Many studies of ethnic group origins focus on two questions: where did the (name of group) come from, and how did the (name of group) get to their current homeland? Some scholars address these questions by examining migration routes recounted in myths of origin or shamanic journeys. Although ontological narratives provide important emic perspectives on how a group came into being, they often leave the impression that, at some distinct point in time, the group in question moved en masse to their current homeland, settled, and then ossified into a distinct ethnic community. The punctuated equilibrium model of migration, characterised by long periods of stability interrupted by brief periods of mobility, glosses over a fundamental, well-documented feature of human movements: although migrations can start as singular events, they typically evolve into protracted processes. As archaeologists have noted, small-scale movements of people are historically more frequent yet less easy to pinpoint than large-scale migrations. Nevertheless, small-scale movements can act as important initiators of social and cultural transformations (Hegmon, Nelson, and Ennes 2000). Focusing exclusively on a seminal migration event, rather than the diachronic process, misses a great part of the story of how communities form over time.

The purpose of this paper is to develop a theoretically-informed approach to studying how migration, as a protracted process, has shaped settlement patterns and social structures in the Himalayan region. Although scholars have unearthed a wealth of data to document the settling of Himalayan valleys (e.g., Oppitz 1968; Jackson 1978; Ramble 2008), none have developed an explanatory framework that rests upon formal theories of migration.¹ The situation is partially accountable to the fact that migration theories are designed to be empirically tested using

¹ Wim van Spengen’s geohistory of Tibetan trade routes (2000) draws on Braudel’s theoretical melding of history and geography to document the development of trade routes between Tibet and South Asia. Albeit not a study of migration per se, van Spengen provides an excellent example of how a scholar can use theoretical insights to provide a more robust and historically contextualized explanation of Himalayan settlement patterns.
data from surveys and interviews—data that simply does not exist in the historical archives. Nevertheless, I contend that systematic research on contemporary migrations can yield novel insights about historical migrations. To accomplish this objective, I draw upon migration theories to address three fundamental questions: Why do people move? Who in a given community is most likely to migrate? How do networks influence the scale and direction of migrations? The theoretical discussion forms a backdrop for the second part of the paper: a case study on the settlement history of Sama, a village in Nepal.

**PART I: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Disciplinary orientations exert a powerful influence on the types of theoretical questions a researcher studying migration is likely to ask (see Brettell and Hollifield 2000). For example, a demographer may want to investigate how migration affects birth and death rates of both sending and receiving populations, whereas an economist is more likely to focus on the macroeconomic forces that motivate people to move in the first place. For the purpose of this paper, I am concerned with questions more rooted in anthropology, namely, how migration is facilitated by social networks, and how migration influences the social organisation of communities. I draw upon two bodies of theoretical literature. The first seeks to explain motives behind migration, while the second examines how social networks facilitate the movement of people.

*Why Do People Migrate?*

Any study of migration must first identify the nature of that migration. Brettell (2000:99-102) provides a summary of migration typologies that starts with five identified by Gonzalez (1961). *Seasonal migration* is a movement by individuals or families that usually occurs once a year in response to seasonal labour opportunities. *Temporary, nonseasonal migration* is usually undertaken by young, unmarried individuals who leave their places of origin for varying lengths of time in order to gain skills, experience, education, or resources before returning to settle down. A temporary, nonseasonal migrant generally sets out with the intention to return, although may end up leaving permanently. *Recurrent migration* is an intensification of temporary, nonseasonal migration. This typology describes people who continually leave home for varying periods of