GOVERNANCE, CONFLICT, AND CIVIC ACTION: VOLUME 5

Edited by

Gérard Toffin
Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka

FACING GLOBALIZATION in the HIMALAYAS

Belonging and the Politics of the Self

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ASIA-LINK
EUROPEAID CO-OPERATION OFFICE
MIDEA
The (Micro) Politics of Democratisation: *European-South Asian Exchanges on Governance, Conflict and Civic Action*
SAGE www.sagepublications.com
Los Angeles • London • New Delhi • Singapore • Washington DC

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First published in 2014 by

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044, India
www.sagepub.in

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320, USA

SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP, United Kingdom

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Published by Vivek Mehra for SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, Phototypeset in 10/12pt Sabon by RECTO Graphics, Delhi and printed at Saurabh Printers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Facing globalization in the Himalayas : belonging and the politics of the self / edited by Gérard Toffin, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka.
pages cm. — (Governance, conflict, and civic action ; volume 5)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Ethnic groups—Himalaya Mountains Region. 2. Group identity—Himalaya Mountains Region. 3. Nationalism—Himalaya Mountains Region. 4. National characteristics. 5. Globalization—Himalaya Mountains Region. 6. Himalaya Mountains Region—Ethnic relations. I. Toffin, Gérard. II. Pfaff-Czarnecka, Joanna.
DS485.H6F33 305.80095496—dc23 2014 2013050062

ISBN: 978-81-321-1162-7 (HB)

The SAGE Team: Supriya Das, Archa Bhatnagar, Rajib Chatterjee, and Dally Verghese
Cover photograph: Computer class in Kabhre, Nepal (front), Kathmandu (back)
Photo courtesy: Prasant Shrestha

Facing Globalization in the Himalayas

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This volume has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union (EU). The contents of the book are the sole responsibility of the respective authors and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

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Preface

Seven years ago, a team of anthropologists, historians, linguists, sociologists, and geographers was invited to participate in a collaborative project geared at grasping the present-day dynamics of belonging in the Himalayan region. While launching this project, we anticipated the need to understand the notion of belonging and to inquire into its dynamic nature under present-day globalized conditions of mobility and rapid social change. In the meantime, 'belonging' has emerged as a key concept in academic research and in public debates.

Our team met for a first round of discussions in March 2007 in New Delhi at the India International Centre (IIC). Out of this meeting resulted our well-received book, *The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas: Local Attachments and Boundary Dynamics* (2011), published in this series. The present volume is the result of a second round of deliberations that took place in August 2008 at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) conference centre in Fréjus, France. The organizers of this second round, including the editors of this volume together with David Gellner from the University of Oxford, ensured continuity within the team, while inviting some new colleagues to cover a broad range of Himalayan subregions. We also brought in additional expertise to help us grasp the current globalization processes that thoroughly affect the constellations of belonging. Most chapters constituting this volume are based on the papers given in Fréjus. Two of the authors, Blandine Ripert and Mitra Pariyar, did not attend the conference, but were subsequently invited to submit a paper.

We are very grateful to our contributors for taking part in the in-depth Fréjus discussions and for expanding on their contributions based on their initial presentations. A number of colleagues played an important role in shaping our project by chairing sessions, in their capacity of discussants, as well as by joining in the discussions. They were Véronique Bouillier (CNRS), Martin Gaenszle (University of Vienna), Gisèle Krauskopff (CNRS), Keshav Maharjan (University

of Hiroshima), Charles Ramble (École Pratique des Hautes Études), Phillippe Ramirez (CNRS), Anne de Sales (CNRS), Joëlle Smadja (CNRS), Deepak Thapa (Social Science Baha, Kathmandu), and Nirmal Tuladhar (Centre for Asian and Nepalese Studies at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu).

Our undertaking would not have been possible without the support of the CNRS (Centre d'études himalayennes, UPR 299) in Paris and in Fréjus, the French Foundation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (MSH), Paris, the British Academy, the German Research Foundation (DFG) through its Collaborative Research Programme (SFB 584), which was run by Bielefeld University, Germany, and last but not the least, the European EU-Asia-Link programme of the European Commission (Brussels) that contributed important impulses to this endavour. Hinnerk Bruhns (MSH), in particular, warmly encouraged the project from the very beginning and has given us useful advice and suggestions regarding its organization. We are grateful to David Gellner, University of Oxford, who invited us to include this book in MIDEA series, published by SAGE Publications. Finally, we would like to thank Bernadette Sellers (CNRS, Centre d'études himalayennes) and Michael Patterson for improving the style of some chapters.

Gérard Toffin and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Globalization and Belonging in the Himalayas and in Trans-Himalayan Social Spaces

GÉRARD TOFFIN AND JOANNA PFAFF-CZARNECKA

INTRODUCTION

This book explores the new horizons produced by ongoing globalization around the world and the impact of these processes on the repertoires and practices of belonging in the Himalayan region as well as in trans-Himalayan social spaces in Asia and in the West. It is widely accepted today that forces of globalization significantly affect Himalayan peoples' lives. We know little, however, about the present-day reconfigurations in human sociability resulting from its impact on this region and its inhabitants. Similarly, little is known about collective dynamics in translocal and transnational social spaces and we are, to a large extent, ignorant of the resulting tensions involved in personal choices, longings, and aspirations in individual confrontations within collective constellations of belonging. Scholarly preoccupations with globalization usually privilege top-down macro perspectives. If interpersonal relations, local solidarities, and attachments are perceived at all, they are seen as mostly helplessly adjusting to the powerful wind of change brought about by international and national politics, by neo-liberal forces as well as by development and humanitarian interventions. Individual and collective rationalities and strategies as well as politics that are geared towards expanding the individual and collective room for manoeuvre have so far received insufficient attention in Himalayan research.[1]

This volume, building on our previous edited collection, *The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas: Local Attachments and Boundary Dynamics*,[2] published in this same series in 2011, reflects the recent dynamics of globalization and transnationalization in Himalayan societies by observing and analyzing how Himalayan people make sense of the changes that are radically transforming their lives. We are mainly interested in social practices, including the ways in which changing values, norms, and ideas are at work, and how social practice shapes an implicit or explicit change of ideas. We pay particular attention to the personal life chances and to the intimate and emotionally charged forms of socializing in collective constellations. These are of interest in localized Himalayan contexts, but we also observe their expansion into transnational social fields.

This volume's inquiry focuses on the notion of belonging. We propose this concept as an analytical tool for reflecting upon the modalities and the interplay of commonality, mutuality as well as the diverse emotional and material attachments under conditions of rapid social change (for a thorough outline of these concepts, see Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011; Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin, 2011; and Croucher, 2004). By analyzing both individual and collective trajectories, the chapters collected here seek to uncover the implicit and explicit politics of the individual and collective self in processes of (trans)migration, in activism responding to global challenges, and within the particularly dynamic religious sphere where different belief systems and modalities of *Vergemeinschaftung*, that is, different ways of incorporating people into social constellations, come to compete with each other in the quest to win over followers.

Through the prism of belonging, we are able to uncover crucial shifts in the meaningful collective constellations reproduced and evolving in the global era. The individual chapters delve into the realm of local Himalayan life-worlds and show how their horizons have stretched far beyond the confines of particular villages and regions. Numerous chapters document the tremendous scope of the Himalayan mobilities produced through travel, work, trade, the use of new communications media, and by new forms of knowledge, possibilities, and aspirations.

The volume's emphasis on mobility, change, flux, and social reconfigurations does not ignore the durable nature of social ties, their strength, and their persistence (see Lien and Melhuus, 2007).

Indeed, it conceptualizes belonging, that is, the emotionally charged social location, as perennially in tension between stability and change. The value of belonging lies in the continuity of cultural models, with people sharing norms, networks, and practices, and relying on routines. Such groupings as a 'family', 'village', 'neighbourhood', 'religious community', and 'ethnic group' build on long-lasting solidarities, histories, as well as aspirations pointing towards the future. The factual force of belonging stems from the well-established modalities of interaction—that goes without saying—and from shared values that are considered perennial. But they are challenged by globalizing forces, rendering them weaker and more fragile, while simultaneously also buttressing their resilience. In any case, under the current conditions of rapid social change, belonging has come under siege: it is challenged; it loses its self-evident property; it appears to be invaluable and therefore instigates protective measures.

The authors of this volume bring to light the fact that the Himalayas are still regarded as very remote, if not peripheral, regions of today's world society. The following chapters reveal how confrontations with the 'external world' occur under conditions characterized by significant impediments and restrictions. Yet, this region is rapidly changing and increasingly connected to the rest of the world through a series of links investigated in the following chapters. The states and societies located in this mountain range in particular have undergone major changes in terms of openness, interconnectedness, and transnationalization (see our 2011 Introduction). The authors report pronounced power differentials, social (including ethnic) boundary-marking, and societal hierarchies that shape individual and collective choices and practices. Several contributions describe how marginality and exclusion impinge upon collective processes and how they shape the overt and covert politics of social positioning.

This opening chapter introduces the main notions and concepts at work in analyzing these processes and gives an account of the chapters collected in this volume—written by eminent scholars who have been carrying out research in this region for many years. It also presents an overall synthesis of the phenomena of globalization in the Himalayan range in connection with various forms of belonging, both old and new. As a first step and before focusing on these remote regions, we turn to the concept of globalization.

REPERTOIRES AND MODES OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization (in French, the term 'mondialisation' is often substituted) describes processes through which closer contact is established between human societies and which generate a *wider circulation of goods, money, people, ideas, and cultures across national borders*. The concept may be defined in several ways, but the most accepted designation emphasizes the *integration of economic, political, and cultural systems across the globe*. The links between local or national social relations as well as global ones, in other words local/global relationships and entanglements, have intensified. According to Steger (2009: 15),[3] globalization can be defined as "the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across time and space, while time and space themselves are dramatically compressed". Or, more succinctly, it may be thought of as a long-term but accelerating historical process of growing worldwide interconnectedness (Pieterse, 2009).

Globalizing forces are sometimes considered to be an all-powerful process, totally undermining the importance of local and even national boundaries. Some analysts foresee a world where a growing variety of social activities will take place irrespective of the geographical location of participants. Everything will have to be thought of as global. Such a view, of course, is inadequate. We are far from the idyllic vision of a global village in which everyone is connected to everyone else. Globalization does not mean that the world economy is now integrated into a single space. Homogenization is at best superficial. Macro-studies which tend to formulate such types of generalization pay insufficient attention to ethnographic particularities or to changes and continuities that exist below the global level on a local, regional, or national scale. A world without boundaries is a naïve concept. Even in the West, the European Union, one of the most advanced examples of regional integration, has not established long-lasting, salient forms of solidarity and a sense of collective belonging among Europeans.

The globalizing process also covers reactions against the ongoing homogenization buttressed by globalizing forces, resulting in a persistence of old-established forms of attachment, to an ethnic group, a region, and a country. *Globalization is therefore a multifaceted process*, encompassing a large range of fields, geographical, demographic, political, technological, linguistic, religious, and cultural.

The definition of such a broad term, with multiple and fluid meanings, is obviously problematic. Globalization covers such a wide range of phenomena that it has rapidly become a blanket notion easily cited for all sorts of things that are indeed sometimes quite different. Some even speak of a cliché, "an all-purpose catchword in public and scholarly debate" with multiple connotations (Lechner and Boli, 2000: 1).

However, when broadly understood, globalization does apply to a distinctive transformative process which can be ascertained in the field whether by an economist, a geographer, a sociologist, or an anthropologist. Connectivity and interdependence between human societies across national borders are among the key notions conveyed by the term. Improved transportation as well as the rapid surge in the use of new communication media, in particular the Internet, now widely used in South Asia and almost all over the Himalayas, even in remote rural zones, is one of the most striking examples of how space is being compressed. Among the urban middle classes, whether Indian or Nepalese, mobiles and the Internet-based social networking site Facebook, with its hybrid English–Nepali or English–Hindi fluid language employed by its users, are much sought-after and much-used modalities of situating oneself and of communicating with others. These phenomena have transcended old boundaries and imposed new types of links. The new circulatory dynamics of the contemporary world have also produced new patterns of migration, a globalizing labour market, and a number of ideological shifts. The influence of external cultural models is multifarious: the Bollywood cinema industry coexists with Westernized forms of cultural consumption as well as with an increasing influence of South-East Asian or Hong Kong products. In the same way, western and far-eastern TV channels are a powerful means of spreading foreign cultural models and expenditure. All these vehicles for globalization compete with each other and also interpenetrate each other. They are part of a wider *cultural politics of globalization.*

Manifold 'local responses' to globalization have been recorded in social science research. A great deal of attention was geared towards grasping cultural forms of incorporation that impinge upon individual and collective positioning. After lengthy debates over the question of whether globalization instigates cultural homogenization or rather heterogenization, academic writing has devoted a lot of space to the notions of 'hybridization' (Bhabha, 1994) and

'vernacularization' (Merry, 2006), that is, the process of translating external notions into a local cultural canon (e.g. explaining human rights norms through local values), and in particular, its modalities. The analyses collected in this volume allow us to conceptualize these processes more accurately. We suggest four repertoires or options of cultural translation or *vernacularization* and argue that the main interconnected repertoires of cultural globalization oscillate between the following:

- *Universalization*: Defining particular cultural elements as 'fitting' into global repertoires or as expressing universal values. Peter Brook's mise en scène of the Mahabharata can be interpreted as such a claim. Universalization also takes place when local grievances turn into claims drawing upon global legal repertoires. With the expansion of human rights, particularist claims—for example, claims to ethnic monopolies over specific territories or resources—can be expressed in a universal language highlighting democratic values.
- *Particularism*: Stressing the uniqueness of one's culture. Examples of particularism are claims of the uniqueness of traditional value systems such as the 'Asian Values'—as embraced by the Malaysian government at the end of the last millennium and thought incompatible with universal human rights. This claim accorded well with the American Anthropological Association's critique of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (starting in 1947 in reaction to a draft document) that resulted in the debate over universalism versus relativism.
- *Cultural reform*: For instance, abandoning rituals involving blood sacrifices in order to appear 'more civilized'. Cases are reported in many regions of the Himalayas, especially in Nepal, where new concerns about animal welfare and the pointless suffering of animals have emerged, for instance, under the influence of various strands of both Buddhism and neo-Hinduism. Other examples can be mentioned, such as movements for the replacement of expensive 'superstitious' rituals making way for new forms or types of practices or beliefs, and today's trend among many Himalayan people (as elsewhere in the world) towards new types of therapists, undermining traditional priesthoods. UNESCO's concern for 'heritage' protection, whether

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