tries to influence the broader laws of karma that will determine the fate and rebirth of the deceased consciousness. While this term is evocative, the use of Western theorists—Freud, Derrida, Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari, and Blanchot—seems out of place at times and not as cohesive as the tentative

explorations of the ways that Hyolmo discourses intersect with deeper Buddhist philosophical ideas of emptiness, impermanence, and no-self.

In chapter 4, which offers a fascinating summation of the rituals of creative transformation and dissolution of the deceased self that follow the cremation, Desjarlais describes the ritual burning of a “name card” that serves as a simulacrum for the deceased. He explores the semiotics of names and texts as ritual substitutes as well as their ephemeral and transitory nature in some detail, but he does not describe the significance of the concept “name-form” (*nama rupa*) in Buddhist theories of the self and dependent origination (*pratitya samutpada*), a central concept within Buddhist philosophy. Name-form is one of the twelve steps of dependent origination that form the cycle of birth and rebirth that explains and describes how consciousness takes root in a mind/body complex that has senses, that then craves and gets attached, which in turn leads to further birth and rebirth. However, the reader would have benefited from an account of how the Hyolmo name card illustrates Buddhist theories of consciousness and rebirth that are summed up by the abstract doctrine of dependent origination. Desjarlais does offer an excellent account of how a monk officiating the name card rite instructs the deceased consciousness about its journey through the bardo, the period of death and rebirth, before relating death to a litany of negation that relates the phrase “form is emptiness, emptiness is form” to the negation of the five senses—no sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, and thus no mental phenomena that would be produced by sense contact. Here again, the Buddhist theory of dependent origination that links name-form to the five senses just described—as well as volition, consciousness, craving, attachment, death, and then rebirth—might have been helpful.

A few minor caveats: the role of gender in the mourning process is rarely explored, although Desjarlais does gender the deceased as male when speaking in generic terms of his subject. While this may reflect Hyolmo patterns of speech or perhaps the lack of access that Desjarlais had to women in Hyolmo society, this is never addressed explicitly, and the effect is to relegate women as rather marginal or deny them subjectivity in a landscape where the main actors—monks, laypeople, informants—are overwhelmingly male. There is a brief mention of both birth and death pollution as well as the custom that women and children do not touch the dead body (p. 101), but Desjarlais does not ask why women should avoid death pollution and how this might relate to female fertility as well as birth pollution within Himalayan Buddhist discourses, as has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> These are minor critiques and do not detract from a highly poetic, dramatic, and richly textured analysis of how Hyolmo mourning rituals transform the processes of death and dying in ways that console and heal both individuals and the broader social fabric in one Himalayan society.

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<sup>1</sup>See Geoff Childs, *Tibetan Diary: From Birth to Death and Beyond in a Himalayan Valley of Nepal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Pascale Dollfus, *Lieu de Neige et de Génévriers: Organisation Sociale et Religieuse des Communautés Bouddhistes du Ladakh* [Place of Snow and Juniper: Religious and Social Organization of Buddhist Communities of Ladakh] (Paris: CNRS, 1989); and Kim Gutschow, *Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), among other sources.