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'From Remote Area to Thoroughfare of Globalisation: Shifting Territorialisations of Development and Border Peasantry in Nepal'

A new road connection through Nepal's Rasuwa District to the Tibetan border is due to be completed by 2012. This could restore the Trisuli-Bhote Kosi Valley to the major position it once held in the cartography of routes available to Transhimalayan travellers prior to the era of the internal combustion engine. The route to Tibet through this valley is the historical twin of the route taken by the Arniko highway to join Kathmandu to Lhasa. Even in winter horses could pass this way. What is this re-opening of contiguous regions for international trade likely to imply for the local population? What relevant ethnographic and analytical frameworks can help in understanding the reorientations of people's territorial locatedness at this juncture?

In this chapter I start from the ways in which building the road connection has been legitimised by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as an endeavour to relieve poverty in this area of northern Nepal. This narrative of generous salvation from hardship, neglect and isolation, uses certain kinds of modern assumptions about how people will generically respond to extensions of the transport infrastructure. How people will eventually respond cannot be precisely known, but in the road project plans there is very little perception of local actors, other than an alert to certain risk-types, such as women and girls who might be trafficked, and a formal procedural compliance to have incorporated an Indigenous Peoples Development Plan.<sup>1</sup> My point is to evaluate certain elements of territorial thinking by examining points of difference between national development discourses about infrastructure and exclusion on the one hand, and ethnographically encountered accounts of people's relationships between livelihoods, place and movement, on the other hand.

This leads back to mythico-originary narratives of settlement. It considers the effects of existing roads, and brings into focus experiences of contemporary journeyings for employment. However, the actual accounts that will be discussed are not taken from the normally gathered and collated conversations of ethnographic practice. They are from interviews and conversations delivered to camera during the process of film-making in 2007. What difference does this make? In the three key interviews I discuss, there is a

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<sup>1</sup> While fully recognizing the sovereignty of the borrowing country, the Bank accepts that it has a responsibility to ensure (i) equality of opportunity for national minorities and (ii) that its operations and assistance to developing member countries do not negatively affect the welfare and interests of national minorities (ADB, 1999:2). The ADB (1999) defines Indigenous Peoples by two significant characteristics (p. 5) (i) descent from population groups present in a given area, most often *before modern states or territories were created and before modern borders were defined* and (ii) maintenance of cultural and social identities; and social, economic, cultural, and political institutions separate from mainstream or dominant societies and cultures.

further yet only partly acknowledged audience being addressed, and a sense of putting the conversations on public record. One must bear in mind the means of communication in discussions about people's relations to territory, and the conscious possibilities for these viewpoints to travel and be heard by such means. In other words, there is an awareness that the camera can transmit to known and unknown others, wherever located. This adds to a concern that emerges in the implementation of the road project: that the poor of the district, who are targeted as beneficiaries, are not being listened to, and will be rendered mute by the noise of impending traffic. Their engagement with the project's impact on their livelihoods reveals variable degrees of alertness to the complex re-territorialising of opportunities and inequalities anticipated in the road's construction.

The perspectives that are revealed about place relation offer a way of thinking about the politics of place-making, and the emplacing of people in schemes of control and change. Against these schemes of modernist state territorialisation, the ongoing practices of fluid interactions bring people into a number of other socialities of place. Rasuwa's Tamang communities have notably come up against various strategies of boundary-making in projects of national unification and development, and have even memorialised them in ritual performance.

In terms of subsistence, the Tamang communities' pastoral movements have been contained in ever smaller circuits of transhumance over the last century. Even so, the Tamang village economy has maintained subsistence strategies based on as extensive an ecological range as possible, rather than conform to the models prescribed by development for intensification in livestock keeping or the designs for turning the district into a tree-fruit production zone. Over the 1980s, the World Bank funded Integrated Rural Development Program for Rasuwa-Nuwakot perceived Rasuwa as a temperate zone that should specialise in a nationally conceived model of economic efficiency. Other boundary-making effects came in the form of national park restrictions on the movement of livestock, and the use of swidden farming was prohibited. This, in effect, consisted in a territorial 'cleansing', to prevent a number of important livelihood activities from taking place within park areas.

The arrival of the road comes with a fanfare of planning optimism that the poor of the region will find economic opportunities to benefit from closer proximity to markets, but it is somewhat stuck in an old idea of releasing potential among remote agricultural producers. The standard gaze of development sees such people through an economic lens as poor peasants, as deficient producers, awaiting intervention through modern ways and means to become proper market actors, released from inappropriately traditional ties to land (Kearney 1996). Nor does the plan consider the poor as politically or culturally located, or in terms of anything but instances of generic human behavioural patterns.

*[B]y removing physical barriers through road networks and improving the policy and institutional capacity, the Project will improve the overall performance of the road sector—leading to reduction in poverty. The proposed roads under the Project pass through poverty-stricken areas and link trade, production, and marketing centers and other locations of*

*economic activities and socioeconomic services. Therefore, the Project will contribute toward poverty reduction. (ADB 2006:57)*

By contrast, I argue that a strategic historical vantage from the border region has given local people a sensibility and regard to the effectiveness and hold of the states on both sides *having reached their limits*, and therefore constituting a zone that is mostly neglected. This does not enter the explicit calculus of the road project's impact assessments, nor does the reality that the transition in political culture among people of the area occurs in gradualised and incremental ways rather than absolutely, with finite limits produced at a border line. A further component to the argument is that because of this historical neglect, and the protection of the area as a reserve of manual labour (Campbell 1997), the people have been used to seasonal labour migration. Instead of the road bringing new income opportunities via *in situ* production, the post-peasant realities of global labour markets has already taken the majority of the rural male workforce abroad.

### **Revealing a place made habitable for humans**

The Asian Development Bank's plan for the road is to link up existing Tamang villages on route to the Tibetan border. The new road will upgrade the existing dirt road that has run since the mid 1980s from Trisuli Bazaar to Syabru Besi, and the mining works at Somdang on Ganesh Himal. Yet even before the dirt road, Tamang villages were concentrated in their settlement density along the main track, *mul bato* heading north. Let us go into one of these villages and hear some accounts of its relationship to the dynamics of residence and movement, past and present.

Purba Yelbo Ghale has been the head *Loben lama* of Tengu village since his father died about 30 years ago. I do not think he has ever seen TV more than a few times in the local town, or watched a film on DVD in one of the few houses in the village with a set (he complains now of poor sight), but a big impression was made on him by the film my brother and I made of the *bombo* of the village on pilgrimage to Gosainkund in 1990. The lama had a bad foot at the time, so does not feature in that film. But after the death of his uncle, the *bombo*, Purba Yelbo saw that the film outlived the people filmed. He saw how the *bombo*'s grandson had learned from watching his grandfather on the video, and realised that he could speak to as yet unborn descendants of his own by means of film. Film could effect something of a similar character to ritual, which seeks to move out of ordinary time to enter the mythical time 'when people spoke with gods'. His clan was among the very first group that settled, reportedly six generations before him. The older lineage branch of this founding clan provides the *lhaben* officiants of the territorial deities *Shyibda*, and *Kalleri Miktung*. He himself will sometimes perform solitary rites at the vegetarian *Shyibda* cairns on full moon days.

It was not a problem to find a theme for filming that was common to his interest of wanting to record some of his knowledge for future generations, and my wanting to record some passages of Ur-territoriality to set against the issue of the coming road. This

was to be a walk through the ruins of the old village and along the old main path northwards, with an accompanying narrative track of myth – culminating in the taming of the place by Buddhist victory over demons. The old village site had been abandoned in the mid 1990s, after villagers resettled on the dirt road that was constructed 15 minutes walk uphill. The move from the old site had been made over a period of ten years. Initially just a few huts were built by villagers. Some people occupied a few more substantial houses that a powerful family from another village to the north had speculatively constructed. When road maintenance work was entrusted to a village team by the Department of Roads, this increased the number who built houses by the road. Most households had potato and wheat fields in the vicinity of the road, so the relocation did not necessarily lead to a reduced focus on farming livelihoods. Most years potatoes do provide good cash income. At the time of the move, there were roughly forty households. This relatively small size perhaps explains the move of the entire community. Larger villages have not followed suit, having slightly more prosperous households and substantial architecture, or being just too numerous to make a collective shift uphill possible. As to where they relocated near the road, there was not an exact re-mapping of the same old micro-neighbourhoods. Many families built where they already had fields, avoiding problems of land-ownership and disputed claims, which resulted from occupancy of the speculatively built houses mentioned above. There is more of a correlation between clan identity and field property in the distribution of houses that are located away from the immediate roadside cluster at Rishyang. For locals, this quasi-urban cluster has the feeling of a bazaar (actually there is just a handful of shops among the houses), as compared to the quieter social life round the bend in the road.

From the old village ruins, the walk northwards would take us past the line of old *purkhang* (small memorial *chorten* for the dead), beyond the nearby set of fields through a patch of forest, to the second grouping of fields, and other points of noteworthy events, on to the site where Guru Rimpoche (Padmasambhava) meditated in a cave, and killed a demon on route to Tibet. In the film of this guided walk, an animate landscape emerges from the evocation of actions and stories borne in the physicality and the enchantment of the past-in-place. Mythical and historical human life events are perceived as having literally *taken place* – that is, are legible in the presence of shapes and forms. So it was as we descended a steep path from the road to the old village, our first stopping point was to look across at a rock where lamas used to receive initiation. (These days new sites for initiation have been used that are above the dirt road – maintaining the structural relation of initiation site as above village habitation). Purba Yelbo began intoning the chant he had learned at initiation. He broke off after a couple of minutes, mentioning that we would never complete our walk if he did not edit the length of all possible narrative accompaniment. Further down, among the ruined walls of the old village, he helped me recall who had lived where, when I had first arrived to do fieldwork in 1989.

Before leaving the old village houses, he made it clear that, in proper fashion, we should have begun our tour of places of significance at Tengu U, the ‘cave’ (in Nepali *Thare orar*), but in fact only an overhanging rock, that was a famous night-stopping place for travellers between north and south. Purba Yelbo had heard from his father that it was at this cave that a Tibetan, Lama Maneba, had died, having first declared all land from this

point to the north as belonging to the Tibetan ‘insiders’ (Campbell 1997). It was significant enough a place in the national itineraries of Nepal in the eighteenth century to receive a mention in Kirkpatrick, who noted from reports he had gathered at Nuwakot, that between Grang and Bokhajunda, there "is a celebrated cave, under a considerable eminence, called Thara-ooral, or the cave of Thara. It is also known by the name of Bhumakagoopa. The Trisoolgunga passes below" (1811:312).

On leaving the ruins of the old village, one large flat rock beside the track attracted Purba Yelbo’s attention. It was here, he told us, that one of the first clan settlers came upon a whole crowd of *mang* spirits. Taken by surprise, they dispersed at the sight of the on-comer and were chased off by a dog. Passing through scrub-forest, round a bend on the ridge, and arriving at Membarding with a vista north of the length of the valley, we met our first villager, Pangbang, a man with some Buddhist knowledge, who has lived and worked with Tibetan families in Kathmandu, and in tourist hotels. Purba Yelbo explained the purpose of our walk

“I walk along. They film.

I explain what it is we see here and there.

What ever comes out of this, will be seen by how ever many children and grand children, even after I am dead.”

Turning to the camera, he explained that it was from this ridge-point (*gang*) that Guru Rimpoche spied a demon (*simbu*) way over at the far side of the village fields, where a stream plunged down across the path. It was a man-eating demon that regularly ate people walking that way. Above this point was a very large, peculiarly shaped rock, like a step pyramid, in which there was the cave where Guru Rimpoche meditated, in order to overcome the demon. On the approach to this area, known as *Sangdormo*, Purba Yelbo pointed out an apparently random sequence of stones connected to the Guru Rimpoche story.

First he showed a rock that was formed by Guru Rimpoche having sat on it, leaving the imprint of his posterior, and in a notch, of his books that he carried strapped to his back. Then we came across a long stone tapering to a point. This was a plough used by the first farmers (he added that a man stepping over this rock would risk becoming impotent – ‘ploughing’ and ‘intercourse’ being frequently linked semiotically). A large, long boulder to the side of the path was said to be a huge foot-operated threshing tool (*kwindilang*). Further along were some rocks that Purba Yelbo said were dogs that belonged to the first farmers, for protecting their crops. These rocks had been broken up according to an order in VS 2025 to widen the track at this point, and Purba Yelbo himself had been among the work team. A long flattish rock with marks like cross-hatching on it was a crop-drying mat (*phyó*). Beyond this, up some steps were the remains of other rocks that were ploughing oxen that had also been destroyed in the path-widening episode. Finally, we arrived at the flat stone under which Guru Rimpoche had lit a fire on which he had boiled the head of the defeated demon in a cooking pot. He had meditated for three years, three months and three days to build up his powers to kill the demon. On removing this obstacle to people's coming and goings, settlement and safe cultivation, Guru Rimpoche

continued on his way north into Tibet (for another, colourful place-founding account of Guru Rimpoche and demonic dismemberment see Ramble 2008:188-90).

At one point Purba Yelbo looked at the camera and declared that all this knowledge about the stones and their meanings came from listening to village elders, and to Tibetan lamas who he remembers used to pass through the village. Moved to comment on the longevity of this knowledge, given changing times and the re-orientation of his community to new pathways of connection and meaning, he added, “There is nobody else now in this village who can tell the stories of these stones”.

In contrast to the notion of culture imposing designs on pre-existent territory, the stones do not at all appear as designed artifice. They are almost like emergent, mythical hypertexts, which only with the gift of knowledge from those with vision, are capable of conjuring up activity, craft, purposeful community, companion species, and the threat and violence that went with their establishment in this place. Humans came to supplant previous spirit-creature occupants, but in various seasonal rites people acknowledge the non-human sovereign Lords of Place whose protection is needed to avoid disease, natural calamity and mishap (Höfer 1997, esp. part II). Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (2009) writes about capacities for stones to be brought into meaningful signification elsewhere in rural Nepal. Stones and features of landscape bear a potential of immanence, and of vision revealed to ‘the chosen’. Greater interest is evinced in manifest divine actions than in human representational capacity, requiring an alertness to the possibility of visual cues of divine agency.

The myth of Guru Rimpoche making a place safe for human habitation is inscribed in these rocks, which perhaps by no small coincidence mark the northern limit to the main concentration of village fields, where a waterfall in a gully presents a boundary to define village limits. The stones cement the idea of Guru Rimpoche’s own journey that leaves behind a string of places made safe for humans and their livelihood activities. It is a place made into one, where the threat from enemies to human pursuits has been violently overcome, but the memory of them and the continuing possibility of their re-emergence still persist. Their presence can be read by the remaining signs of mythical time, beside what used to be the main passage for leaving the village to the north. Their continued subjugation is re-enacted every *baisakh purni*, when alongside the *lhaben*’s sacrifice of a goat to the deity *Kalleri Miktung*, the lamas perform a symbolic sacrifice with a ritual dagger. Elements of alternative versions to Guru Rimpoche’s defeat of the demon were told me by the village *bombos*, suggesting that beheading demons led to the transformation of their blood into the proliferation of leeches in the monsoon period.

In this section, notions of territory are emergent from encounters and conflict of different beings and presences in a place formed by their actions as a founding narrative of links in the lines of history and landscape. The political state does not belong in this particular narrative. In other ritual contexts of local territory the *lu* and *shyibda* are the local rulers, dispensing permissions and punishment. At *baisakh purni*, sacrificers and lamas enact simultaneous versions of village-based sovereignty and citizenry. No two rites or

mythical episodes necessarily match. *Dasain* provides an occasion for territorial enclosure of the village and marking hierarchy by central state-endowed authority, but it is founded on a sinful state-required act of sacrifice that necessitates mourning for the buffalo (Campbell 1995). In sum, there is a pluriverse of incompatible territorial powers in co-residence, and in motion. Among these Guru Rimpoche provides one of the strongest extra-local impulses to set the local in wider networks of ‘nomadic’ connectivity.

### **From Myth to History**

In the early 1990s the villagers of Tengu had decided not to be by-passed by the arrival of modern transport communication through the valley, and had rebuilt their homes on the new roadside. The road itself provided employment for some, and the few shops obviously were crucially situated there for attracting passing customers, but there was no other direct economic rationale for the relocation, other than maximising the opportunity for villagers to stay in touch with other settlements in the valley, and keeping the village community in the line of sight of anyone known or unknown, travelling the road. The lesson I want to draw from this is that the relocation displayed a different starting point and approach to domestic and community viability than the logic and experience of development, of livelihood improvement, that the villagers were offered in the form of agricultural and livestock extension advice at the time.

After cautious hesitancy, the villagers saw that the heart of community life, and the young in particular, were drawn to what the new road offered, by way of connection, even if this was not directly ‘economic’.<sup>2</sup> This kind of response was not, I expect, foreseen by the road planners, who were merely heading for the mine, via the district capital, irrespective of the community territories through which the route passed. In hindsight the move is explicable in terms of a livelihood rationale that has a very different notion of the importance of territory to be found in either mineral extractive projects, or in rural development plans of the times. The logic of development standardly proceeds by intensifying production through the application of new methods and technology on given, bounded territorial resources to increase the returns to inputs of labour or capital, and to produce items or services of value for markets that can be reliably known and predicted. The livelihood logic of this mountain border zone had other characteristics.

For the Tamang communities occupying agriculturally unpromising terrain, livelihood was primarily dependant on livestock keeping practices that required extensive movement to access seasonal fodder. Only with possibilities of grazing *across territorial boundaries* would flocks and herds from different villages manage to compensate for the inadequate array of resources available to them within specific village territorial domains. In the film, Lama Purba Yelbo tells how as a teenager he went five times with village flocks of sheep and goats to pasture across the Tibet border in the valley of Lende, before

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<sup>2</sup> I recall hearing many of the older generation say they would never abandon their old houses. They did eventually.

the Chinese occupation. Since the middle of the twentieth century, the major political and developmental changes in Rasuwa have reduced the territorial room for manoeuvre of subsistence production to ever smaller scales. With the closure of the Tibetan border and consequently no further access to pastures, the creation of the Langtang National Park restricted movement of livestock to within the territorial limits of the panchayat or *gaon vikas samiti* where livestock keepers held landed property.

Within the border zone region, villages occupied marginally different ecologies of niche diversity, varying according to location up or down the north-south valley, and all their livelihoods depended on *distributed* possibilities for access and exchange amongst them. Facilitating the movement of people across territories were clan affiliations that were continuous across even the linguistic divide between Tamang-speaking and Tibetan-speaking communities of 'Border People' (*Sépa*). (It is through these *Sépa* villages that the new road connection remains to be made.) In other words, there was a contiguous gradualism in the passage northwards, with language, clans, ritual, religious architecture, food, and kinship just somewhat rearranged rather than abruptly confronted. So it was in the economy of the border region. The standard target of development interventions – the peasant producer intensifying with technology to make finite land resources yield crops more efficiently to satisfy demand in integrated markets – was not a salient reality. More relevant would be to think of people occupying a number of different sets of entourages (of which village landed territory is but one) in the intersections of which the reproduction of livelihoods through networks of relational proximity, are managed by language, clan, co-operative reciprocity, ritual friendship, religious congregation and patronage, and traditions of hospitality. The narrative of Guru Rimpoche's mythical journey even provides a thread to stitch together the transitions en route.

As the testimony of Purba Yelbo further makes clear, the actual livelihood realities of these communities regularly consisted of forced labour demanded from each household by the *mukhiya*, frequent occurrences of famine, when families resorted to bartering bamboo produce for grain, and poverty was widespread in the region, reflected in people wearing patched-up rags for clothing. Wages had to be sought externally in portering and manual labour, mostly with bazaar merchants, but some Tamang *mukhiya* employed villagers on sheep trading expeditions to Dzongka. Such conditions of survival were in part a political outcome of the area having been protected from recruitment to Gurkha regiments in British and Indian armies (Campbell 1997). The communities of Tamang porters along the route to Kyirong were vital to the Ranas' trade interests.

If in the normal run of things, people pursued livelihoods without too much reference to the needs of the centre, and the state normally kept only a minimal presence.<sup>3</sup> The occasions when state territory was disputed, and armies turned up to face each other, left a powerful trace in the memory of village history. Placing themselves at the centre of their worlds, but on the borders of others', the Tamang communities use the occurrence of the border wars after the Gorkhalis' unification of Nepal to proffer their own hospitable disposition each way, and to manage dharmically inspired compassion to the

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<sup>3</sup> Tilman visited the border post of Rasuwa Garhi in 1949 and mentioned 5,000 man-loads of salt per year passing through, adding that at that time trade was 'blessedly free' of customs duties (1952:55).



needs of wayfarers, military and mendicants. During the *tseene cheeba* performance of dancing kings and warriors, in Bharku village (featured in the film), the village ancestors place a rope on the ground in the middle of the road, in anticipation of the armies arriving from Nepal and China. This somehow encapsulates the arbitrariness of territorial aggression to the people whose own centre is the dividing line of sovereignty for polities for whom such a place is already socially a foreign community: *Bhote* to Nepalis, *Rongpa* to the Tibetans. With stereotypes confronting each other, and making threats via the stereotypes with which the Tamang risk being tarred, ('beggars for flour' vs 'arrogant and aggressive'), the two sides of the drama make visible state territorial presence as a performance of an arbitrary kind.

### **In the Bazaar**

For a perspective on the new road connection and its territorial effects for contemporary livelihoods, the film includes an interview with a woman originally from the same village as Purba Yelbo who moved to Dhunche, the capital of Rasuwa District, soon after the dirt road was completed in the mid 1980s. She settled down with a Sherpa who moved in from the Solu Khumbu area, and the two of them ran a shop, earning enough money to send their children to school. She therefore represents someone who has consciously taken up a residential and occupational position to be where change was taking place for her district. At the same time she has maintained a clientele for her shop that consists of many of her kinspeople from the village. She might well offer villagers credit, and they would seek her out to buy their produce, such as *raksi* (local alcohol), or fresh milk. She is a granddaughter of the Tengu *mukhiya* who was a successful sheep trader for the Dasain trade, and she demonstrates a capacity for strategic reflection on the consequences of new communications and trade opportunities in the valley.

In conversation with her about the road, I tried to gauge the success of the Asian Development Bank's efforts to persuade the people of the district that the road will relieve poverty, and bring them new development opportunities. As the principle road among three identified for construction in the Banks' Connectivity Sector Project it aims to

“(i) support economic growth, particularly in rural communities; and (ii) help reduce the poverty of isolated people, mainly in hilly areas” (ADB 2006:ii).

After discussing aspects of the effects of the road on shops in the bazaar, we went on to talk about what was happening more generally with those looking for work. I started the interview with a question: whether she thought the road will benefit shopkeepers such as herself in Dhunche. For example, all kinds of new cheap goods might start coming from China.

Her answer came in a torrent, explaining how the people of Dhunche were not going to benefit. Rumours were circulating that the route the road will take will deviate from the original plan that it should pass along the contour of the existing dirt road, and instead it will run beside the river in the valley bottom, a thousand metres below.

“This place will be poor from now. It will not be good for business. What comes from above will be taken straight down. What comes from below will go straight up. Kyirong will be reached directly, and so will Kathmandu. There will be no trade for us. It will make us poor.”

As if under imminent threat she declared “We’ll be poor. There won’t be enough to eat. How will our children be educated?” She put this scenario in context by describing how in her own life, she started off poor, then with her move to Dhunche some business was slowly built up. All this will be taken away if the road goes ‘below’.

I suggested that they might relocate their shop, having the history of Tengu in mind, which, as previously described, had completely moved uphill after the dirt road by-passed the village. She replied:

“How are we going to move? We haven’t any money. With no money how can you move? If we had money maybe we would. These households will go broke, or may be they will move away. Everything’s ruined here. The road is being taken below by China. It is the place ‘Big Pasture’ that has ruined it most. [Where landslides block the road almost every year in the monsoon]. Having to pay to carry our goods across the landslide, half the money is eaten up. There’s no profit. There’s not enough for us to eat. We have to give so much money when someone dies, and when someone gets married.”

Thinking how there might still be opportunities she could take advantage of with the new cross-border connection, I asked if she could not make business by selling produce from the area. In her response, she made clear to me just how much she had self-consciously left behind the position of being an actual cultivating villager, and what a marginal kind of activity being in a position of having to sell agricultural produce would be from her point of view now. To actually choose to make a living from selling farmed produce, as a decision selected from among other alternatives, was characterised by her as a precarious strategy, unless you were to be already cultivating as a normal villager would, and perhaps have a few kilos in surplus.

“We have no land. Others have land, not us. Without land what are we to do? Even if you sell radishes, how much will you get? Five, ten, twenty rupees. The competition is too tough.”

The strident and almost desperate tone in which the shopkeeper gave her estimation of the effects of the new road can be recognised as part of a collective response of the community of the district capital’s bazaar to the rumour of the modified route. The performance on camera was made with strong conviction, and a powerful scenario was drawn of the impact that a decision to re-route the traffic would make. This is not to diminish the genuineness of the sentiment behind the answers she gave, but her comments revolve around the possibility that the road could actually make people like herself poorer, in spite of the project’s claim to do the opposite. Given the context of the

interview taking place in front of a camera, this comes as if from the collective voice of the generation who had witnessed the first signs of development in the district. They had adjusted their networks of kinship, residence, politics, education and trade to completely new conditions as the district bazaar and other enterprises grew in size, before the onset of the Peoples War (which particularly hit tourism on the Langtang trek). In identifying the swifter alternative route passing directly up and down the valley beneath Dhunche, as almost an existential threat, it is the Tamangs' mediating positional ontology in this border district which is at stake. The Tamang middle-ground, in which regional tactics of flexible cultural affiliations and self-presentation have operated to some advantage, was now to be faced with a rapidity of movement between urban centres, and other road networks to the north and south, that could render their mid-way-between transitional locatedness into being merely a point of observation on others' movements between destination points.

The transformation to be considered is one from the region only being accessible to 'wayfaring' twenty years ago, and that is now about to be thrown into full-scale 'transport' (Ingold 2007).

Unlike wayfaring, [...] transport is destination-oriented. It is not so much a development *along* a way of life as a carrying *across*, from location to location, of people and goods in such a way as to leave their basic natures unaffected. (2007:77)

According to the Asian Development Bank's plan, the road will allow goods to find markets, and boost the economy of poor northern districts. It sees the lack of road infrastructure as a major constraint to growth, and as contributing to "the close nexus between poverty and excluded development". It intends that greater benefits will become available to disadvantaged groups in the conflict-affected areas, and specifically identifies tourism as "an instrument of poverty reduction". (Technical Assistance Note, point 5. June 2004<sup>4</sup>). When I talked with one of the local Tamang entrepreneurs who has invested in the tourism infrastructure at the existing roadhead in Syabru Besi, he told me there was little chance the rural poor were likely to benefit from the road. Those who are not entirely yoked to their hard labours of ploughing and carrying wood, have noticed that it is Nepalis from the south who have come in to build up businesses and dominate the prospects for trade in the future. He was firmly of the opinion that a young person with any sense would see better opportunities for an income out of the area.

The report states the second expectation of the project is to:

"improve people's mobility so that they can access employment opportunities outside the community" (ADB 2006:57).

This might be thought of as anticipating the outflow of the labour force, but there is no consideration given to class and gender differentiation among those who leave for work. School leavers might look elsewhere in urban locations for jobs, but if the road is meant

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.adb.org/documents/tars/nep/tar-nep-37266.pdf>

to improve economic activity in the agricultural sector, the labour force will be deficient, if the trend for work abroad continues.

A remarkable telephone call was by chance filmed back in Tengu, at the village shop with the one and only telephone. A young wife was talking to her husband in Malaysia in an increasingly agitated tone. She reprimanded her husband so that the congregated village public would all be able to hear, rehearsing the shame in which she would have to humbly face her husbands' clan sisters and daughters, when they came for ritual greetings at the time of *tihar*. This made sure there was no doubt in the village information network that she had no money to live on or to keep up customary festive appearances, and that she had let her husband know the situation.

Woman on telephone:

If you [decide to] come back, come. If you [decide to] stay, stay.  
What good is [*tihar*] *tika* to me? You're just telling lies and lies.  
Which country has your money wandered off to and gone to sleep?  
If your money had come for dasain, that would be fine. You said it would come for *tihar*.  
I don't have a single coin here.  
"I can send" you say. You can't [i.e. be honest, and say you cannot send money].

This conversation makes questionable ADB's automatic assumption that road connections will intrinsically improve economic activity. The direct benefits calculated in terms of 'present value' of the Galchi-Syabrubesi road are Nrs 732.9 million (ADB 2006 report p54). Based on this figure an assumed poverty impact ratio of 0.44 is added, but without any justification or argument being made to support this effect. Although analyses of road building elsewhere in Nepal have shown impacts on livelihoods before and after to be more positive overall than had been expected in reducing socio-economic inequalities (Blaikie *et al.* 2002:1264), it is very hard to pinpoint causative processes, and even harder to predict outcomes, given the number of variables at work, and the difficulties of factoring in social benefits, environmental costs, gendered wellbeing, and cultural rights and resilience.

By improving road connections it might be expected that the situation of the woman would become even more common among the households of the district needing cash.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "The nature of the rural household itself (and possibly even "the village") has been transformed, if not fragmented, by the rise in individual migration. The household is also now, in structural ways (as opposed to visual), much less "rural." Many rural households have become a sort of spatially disparate extended family. The results are: increasing feminization of rural life (with the potential for greater exploitation and oppression of women, but also offering possibilities for women of significant improvements in their relative position), and the demographic re-structuring of households and villages (as the

On gender and development, the ADB makes an excessively confident prediction:

“The Project will have no negative gender impacts. The Project will benefit both men and women by providing them with direct construction employment opportunities, easier access to markets, better delivery of services, improved social facilities, and improved access to better quality health care facilities and higher education.” (ADB 2006:58).

There is a warning about HIV-AIDS at the end of the section, but no reference is made in the document to ‘male out-migration’, or to the preponderance of female-headed households. The project arrives with little evidence of anyone having understood the dynamics of socio-economic change in rural Nepal, and assumes as if by law of nature that roads will increase economic activity to the benefit of the poor. As Scott says of high modernist planners in general, they routinely “ignore the radical contingency of the future” (1998:343), and populate their before and after scenarios not with different kinds of people but with standardised subjects of development. It is as if by making an appropriate national map of connection, a territory for national economic welfare will then emerge, when in fact the global directions of the new nexus between cash-needing households and wage offering employment takes mostly men abroad. This is reminiscent of the blind faith in road building, with scant regard for the conditions the road is formally intended to address, that Ferguson (1991) describes in the case of Lesotho. The idea of building roads for the purpose of increasing production had not been matched to the fact that local producers had migrated en masse for waged work in South African mines decades previously. On top of this, roads bring in cheaper food than can be produced locally.

Back in the conversation with the woman shopkeeper in Dhunche, I had asked one of her friends, holding a baby, whether the arrival of the new road would make it more likely for the young in Dhunche to stay or leave. She said:

If this road is built below here, the young will fear poverty and leave for anywhere-wherever.

Even so, the actual wage-earning experience elsewhere is not wholly positive.

They go but they come back again. They are not able to earn.  
They come back empty handed. They are not able to go to ‘big countries’.  
They go to ‘small countries’, and come back with nothing.  
It costs them, one lakh, two lakhs. The people of Dhunche are poor.  
They stay one year, two years, and return with debts owed to friends.  
They are not able to earn. If they have some education they can earn.

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economically active men seek employment elsewhere and women are left with the children and the elderly). The risks for those “left behind” are great, if monetary remittances from younger, mainly male migrants decrease as the moral economy of the household and the village disintegrates.” (Blaikie *et al.* 2002: 1268)

Some have been beaten [by their employers]. They don't understand the language, and end up being beaten. That is how it has been for many who come back.

In other words, far from the road being seen as bringing opportunity, it is expected to redirect the flows of value currently accessible, and comprehensively pull the rug from underneath the advantageous location that the district capital once represented. To play with Ingold's opposition between transport and wayfaring, the road will introduce a *transport* system that will send the young people into a condition of rootless *wayfaring* in search of work far away.

## **Conclusion**

In the last decades Rasuwa District has been characterised as a remote area. It has low levels of education and considerable conditions of poverty as compared to other districts, which have longer histories of remittance economy connection. The population is 80 per cent Tamang. Prior to the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the Bhote Kosi valley through Rasuwa was the main route into Tibet along with the one through Kuti.

In this chapter 'territorialisation' has been used to analyse relationships between people, places, and the modes of representation that are available to locate identities, collective difference, relative claims of belonging and entitlement, and the power relations that build on such representations. What is of particular concern in this paper is the relationship between different languages of territorialisation, and the possibility for them to take account of each other. Looking back over foundational discourses of human settlement, and adjustments over the centuries to changes in cross-border relations and conflict, the place-specific histories of livelihood and interdependence form links through trade and non-exclusive rights along contiguous strings of communities stitched together by the thread of Buddhism's placation of territory. My argument is that by contrast the road project is legitimised by a language of planned transformation, which assumes to know about, and be attentive to, the communities who will be affected, and in whose name the road construction is being justified.

Official documents about the project display how a distinctly 'productionist' (Kearney 1996) view of these communities' interests and motivations is adopted. This presents the poor of the area as lacking the conditions of infrastructural connection which will enable them to develop their potential as economic actors - as rural producers who can be brought into developed modernity through better national integration with markets. The ideology of development in Nepal 'placed' its villagers as subjects in need of change for their own benefit and for national transformation (Pigg 1992). In 'remote' underdeveloped areas like Rasuwa the models for change imagined modern economic actors to emerge into the designs of national economic planning: adopting new agricultural and livestock keeping practices, or responding to the opportunities of tourism, so that their village economies would connect with national markets, or through education join the literate classes who would modernise the nation. The aspired-to horizon of modern developed nationals displaced attention from actually existing

practices of livelihood and social and cultural networks orientated to multiple and mobile sets of locatedness. Instead, models of development were premised on emergent agricultural cash-croppers, spreading practices of production intensification, and an image of producers grounded through property and kinship, who would improve their quality of life through the provision of skills and infrastructure as the cogs and wheels of the mechanics of national economic integration.

This projection from poverty into a future of connectivity is ahistorical, neglecting the existing bases on which infra-regional and cross-border relations are likely to be configured from the point of view of the local population's cultural and economic links to the north and south. It also conveys a distinctly national territorialisation of effects, in that it imagines that the energies of the people of this remote area will be channelled according to the project's designs into circulation within Nepal. It neglects the existing condition of trans-national labour migration that has already taken much of its labour force out of the district and the country. Nor does it (could it) consider how the emerging dialogues about a post-conflict constitutional federalism could be affected by the road.

The generic poor of development tend to be simply presented as of-and-in-place. Road projects imagine their effect as opening up obstructions to communication of people and goods. This is a distinct kind of territorial imagination. It needs to be set alongside other territorial imaginations, including those of oral history, and current migration experiences.

The 'people of the middle ground' is the conscious ontology of the Tamangs being peripheral to state imaginaries from both sides. Perceived in inferior glances from above and below, as derogatory *Bhote* or *Rongba* from Nepal and Tibet respectively. If state-territorial, exclusive boundedness always co-exists with nomadic boundary-crossing practices, the prospect of the road will run rough-shod over the ambiguous points of their overlay. In the malleability between levels of cultural-economic spheres, there have been dispositions for actions of livelihood afforded by historical knowledge of potential value in the movement of people and things from one place to another, across the place-specific configurations of value, access and socialities of return.

In remaining peripheries, as in many of the areas of South and Central Asia where 'cultural diversity' is recognisable, this is enabled by certain skills of mountain living, with some physical advantages e.g. water, and neglect or autonomy from states (Brower and Johnston 2007:20). Roads will change this. Such specific conditions in which concrete needs and their provision can remain invisible from the ways of 'state seeing' are often a feature of places that have remained peripheries and not been drafted in to central sightlines and designs:

“the premodern state was...partially blind; it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very identity.” (Scott 1998:2)

State territoriality is of necessity arbitrarily performed to make places separate. In the Bharku dance, Tamang village authorities witness the battles for division on their home ground, and the enactment of contrasted, stereotypes of the meat-eating Tibetan warriors and the officious Nepalis defending their grain stores against beggars from Tibet – in-between which the Tamangs position themselves in terms of contextual alignments, facing one way or another, according to the power dynamics of a given interaction, and creatively hybridising the possibilities of who they can be.

Harvey and Knox, writing of contemporary border road planning between Peru and Brazil, contrast the planners' forthright rendering of places, goals, scales, objects, and agents within frameworks of *compatibility*, and the aspects of social life in border regions which are innovative, diverse, and intently engaged with the art of addressing the difficulties of making conversations, negotiating across differences, and achieving mostly provisional compatibilities. There is then a disjuncture between visualisations of the future through the provision of connectivity by making places simpler and speedier to get to, by privileging technical solutions, and the modes of operation of people caught up in these designs. From their perspective "it is clear that smooth, speedy integration involves erasures, removals, and disappearances that draw forth active responses" (2008:89).

Questions then need to be asked about whether these territorial discourses can speak to each other, or whether they remain mutually remote and isolated, lacking *discursive* connectivity. As the voices heard in the film announce – the road intended to relieve poverty will do the opposite of the stated goal and make them poorer.

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