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Pathways of Place Relation: Moving Contours of Belonging in Central Nepal

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Introduction

In its everyday English usage 'belonging' can evoke a notion of bonds that stand against the flow of contingent process, and the constant re-arrangements of relationships and things swept up in the relentless pace of a changing world. This usage conveys an untroubled stability of association, a self-evident connection of people and place, beyond need for further explication. This kind of idea is especially suspect in an era characterized by increased global movement and deterritorialization. The grounds and justifications for claims to belonging need to be brought into the open.

This chapter deals with Tamang-speaking villagers of Rasuwa Disrict in Nepal, for whom any discussion of belonging involves leitmotifs of movement. This belonging-in-motion connects ancestral clan migrations, agro-pastoral cycles of displacement, and the journeys that nowadays take people into ever-widening circuits of places beyond the familiar, to bring back cash for necessities at home. I contrast this self-consciously mobility-oriented disposition with sedentarist topologies of belonging, which pervade state and development gazes. The contradictory interactions between dominant modes of imagining belonging and people's actual practices then come into view. The ways in which communities' characteristics and locatedness have been represented and resisted have to be seen in historical process moving into contemporary

scenarios. This chapter looks at the genealogy of external frames of belonging in Nepal, from 'tribal' and 'peasant' relationships of people to territories in the frame of national economic development, leading up to the currently dominant 'environmental' framing. The idea of belonging in global sustainability programmes presents contradictory features when it makes local belonging a criterion for new practices of governance for environmental conservation purposes, but at the same time conditions of globalized labour markets have re-oriented the rural workforce elsewhere to sustain their livelihoods.

Himalayan Kinship and Territory

I have drawn much inspiration for this chapter from Graham Clarke's (1995) extended historical reflections on how kinship and territory have provided alternate bases for external perceptions of Himalayan societies. While sympathetic to his historical critique of primordialism, I suggest that recent strands of new kinship theory and post-productionist analyses of development and political ecology offer possibilities for moving beyond the binarism of kinship and territory. Provisionally at least, 'belonging' provides a viable alternative conceptual vehicle for analysing the twin politics of dwelling and difference.

Clarke discussed the colonial mapping of people and places and the tension between principles of territory and kinship in the Himalayan and Hindu-Kush range. He tracked the effects of imperial structures of control and ethnological knowledge, and the possibility for national framings to arise in the region that could draw on ideas of solidary communities of blood. His argument involves a cycle of classificatory ethnonymic invention on the part of Victorian administrator-ethnologists. They moulded empirically observable groups to names of peoples

derived from ancient Greek sources (e.g. The 'Dards'), and anticipated the take-up of nation-oriented identifications. His central point for our concern is that the Himalayan mountain topography has not been conducive to the kinds of horizontal political solidarities of belonging generated by notions of shared kinship that were mythologized in Victorian conceptions of nationhood. Most kinds of interactions in Himalayan people's lives have historically been conducted across vertical ecological steps, and within polities constituted by communities of asymmetrical status.

> The mountains act as moderators, physical baffles to the full and lasting incursion
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> of fundamental social changes, whether these are the forces of religion, the
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> economic market, or of nationalism (Clarke 1995: 90–1).

Clarke argued that the state had limited reach, and people's acceptance of the overlapping presence of various states, prior to the notion of integrally bounded territorial polities, suggest an easy-going cosmopolitanism (not Clarke's precise idiom) toward the traffic of diverse actors. Conversely, "Nepal had authority over various shrines and their associated fiefs further abroad, such as the Kyirong area of Tibet [and] … Benares" (1995: 99). Nepal's traditional polity had a ritual focus on a 'sacred centre', from which a succession of thresholds radiated out on leaving the Kathmandu Valley. Outlying valleys of the Himalaya offered little horizontal connection, and pilgrimage was one of few contexts for meeting people among whom a greater sense of likeness or ancestral connection could be entertained. The tendency was for routine relations to "drop back into the local space, and to be encapsulated in *local* relations of territory and kinship" (1995: 93).

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One is not Nepalese in the sense that one is French. … the modern Nepalese citizen often can appear more as an individual than as the representative of a nation. In having avoided the European model of the nation state, a Nepalese at the same time may be both traditional and post-modern (1995: 96).

Outside Nepal, imperial administration validated, bounded, and named higher-order ethnonyms on the back of territorial units, e.g. 'Ladakhi' and 'Balti' (1995: 110–11). Within Nepal, the somewhat arbitrary selection of the categories Rai, Limbu, Magar, and Gurung to denote those communities of blood with requisite qualities for military recruitment became a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', in so far as people seeking employment in Gurkha regiments then presented themselves as being of these groups.

Combined with the normal tendency for sons and co-villagers to take on the same professions, this helped give territorial expression to these 'tribes' as collections of local groups (1995: 114).

Clarke's analysis stresses the need to look at territory and kinship as both produced at the interface of metropolitan and vernacular processes. He goes some way in this direction, but his attention remains at a sub-national level of focus: on the effects of mountain ecology in terms of its inhibition of greater opportunities of social scale for the playing out of solidarities of kinship. The geography provides less fruitful ground for the kinds of nationalism that rely on mythologies of common blood. I suggest there are issues to do with 'belonging' that need to be discussed in

practices of strategic identifications, and not just as apparently disparate principles of kinship and territory, for these have a particular purchase in the model of formal rights of citizenship in the language of the state. We have to ask how is kinship different in the hands of the state as opposed to its operational life in village contexts?

Placing Kinship

Kinship is not just about genealogy. As used by anthropologists to study social relations in societies where functional complexity has traditionally been exercised within rather than opposed to differential intimacies, kinship entails relations between relations by which a variety of characteristics are analogically familiarized. It concerns how people effect linkages and truncations of sameness and difference in respect to terminology, embodiment, gender, alliance, residence, the conduct of ongoing livelihoods, and articulations of non-human affinities. Kinship is now seen as a technology for producing effects of natural relationship (Franklin 2001: 312–13). A welcome aspect of Clarke's article is its pointed epistemic rupture between local and 'national' logics of kinship. This enables him not to essentialize kinship as foundational, and he shows this in arguing against the notion of 'impression management', which would imply people 'really are' something authentic beneath a show made for others (1995: 101). Adding a malleable dimension to ideas of kin relatedness, Clarke also remarks that shared blood is supplemented by the shared water and air of distinct climates (*havapani*) (1995: 97).

Clarke's analysis, however, misses the possibility of local perspectives in which kinship and territory are not necessarily perceived as distinct principles, and can be both actively brought into

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existence through labour and residence over time (Campbell 1993), and through sentient ecologies that fertilize, protect, and heal human relationships. Movement of individuals and families into Tamang-speaking villages of central Nepal is enabled by contracted work in herding, in participation in agricultural field labour, and in craft specialisms. People can move into a household to help repay a debt, or can attach themselves to the households of known kin, and if they prove themselves in terms of contributing to others' livelihood welfare, are encouraged to settle and take a spouse. Many field names carry the appellation of the cultivator who cleared a piece of rough ground and brought it into cultivation (e.g *Yarten Kharka* – 'the field of the man from Yarsa'). Several such cases existed in the village I worked in. Data from the early 1990s showed some 14 per cent of men had arrived in this way. A higher proportion of women arrived from outside the village in marriage, but I was able to see examples of other women who for one reason or another had attached to the village, and were encouraged to join in the rounds of field labour groups to broaden their interaction with the range of village households.

The labour-flow and household property nexus gives movement and relational creativity to the terms that Clarke speaks of as 'kinship' and 'territory'. If the situation is not quite so fluid and 'optative' as Schneider's (1984) example of the Yapese, which led him to reject kinship as a generic analytical category, cooperative relations can notably instantiate kin recognition pragmatically. Tamang kin terminology is indeed a precondition for any village interaction, but this does not restrict its deployment only to those who are offspring of ancestral lines. Kinship is not parthenogenetic, but crossed back and forth in Himalayan contexts with analogical reticulation between different kinds of idioms signifying the body, house, place, and ritual

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(Diemberger 1993). Lineage logics of blood or 'bone' can compete with 'house'-based principles (Clarke's own key tension in his 1980 thesis on Yolmo). Diametrically opposed versions of affinal hierarchy (between the classic hypergamous 'North Indian' model and the hypogamous Tibeto-Burman) does not mean actual people cannot straddle them and live with such contradictions, although this may objectively constitute an entirely opposite interpretation of power on each side (Lecomte-Tilouine 1993: 328ff.). Various synecdochal images of body parts, house and hearth elements, field and herd histories give diverse compelling resonances for the causes of relational solidarity thereby evoked, without bringing them into any transcendent resolution. They are all, as the Tamang say, 'pathways' (*gyam*) for reckoning identity. Terms from Nepali and Tibetan such as *jethan*, *tewar*, *ashyang* and *makpa*, *kul*, and *ru* jumble into local configurations. Whether as *saino* or *mheme khor* kinship in its multiple versions is averse to anything but provisional officialization. I doubt that its opposition as a category to territory would make any sense to the Tamang, for whom *Tamang lungba* evokes 'place' as a homeland where people interact as kin, sustained by appropriate dialogue with non-human guardians of place. In Rasuwa it is not so much the ethnicity of Tamangness, but kinship in its Dravidian articulation of clans that is the language of relationality between participating 'ethnicities'. Half the people speak Tamang but are not of 'Tamang' clans.

Pathways convey the pedestrian inscription of purposeful social activity in the landscape, and the indigenous Tamang term for 'path' (*gyam*) carries through to explain who people are. This is both in the sense of where they have come from geographically in recent and ancestral migrations, and as marked identities within relational pathways of parallel and cross kinship. As a people whose dominant mode of subsistence is transhumant agro-pastoralism, the Tamangs'

almost perpetual motion through the landscape requires a special recognition of their kinetic sociality. From the everyday orientation of activity with crops and livestock, and from the language of relationship in kinship and affinity, to the concepts of sacred space exemplified in pilgrimage, social life is predicated on traversals of landscape, diverging and converging along connecting pathways. In fact it is hard to think of any significant discourse of relationships, or field of exchange, that does not contain a defining component of movement through place.

Women often deliberately short-circuit classificatory extensions of hierarchical affinity relations to their husbands' wider kin, to stress parallel kinship, if traceable, through the 'mother's path'. Mutual acceptance of reciprocal terminological paths between two people gives important moral clarity to the relationship. There is room for agency in how people make the paths of relatedness in their lives. Paths of kinship can be further worked on, made clearer, through undergoing ritual kinship and making gifts, shoring up pathways between relational coordinates, so that genealogical traces are made bolder by intentionally affirming routes of connection.

Toffin (1990) writes of the tension in which 'segmentary' qualities of clan-based social relations are held against the dispersed roamings of agro-pastoral production. For the Tamangs of Ankhu Khola, these movements give them a "great suppleness, and a fluidity in social relations, and are a means of evading in part the constraints of lineage organization" (1990: 30, my translation). This is closer to the analysis I have pursued in talking about the kinetic sociality of livelihoods in mountain ecology, and the creative rhetorics of solidarity that enable people to accommodate flexible patterns of tactical belonging. Transhumant demands of domestic herds compete for priority with kin-based coordinates of social order. Models of house- and clan-oriented village

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wholeness are symbolically constructed at times such as the four national festivals,[1] but on an everyday basis a *de facto* territorial community in motion performs and reforms on the slopes of 'open' field terraces.

Village lands give a primary and immediate context for people's orientation to the productive affordances of high–low displacement, but this is a transposable disposition that organizes understandings of landscape and activity in such a way as to make village boundaries evident as administrative constructs, rather than natural limits. The locations of territorial fixity that mark the political and religious landscape – rivers as boundaries, and the dwelling places of territorial spirits and gods – are arguably less intrinsic to the notion of a productive territory, than the practices of integrating high and low. As Ramble comments on place orientations in lower Mustang "it is *the vertical axis itself* rather than any particular god or class of supernatural beings inhabiting the landscape, that is linked to notions of fertility" (1996: 150–1 original emphasis). The human relatedness to place conveyed in the imagery, practices, and 'being in the world' of pathways thus contrasts both to the sedentarist models of house- and lineage-based residential community (identified by Toffin above), and to the territorializations of boundaries and naturalizations of rights that have been substantialized since the 1970s in the governance of the Langtang National Park.

The national park does not permit use of pastures to livestock keepers unless they own land within the G.V.S. This has meant that whereas villagers once took their flocks of sheep and goats several days' journey to the north, since the time of the park they are confined to using the

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[1] *Dasain, chaitra dasain, magha sankreti, saun sankreti.*

immediate vertical range of their G.V.S., in which they are property owners. Correspondingly, the buffalo and cattle herds of Bahun-Chetri that used to be pastured in the valley bottom are no longer permitted. These overlappings of community and territory have been separated out, so that belonging corresponds to distinct sets of use rights.

Giving a perspective from research on Tamang invocations of place in ritual journeys, Höfer's (1999) analysis presents a model that is instructive for the issues of territory. He argues that Tamang relationships to place can be seen as derived from an idea of 'sacred territory' associated with "societies in transition from tribal to 'pre-feudal' forms of social organisation" (1999: 230). He differentiates this notion of territory from the sense of any political or demographic unity, and rather than making claim to an original ethnic sovereignty over land,[2] suggests that the Tamang chants of ritual journeying have historically articulated relationships of accommodation with powerful neighbours:

> the journeys take cognizance of the 'givens', e.g. that the Western Tamang live in an ethnically heterogeneous settlement area; that they are organized in a polity resulting from a history which has not been exclusively theirs; and that they have in part been orienting themselves on the surrounding Newar, Khas (Parbatiya) and, Tibetan cultures. Still it is precisely by respecting such 'givens' as components of ethnic-cultural identity that the itineraries constitute specifically Tamang **ways** of declaring presence and claiming competence in that they inscribe (or rather in-speak) themselves into the relief of a land shared with others (1999: 228).

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[2] In the context of the people's war since 1996, claims for autonomous regions for Nepal's ethnic groups have repositioned arguments over historical injustices of lands expropriated from Tamang clans since the Gorkha conquest (Tamang, n.d.).

In contrast to systems for representing religious verities in landscape forms, Höfer further argues that instead of making the sacred legible through constructs that remould landscapes as *mandalas* or *stupas,* "Far from finding the 'thusness' of the world meaningless, [the Tamang] content themselves with namings and movements to mark what is invisibly immanent in the visible, real landscape" (1999: 229).

A common theme in Tamang mythology is of different subjects encountering each other as different kinds of being, who can be potential affines. The territorial context for such encounters is this periphery of transits and cross-overs, where the local society is consciously composite, and derives energy and tension from the perspectival differences of clan, gender, and alliance. 'Integration' or 'encompassment' of the local are terms that presume a closed, schematized, and complete relationship of ordering to describe the attendance to qualities of difference that make a difference in the thusness of a land of shared belonging with others. There is not a single scheme for integration here, but a border world of dialogical engagement with alternatives and with indeterminacy. Sihlé (in Smadja 2003: 195) suggests for lower Mustang something similar in a possible absence of the 'ordering' effects of mythical landscapes (that are *sometimes* held by local actors and observers), and argues for an irreducible diversity of place qualities that resist this possibility of coherent ordering.

The point to stress is the actual closeness of this 'remote' social place to centres of ritual landscape. The near contiguity of concertina-layered ecological, cultural, and political strata makes the positionality of dwelling-in-between the centres of *mandala*s and *chorten*s (in

Kathmandu and Kyirong) appear alternately empty, lacking, and remote, or uniquely vantaged for managing the flows between poles of difference. In the longest continuously inhabited Tamang villages of the region, annual ritual dramas enact the intermediacy of the Tamang regions by staging them as occupied in the historical battle zones of Chinese and Nepali armies.[3] In his review of new approaches to place, Escobar (2001) cites Massey on the qualities of meaningful specity, mixture and porosity in such contexts:

> "places" may be imagined as particular articulations of [power-filled] social relations, including local relations "within" the place and those many connections which stretch way beyond it. And all of these [are] embedded in complex, layered histories. This is place as open, porous, hybrid – this is *place as meeting place* (again, the importance of recognising in the "spatial" the juxtaposition of different narratives). This is a notion of place where specificity (local uniqueness, a sense of place) derives not from some mythical internal roots nor from a history of relative isolation – not to be disrupted by globalisation – but precisely from the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found together there (Massey 1999:18).

To summarize this section: viewing both kinship and territory as processual, not as fixed, liberates anthropological analysis from the ideological inflections of the kinds of nationalism that were Clarke's focus. Under conditions of central neglect in areas like Rasuwa, active discourses of sovereignty (citizens empowered over territory) did not supplant the processes of 'involution' with which Holmberg (1989) has described Tamang relations to the centre. This raises the converse question of how well have ontological quandaries of locatedness been apprehended

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[3] Holmberg (1989), and Toffin (1987) described examples of these performances.

where the state does not feel at home? In the village economy of mobile agro-pastoralism, kinship is made in the process of living in place, moving to make livelihoods between different ecological zones, and sharing in the fertility of the mountainside through the seasons. In the practices of dwelling, the belonging of kinship and territory are not separated out. They are the same activity.

From Colonial Castes and Tribes to Targets of Development

Colonial ethnology yielded typologies of 'peoples' who were seen as exhibiting intrinsic qualities of blood (e.g. martial, suited to plantation labour, degenerate) with variable potential for achieving liberty in the prescribed Victorian manner of nationalism. Soon after the opening of Nepal to ethnographic research against the background of development, the attention brought to its rural population as peasant 'producers' (vertically distributed, land-scarce, demographically multiplying, environmentally threatening, culturally constrained) imposed a flatter kind of topography for belonging and for directions of social change. The peasant's relation to modernization became a distinctly new kind of framing for kinship and territory. By the 1970s the 'tribal' prism of discrete peoples and cultures had yielded to the realities of agrarian peasant incorporation. Sagant confidently declared that, at least in terms of Nepal's rural production, "ethnic particularism is dead" (1976: 270).

Peasants as rural householders were expected to respond to opening infrastructure and integrate the many village production systems through a nationally overseen discovery of miracle high-yielding or market-valued crops: apples in the mountains, winter wheat in the Tarai, and Holstein milch-cattle replacing 'riff-raff' herds of non-productive bovines. 'Local' in this context meant

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unimproved, illiterate, stuck in place, not moving with the times, much as Pigg (1992) describes

for the generic relation of 'the village' to development. Above all, unreformed, habitual peasant

relations to the land were seen to be in need of transformation in order to prevent soil erosion,

which was attributed to levels of population growth that compelled cultivators to clear marginal

and unsuitable spaces to build diminutive terraces for growing low-yielding 'poor' crops. But

many locals from the hills did get the message to produce. Soon the weight of numbers moving

from the hills to the Tarai encroached on tenure systems, and on privileged, commercially

valuable forests to constitute a problem of illegal squatting (Ghimire 1992; Müller-Böker 1995;

Shrestha and Conway 1996). The producers had overdone it, and exceeded the message to

cultivate where the land was best suited. Meanwhile, in this southern border zone, the formation

of land and kinship in terms of 'blood' marked those groups identified as having come from

India as being 'other' and 'foreign' (Clarke 1995: 119). Kinship belonging served as a

technology of territorial border maintenance.

In the meantime foreign anthropologists apparently still drawn like moths to a flame to study

'exotic' practices were criticized as perverse and anachronistic by Nepali social scientists

(Mishra 1984; Dahal 1993), for following research agendas divorced from Nepal's national

development needs. Studies that did look into changing characteristics of rural Nepali society

and de-tribalization processes often concentrated on the actual transfer of land between

categories of title-holders, or between categories of title-holding. Thus, Caplan's *Land and*

Social Change identified the shift in East Nepal from collective cultivation rights under *kipat*

(with birth rights providing access to corporate clan lands), to its abolition and conversion of

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fields into *raikar* status, that was then mortgageable and alienable to owners outside the kin or ethnic group.

Therefore, from the 'tribal' framing of anthropology that misrecognized fragmented territories to be peopled by distinct ethnological groups, the agenda of development, agricultural modernization, and questions about the characteristics of peasantries shifted attention from ethnic unities to the transformations of systems of land tenure and taxation from *jagir*, *birtha*, *guthi*, *rakam* and *kipat*, towards *raikar*, and the consequences for peasants' relation to class processes and national integration.

It is common in the discourse of development for the relation of land and identity among peasants to signify their non-modernity. Either peasants cannot adequately liberate land as a factor of production, or they are abusive of it in both physical and proprietorial senses. Rural Nepali society in general was characterized by the prevalence of owner-cultivators in a 'household mode of production', in which the development of capitalist agrarian relations was inhibited by ruling-class interests, conditioned by the history of Nepal's 'semi-colony' relation to India (Blaikie *et al.* 1980). In development projects aiming to transform the productivity of the subhsistence economy, generic characterizations of peasants as producers located in sedentary communities were normalized through techniques of household surveys and farming systems research. Packages of intensified agronomic, sylvicultural, and livestock-keeping practices were promoted for more rational management of available resources in conditions of population growth, while growing concerns about the environmental 'carrying capacity' attributed forest degradation to villagers' 'archaic rights' to headloads of fodder (Wyatt-Smith 1982). Responses

to the peasant/land complex took various forms, but up to the mid-1980s the alternative to a productionist model of land utilization was to take land out of production and make nature conservation the binary alternative to resource utility (Guthman 1997).

Kearney's (1996) overview of peasantry discourse within anthropological and development theory offers an important position from which to think again about Clarke's analysis of kinship and territory. Kearney's argument is that the notion of 'peasant' in the twentieth century entailed a non-modern contrast with the modern subject over a whole set of social and economic features. A fundamental prism of the peasant as locked into a relation with the land as a producer resulted in anthropological neglect of other kinds of subjectivity and relational practice, such that when peasants did actually move, migration tended to be seen as deviant, and even pathological. That the post-Cold War era has witnessed widespread movements (in Kearney's study it is primarily Mexicans taking up opportunities in the USA) need not be taken as evidence of a wholly new outlook on the world. Instead, the discursive containment of the peasant as belonging in ascriptive social relations of traditional corporate communities, and tied into productive dependence on non-commoditized property systems, blinded the development anthropology of the time from seeing more complex subjectivities. The productionist framing of development made the recent global movements of peasants and the contemporary resonances of ethnicity as an international phenomenon *appear* novel.

Globally restructured, post-Fordist capital and labour markets of course play their part in the new territories of livelihood, residence, and identity, but trends in what we now call belonging can be

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illuminated by post-productionist perspectives. These depart from the images of ensconsement in, or rupture from, an umbilical kinship with the land.

So what has changed significantly in the contexts for talking about kinship and territory since Clarke's attempt at Himalayan synthesis?

1. Globalization has been marked by countervailing repositionings of the local and of community as contexts for particularized claims over practice, produce, territory, knowledge, and value.

2. Significant changes have occurred in the reduced role of the state in development processes. Ripert *et al.* (2003) describe the sandwiching of the state between levels of NGOs, which doubly mediate its relations both with the international community and with its infra-national communities at regional and village levels.

3. Devolution of environmental protection to community forestry groups, national park buffer zone committees, and conservation areas has instrumentalized residential communities as holders of use-rights over the non-agricultural environment.

4. The effects of new labour migrations have resulted in 'villages with no men', to use a prevalent local idiom echoed from one end of Nepal to the other.

Development's reincarnation in the guise of sustainability is seen by Kearney further to ensconce peasant–land linkages. With the idea of 'the local' standing for what is close to the people, accountable, and ecologically responsible, sustainability's emphasis on benignly adaptive livelihoods even removes people from pathways of progressive life opportunities that traditional

development once offered to the poor. For Kearney it requires people "to adapt to conditions of persistent poverty in ways that are not ecologically economically or politically disruptive" (1996: 107). In the circumstances in which sustainability has arrived in those parts of Rasuwa District under the Langtang National Park, as participatory conservation, the 'local' people have seen few chances to benefit from infrastructure and employment in the district or nationally. The pathways of modernity and development have been tangential to their orbits of subsistence agro-pastoralism, to such an extent that a tourist guide to the area proclaims its villages as places where 'time stands still' (Pradhan and Harrison 1997). (This guide was produced as part of the United Nations Development Program's promotion of tourism as a means to demonstrate local benefit from the park.) Seeing that time has indeed stood still for them in terms of economic opportunity, some two-thirds of the men between 16 and 40 years of age have left the villages of Rasuwa for employment in Malaysia. Better-off migrants from Rasuwa have managed to secure employment in Europe. There are accounts to be made of levels of dependency on foreign remittance economy across different households, and the different destinations that are travelled to between manual labourers and the regional elites. But my central point is that the emplacements and characterizations of colonial ethnography and of peasant development (proto-national communities of blood, and unsuitably non-modern economic actors also taking Pahari ways to the Tarai) were unable to anticipate how sudden has been the take-up of global labour migration.

The realities of globalization present an altogether variant perspective on kinship and territory than that proposed by the instrumental hitching of communities to resources in environmental governance, which imagine stable memberships of belonging in forest user groups. Just as Pfaff-

Czarnecka (2007) has written of civil society and NGO interventions in large-scale South Asian environmental projects, so at village levels there is far more indeterminacy, conflict, and fragmentary provisionality in the communities that have been set up as genuine organizations for administering rights and entitlements of environmental belonging. This idea of devolved stewardship is transcribed into memberships subject to rule-bound sets of 'collectively' agreed legitimate behaviour for the management of forests as resources.

Global Sustainability

Neo-liberal forms of conservation have spearheaded global sustainability: rational actors will conserve the environment if they are given incentives to do so. The environment is presented as an object, a source of products for use and exchange, and can be substituted by other resources for the purpose of meeting livelihood needs. Territory and kinship enter a new relationship when the environment is no longer a sentient ecology of known spirit-abodes, or a context for subsistence and other social activities, but becomes an object of scarcity, that is made over to rights-bearing communities of inherited membership, excluding those who do not belong. This delivers control of forests into the public realm of formal village memberships in which property differentials and the inequalities of gender and status, naturalized in land-ownership patterns, lie behind appearances of collectivity (Agarwal 2001; Nightingale 2005).

The new sustainability agenda merges citizenship and environment in an instrumentalization of belonging for management purposes. Classic modernity's liberation of the individual from

affective or tradition-bound ties to the land, differentiating actor from resource, becomes reconfigured in the devolution of agency to citizens with environmental responsibility (Agrawal 2005). A new authority of citizenship stemming from environmental discourses, took from representations of movements such as Chipko to be an iconic 'grassroots' struggle for villagers' rights to belong in healthy forests with clean air and water. The narrative of a people taking responsibility for protecting the forests with whose fate their own lives belong, found a distinctive niche in the ecology of global communications and UN awards. Further creative appropriations were made possible, after this template became legitimized – thus local actors grasp new tactical opportunities for presenting themselves to external gazes. Pernille Gooch (1998) for instance describes how the Van Gujjar pastoralists adopted a 'forest people' identity in their strategies for claiming rights of transit through designated park areas of Uttarakhand. Contrastingly, Karlsson's (2000) work demonstrates how people of the same ethnicity on different sides of an Indian state border can configure themselves differently according to the distinct political agendas and persuasive poses of the respective states.

With the idea of territory as 'environmental', and the new valuation of nature in terms of biodiversity scarcity, it becomes the object of protection as a national asset, and a source of international symbolic capital. Good and modern citizens are now to be found in local organizations for forest protection (Agrawal 2005). I suggest that ethnography leads to different kinds of analysis, and the rolling out of new global environmental citizenship patterns encounters barriers of resistance in culture and place. If "global environmental change alters the notion of citizenship itself" (Redclift 2000: 111), it can only do so in terms that make sense to people who are already alert to human–environmental relationships. The imagined connections of territory,

community, sovereignty, and agency conceived in environmental governance need to be tracked through ethnography and cultural analysis.

Attending the pilgrimages to Gosainkund and Shikar Besi presented occasions for thinking about wider contexts in which to set the state's relationship and claims to village territories for nature conservation. The Langtang National Park, whose representatives officiate the human–divine confluences at Gosainkund, could be seen as acting within a framing of cultural legitimacy for claims to environmental sovereignty over the lands of those communities who congregate at pilgrimage. In this benign face of territorial sovereignty, the inclusive common ground of belonging shared by diverse participants interweaves the ritual intensity of diverse village practices and the vertical sacred polity.[4] An atmosphere of tense accommodation of cultural others prevails (Tamang, Sherpa, Newar, and Parbatiya – much as in Höfer's quotation above), in contrast to confrontations over forest resource control, in which village society is categorically opposed to state interests (this confrontational relation is most evident in villagers' attempts to avoid payment for licences to take forest products that they deem common property). However, in both pilgrimage and environmental regulation, officials are not concerned with the realities of local practice *per se*, but with maintaining recognition of hierarchical power in relation to the local. The state's manifestation in this kind of periphery is far from consistent or continuous. There is no simple local–state tension, but a range of interactional modes in place and time. Participatory, paternalistic-reciprocal, and inclusive institutional practices coexist with those of a more predatory or coercive character, thus presenting different kinds of claims over territory and persons.

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[4] See Tautscher 2007 for an excellent and well illustrated account of pilgrimage cults and mythologies in Tamang areas of central Nepal.

Rather than a dualistic state–local dichotomy, the heterogeneity of the state and its territorial interests ought to be recognized, as should the role of local intermediaries. The variability of such relations across Nepal should be kept in mind. Even the sacrality of landscape takes quite different manifestations and contexts of relevance when, for instance, the privileged land relationships of *kipatiya* title-holders of eastern Nepal are considered, with wholly different mythologies and directions of ancestral migrations (Gaenszle 1991). Writing of Sepa in northern Sankhuwasabha District, Diemberger describes a stronger disjuncture with the coming of state forest control in the east than was possibly the case in Rasuwa:

> The traditional relationship to territory according to which the community administered its land seems … to have been preserved until the nationalisation of the forests and the introduction of panchayats. In this context the access to land was conceptualised and administered according to a view which entailed the inherent sacrality of the landscape (1996: 222).

Worship of sacred "land-owners" was part of local land access regulation, and the *karkyong* celebration ritually opened the doors to the hidden valley, providing an event for settling community affairs and scheduling pastoral and forest activities (1996: 223). Diemberger argues that the traditional community administration of all resources "drastically changed with the interference of the state in the administration of the forests" (1996: 228). The rediscovery of value in local environmental practice, which has been promoted in more 'participatory' conservation models, has led to a revival of interest in such institutions; but the possibilities for

negotiating with central authorities over resources are limited, as is the convertibility of cultural practice into frameworks for sustainable management of the environment as a controllable and objectified entity.

When ethnographic approaches to the social life of mountain-dwelling are looked at freshly as a cultural politics of environmental engagement, this combination of approaches to the environment can contribute to explanations of why attempts at environmental regulation by conservation schemes have experienced unforeseen obstacles to assuming that states are in control of the lands declared protected for nature. The operative notions of sovereignty, ownership, and legitimate use rights in these places are relationally 'thick'. They are unstably contingent on 'declared presences' (Höfer 1999), and the perceived competence of human and non-human actors in distinct places where belonging is negotiated with reference to the spirit 'lords of place' (*shyibda*), rather than organized by the rule-bound, rational-actor approaches of neo-liberal governance.

Development project funds have been made available in Rasuwa District within the Langtang National Park's buffer-zone initiatives, offering villagers substitute financial incentives in exchange for more positive attitudes to nature protection; but they are essentially displacing a genuine examination of real issues of environmental justice. Using a reductionist understanding of the environment as providing material resources, this logic substitutes one 'resource', normally cash income, for another, without attending to the incommensurability of the resource substitution. The 'thus-ness' of living at comparative liberty in Himalayan forests, conditioned by poverty and developmental neglect, entails a wholly different ontology of belonging from one

that depends on tourist income hitched to the idea of conservation benefits. Trekking tourism produces an income for a small proportion of the totality of those affected by the park, and even this number has been reduced by the extension of transport services, which has effectively excluded southern villages from benefits, and created enclaves for small numbers of local and outside entrepreneurs. Furthermore, hotel-keepers in Rasuwa reported a 60 per cent drop in tourist income with the escalation of the Maoist insurgency from 2001. The *Easy Trek* booklet mentioned above reassures visitors that, though they can expect other-worldly experiences, accommodation is provided by the locals, and "your favourite soft drinks are now available on every mountain top" (Pradhan and Harrison 1997: 43). The local territory and its inhabitants become a pre-industrial consumer experience for the global leisure classes – further exoticized by the unintended risk-factor of Maoist presence.[5]

The extent to which conservation can address environmental dimensions of political economic inequality through the imagined cargo of tourism revenues has to be doubted, given the picture of low, single-digit percentages of national tourism revenue reaching villages. An idea of the challenges facing conservation in the sub-continent can be gleaned from Sharma and Yonzon's (2005) collection, which highlights funding shortfalls, and the general position that private capital is not attracted to support conservation, apart from specific lucrative ventures. Alternative 'pathways to sustainable development' as Rhoades' (1997) book argues, would work on facilitating exchanges and movement attending to the unique 'politics of location' presented by mountain verticality. Sustainability could be built on judiciously enabling better terms of

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[5] The ways in which Tamang-speaking villagers talked about the Maoist insurgency highlighted the poverty of the district and its separation from both the benefits of development and participation in the struggle against the state. They said 'we are all poor here, there are no rich' and that the insurgency was something going on 'down there, in the *Jyarti* (Bahun-Chetri) villages', in order to divert the attentions of both the Maoists and the security forces.

engagement for Nepal's diverse populations to make exchanges of value in things and skills from their varied productive relationships to the environment. Not, in other words, confining and trapping in place the productivity of livelihoods and identities, hitched to fixed landed property, but rather giving room for extensive complementarities of place relationships, for overlapping claims of belonging in various locales, as Rasuwa villagers manage through recognizing the distributed commonalities of clan, ethnicity, ritual congregation, and exchange potential that re-orient people to other places, in ways that obviate the boundaries of national park administration. Similar stories of the negative impact on regional sustainability of an over-localized focus on resource conservation have been repeated for different parts of Nepal (see, for example on Dolpo, Bauer 2004: 129–32).

Environmental regulations can thus be seen to take place, and make place, in ways that actively reconfigure integrative and differentiating processes in relation to state authorities, to village leaderships, to communities of ethnic difference, and to perceived pantheons of supernatural presences in parallel orders of territorial occupancy. The multiplicity of spheres of agents and levels of interaction that have been brought out in the ethnographic deconstruction of the environment cannot easily be contained or hierarchically ordered by the single plane of national/ local resources. Place, agency, and authority have been profoundly impacted by the re-territorialization of human–environmental relations under the national park, as biodiversity 'protected area' status introduces a global schema for re-categorizing places, boundaries, and access. According to Croucher's account of the contemporary relevance of belonging, it is when the boundaries of belonging come under processes of negotiation, promotion, rejection, and

violation, that the new context of globalization is made visible as a politics of belonging (2004: 41).

Extensive cross-regional movements of Tamang communities through tributary and barter relationships have been realigned into effectively homeostatic ecological models (Peet and Watts 1996: 5), bounded within village territories of restricted resource circulation. The national park's institutional practice has sealed up an involuntary historical compaction of territorial range for the agro-pastoral economy since the mid-twentieth century. The framings to territorial claims of the state are meanwhile met with counter-voices from villagers.[6] These call on the place-enlivening qualities of people's vertical environmental interactions, and the relationships of reciprocity ('declared presences') maintained with invoked site names, with movement, and with attendance to living things.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show how ethnographically generated understandings of belonging diverge, bounce off, and are transformed by state-bureaucratic templates for people and territory. The conference theme prompted me to revisit Graham Clarke's synthetic analysis of the relationship between kinship and territory as principles of belonging in the Himalaya. His identification of the importance attributable to integrative qualities of vertical asymmetry – in

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[6] Peluso gives an illuminating discussion of the effects in Western Kalimantan made by shifts in territorial claims from intergenerational rights in tree crops, to landed property. "State territorialization policies have, in fact, always faced local and regional challenges to their territorial sovereignty. In these, local and regional actors have emphasised more localized, identity-based territorial strategies of resource ownership and control as a means of mounting counterclaims or reclaims to contested or appropriated resources" (2003: 231–2).

terms of ecology, economy, and religion – even seems to be borne out by the region he was most concerned with, Yolmo, which has in recent years provided its communities with a framework of belonging, as opposed to aspiring for designation as Sherpas (Sato 2006). While his analysis of the effects of mountain topography on processes of change continues to bear up, his key terms of analysis have shifted ground substantially. Equating kinship with ideologies of blood relation may be true to the conception of kinship held by Victorian ethnology (and its 'self-fulfilling prophecy'), but it too easily pulls kinship apart from territory rather than exploring ethnographically their conjuncture and idiomatic deployments.

In relation to the Tamang in Rasuwa District, there is a historical sequence of framings for territorial belonging: from feudal tenants with legitimate presence in Nepal rather than as squatters from Tibet; as populations with a problematic relationship to development modernization (Campbell 1997); as farmers who present threats to forest and biodiversity in Langtang National Park (re-vamped by the global sustainability agenda that separates people from nature as resource-dependent, only subsequently to recombine them). All along the imposed packagings of belonging have been taken up, tried out, and reflected back within people's projects of livelihood and collectivity. This has taken place always in relation to diverse others, and pragmatic dealings with immediate surroundings – which also include the non-human owners of place as a non-negotiable dialogic presence.

In the context of recent environmental governance initiatives, the conjuncture of territory and kinship in participatory conservation has remoulded the socialities of both, to give rise to a version of citizenship that is still only in its early years. It is possible that Clarke's problematic of

the topography of the mountains can provide an entirely appropriate platform for evaluating whether grassroots environmental democracy has effectively taken root (as some anecdotal reports of Maoist approval of community forest groups might suggest), or whether elite ethnic capture across such institutions marks a newly empowered hold of horizontal alliances of blood, as a form in which the national context of ethnicized political allegiances merges with a taken-for-granted ideology of belonging at the local level. Nepal's emergence from civil conflict into federalist experiments with people–territory relations will be a critical process in which to look for creative dialogue between addressing historical injustices perpetrated by the state in relation to the territorial rights of the rural poor (Tamang 2006), and doing so in a fashion that will learn from the same people's understandings of convivial belonging between humans and a variety of non-human others.

More generally, reflection on the land–identity relation in the theme of belonging (one that involves its formation as a nexus of sensibilities and anchored claims to presence), reveals a history of imputed fixities and mountain niche-specificity that enable a re-examination of the generic terms that have constituted Himalayan ethnography: tribe, ethnicity, caste, and peasant. By reconsidering the emplacements of these terms, current patterns of migratory turbulence might be re-viewed as not so novel after all, nor necessarily a grand rupture with belongings of the past.

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