

G rard Toffin and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, eds. 2014. *Facing Globalization in the Himalayas: Belonging and the Politics of the Self*. New Delhi: Sage.

Transnational migration, an important dimension of globalization, questions the correspondence between territory and community (place and people) in the concept of culture. Regarding culture, anthropologists and sociologists have shifted theories of identity from a focus on primordialism to instrumentalism to constructivism. Belonging is increasingly being utilized in the discourse of globalization. Yet few have attempted to empirically investigate the relationship between globalization and belonging. *Facing Globalization in the Himalayas: Belonging and the Politics of the Self* is a welcome addition to the scholarship on this relationship in the context of

rapid social change in Himalayan societies and their interconnectedness to the world.

Edited by continental anthropologists of Nepal and the Himalayas and with contributions by scholars in/of Himalayan societies, the book is a product of a conference held in 2008 at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (France) on the theme of belonging. It includes chapters on Nepal, India, Tibet and Bhutan, although it seemingly focuses on Nepal. The book examines belonging through the heuristic dichotomy of traditionality vs. modernity of Himalayas societies on “the global periphery” (p. 38) because, for the editors, traditional social forms persist in this region. In the Himalayas both the concepts of belonging and globalization are salient, especially in Nepal given the current demand of ethnic provinces by indigenous groups, and also growing migration and the remittance economy, and social changes brought by them.

The book is divided into five parts. The first three focus on cross-border/transnational migration, with which I will be concerned in this review (but focusing only on Nepal), leaving aside the parts on linkage between global and local activism (part IV) and the role of state in shaping belonging (part V). The ethnographic articles cover diverse social groups: high-caste Bahun-Chhetri; indigenous Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Newar; and the marginalized Thangmi. The articles also analyze diverse forms of belonging: ethnic (indigenous activism by Gurungs), religious (conversion of Tamangs), linguistic (Dzongkha and Nepali language in Sikkim), professional (nursing in particular), and national, diaspora/transnational, as well as non-belonging in general. This diversity is the strength of the book and reflects effects of globalization on these diverse societies.

The shift from the concept of identity to that of belonging is the main thrust of this book, as discussed in the first, introductory chapter, and more fully in the previous book in the series (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011). To belong, as employed in these books (following Anthias 2006: 21), is “to share values, networks, and practices”: belonging comprises of commonality, mutuality, and attachment. The editors’ focus on belonging seems to be due to their disenchantment with the resurgence of identity politics in the face of globalization, and thus with the concept of identity itself, which they associate with fixity, permanence, formal membership, labeling, and collectivity. Following Croucher (2004: 92) the book identifies three mechanisms of globalization: connectivity, interdependence, and openness.

The second chapter, 'Improbable Globalization: Individualization and Christianization among the Tamangs' by Blandine Ripert, describes the rapid social changes occurring in a community of western Tamang, mainly brought about by their international labor migration. She notes a shift from collectivity to individualism, with individual innovations, new rationality such as profitability, preference of Nepali language to Tamang, and denigration of their rituals and ritual specialists. Most striking was the consequence of globalization on their collective belonging: the youths do not feel they belong to the locality and abandon it; Tamangs there now belong to a larger and more universal society of Christians. However, she sees the force of previous cultural and ethnic identity strengthening, such as reviving the Tsechu festival by non-converts. This "improbable" globalization in a remote area sharply contrasts with what Toffin noted as the lack of globalization in Pyangaon, a Newar Jyapu farmer caste village in the Kathmandu Valley which he has studied for many decades. For Toffin the village is "an example of a lasting traditional community and territory within a region undergoing tremendous change" (p. 15).

In 'Histories and Economies of Belonging in the Transnational Thangmi Village,' Sara Shneiderman analyzes the complexities of belonging within the Thangmi ethnic group of Dolakha and Sindhupalchok districts, who migrate from periphery to periphery (to Darjeeling and Tibet). She argues that Thangmi belonging is grounded in intersectionality due to their circular migration to multiple locations at different times. Thangmis experience simultaneous historical non-belonging in the context of their home country and its capital Kathmandu, due to their marginalized status and social exclusion, but they experience belonging to their village territory where they own property. Conversely, although they are regarded as foreigners in Darjeeling (and have no prospect of citizenship, land acquisition, or permanent settlement), due to the absence of caste/status hierarchies in Darjeeling, Thangmis nurture their sense of belonging through organizations and political actions and aspire to be recognized at the Indian national level.

'Migration, Marginality, and Modernity: Hill Men's Journey to Mumbai,' by Jeevan R. Sharma, explores decisions and experiences of migration to Mumbai of male youths from a village in Palpa district. He argues that the village's "exploitative social structure... constrained their identity as men" (p. 131) and they migrated for fulfilling their dreams and possibilities of attaining manhood. He defines manhood in the context of a culture of migration and

migration as rite of passage: the youth's striving for belonging to family by fulfilling loyalties and obligations, and aspirations for adventure abroad. However, he neither explores masculinity properly nor gives adequate description of the social structure that confines their masculinity. The youth he studies seem more to desire avoiding being categorized as good-for-nothing than to belong to the category of successful male.

In 'Geographical, Cultural, and Professional Belonging of Nepalese Migrants in India and Qatar,' Tristan Bruslé explores how belonging determines everyday social and spatial practices in the destination countries, and how the migrants view themselves and their country. Due to cultural differences, spatial segregation on the basis of nationality and class, temporary labor migrant status, and near-impossibility of obtaining citizenship, migrants have no sense of belonging to the host country, Qatar. As a result, Nepalis abroad come to realize their Nepaliness. This sense of national belonging determines practices such as visiting Nepali places, participating in or organizing cultural events by or aimed at the Nepalis community, and consuming Nepali music. One important finding of Bruslé is that Nepalis – and, in his case, mostly high castes – retain their caste/ethnic, linguistic, or regional identity, and even perpetuate hierarchy, abroad.

While Nepali temporary migrants to India and the Gulf do not wish to belong to their host countries (which actively prohibit them from doing so), immigrants to developed countries such as the UK and the US wish to belong but are not readily accepted. The articles by Sondra L. Hausner and Bandita Sijapati focus on this non-belonging or difficulty in belonging, along with different types of belonging. In 'Belonging and Solitude among Nepalese Nurses in Great Britain,' Hausner provides a "matrix of belonging" of Nepali nurses in the UK, where they had come to advance their nursing profession. This matrix includes 1) professional identity as a solitary, underutilized nurse in the UK, versus dignified nurse in public hospitals in Nepal before immigration; and 2) family and kin networks in Nepal; and ethnic, national, institutional organizations (and maybe even professional transnational networks) in Britain. These nurses' professional identity is linked to the structure of the National Health Service and Home Office in Britain: "Once registered, a nurse properly belongs" (p. 195). However, due to the work demands, nurses have less time for performing belonging, so their networks are constrained by their work demands. Like Shneiderman, Hausner questions the utility of a single nation as a framework for analyzing

belonging: “Belonging in each place has an impact on belonging in the other” (p. 193). She provides not just description and analysis of belonging but suggests the necessity of and ways of facilitating belonging by the sending and receiving states.

Bandita Sijapati, in ‘Being and Belonging: Mapping the Experiences of Nepali Immigrants in the United States,’ utilizes both the assimilationist and pluralist models, and the phenomenon of transnationalism, to understand the belonging of Nepali youths in the US. She describes how Nepali immigrants navigate through the social fields of American society that are fraught with the contradictions of a country that welcomes but with racism and xenophobia; that is cosmopolitan but inoculates with American values; and that inspires aspirations of American dream but crushes those dreams quickly after emigrating due to low income and status. If belonging is difficult or impossible even for legal nurses in the UK (in Hausner), the status of Nepalis as ‘illegal aliens’ obviously encourages them to feel that they do not belong to the US. Sijapati’s utilization of the distinction between structural assimilation and cultural assimilation is important: Nepali desire to be assimilated structurally in the fields of education and profession, but not culturally to the values and norms of individualism, choice, freedom, etc.

Belonging is important for (im)migrants not only for affective mutuality but also for transnational politics, and ethnic identity politics is now not confined to the boundaries of a state. In this regard, Susan Hangen’s study of a US ethnic organization called the Gurung Society (‘Global Gurungs: Ethnic Organizing Abroad’) is relevant given the current demand of ethnic provinces by indigenous groups while restructuring Nepal. She views diaspora as a social practice rather than a pre-existing identity and considers production and circulation of DVDs of the Lhochhar festival and participating in a picnic by Gurungs in New York as “cultural practice that contributes to the production of the diaspora” (p. 276). Similarly, providing social support, for example to new Gurung immigrants in New York, is an instance of social practice. Likewise, the Society’s quest for recognition as a dominant sub-ethnic group in the US by donating money to American Red Cross is a political practice. These practices in the destination country, she argues, reflect not only ethnic belonging but also disenchantment with the domination of transnational institutions by the traditionally dominant groups in structure and organizations in Nepal.

A few points can be made from the articles in the book. First, social exclusion and marginalization of caste/ethnic groups at home can also be used to analyze causes and continuation of migration (in Shneiderman and in Sijapati), practices of migration (denial or insensitivity to racism, in Sijapati), and sense of belonging/non-belonging/isolation in home or destination countries (in Shneiderman and in Bruslé). This points to the salience of studying diverse caste/ethnic groups and associations in migration studies in a hierarchical society like Nepal. Second, when employing the concept of non-belonging, consideration should be given to whether Nepalis are willing to be assimilated (if Nepalis are the least-assimilated group in the US, as cited by Sijapati). Lastly, in spite of divided belonging, temporary labor migrants' belonging is gravitating toward the home country and that of immigrants toward the destination country.

Methodologically, the long experience and expertise of the authors is sometimes reflected by their absence (if not failure) to mention a clear methodology. A few authors seemed to fall short of 'fitting' their findings to the concept of belonging. For example, Jeevan R. Sharma explains neither globalization nor belonging of the migrating youth in any concrete way. Additionally, while differences in belonging within Himalayan societies are covered through cross-national comparisons in many articles, neither the editors nor the authors make clear how the sense of belonging of Himalayan people is similar to or different from those of other regions of the world.

Globalization questions the classical binaries between universal and particular (global and local), continuity and change (traditional and modern), and individual and collective (agency and structure). In selecting the articles, the editors have been successful in blurring, if not bridging, these dichotomies. Although failing to regard belonging as a source of identity, ample evidences of how individual practices (conversions, migrations) of belonging give rise to a sense of collective identity points to the salience of the concept of identity which the editors are trying to avoid. Thus, the book will be an important contribution to expanding not only the concept of belonging but also that of identity itself, and the debate of identity politics in the Himalayan region.

References

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