Introduction

Belonging and Multiple Attachments in Contemporary Himalayan Societies

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This book is an account of affinities, affiliations, and attachments as well as of experiences of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion in one specific region of the world: the Himalayas.[1] To grasp these phenomena adequately, we propose a new analytical approach, through the concept of belonging. This concept has recently appeared on social and cultural studies agendas, and it increasingly informs scholarly inquiries. The notion of belonging is appealing, allowing us to analyse societal formations in various historical periods and capture the ongoing change in them. Observing the dynamics of human sociability from a different angle than through the notion of identity, it embraces simultaneously the intersecting institutional and relational, as well as the symbolic dimensions of social life. It comprises not only formal membership and labelling, but also imagined and narrated, more or less fluid, we-group constructions related to sameness, unity, and togetherness. We support Anthias' (2006: 21) claim that to belong is "to share values, networks, and practices" and that belonging "is not just a question of identification". This publication is a collaborative attempt to go beyond (and beneath) identity constructions and to call into question the idea of permanence implied by this term. It proposes a new framework which will do justice to enhanced human preoccupations with belonging that call for a shift in paradigms and research agendas.

Let us take a concrete example of what we mean by belonging. It is often said in Nepal that some castes and ethnic groups demonstrate a very parochial attitude in matters of employment and an extremely acute sense of internal solidarity. When a person belonging to a village, where such groups live, secures a job in a government

office, it is reported that sooner or later, the whole village will find employment in the office in question. Obviously, the same may be said of many other developing countries (if not of some Western developed countries). It is evident that, in such instances, which reveal potential conflicts between bonds to primordial attachments and the construction of the state, identity matters much less than belonging. Here ties to one's elementary group or to a group of persons with which we feel we belong to and are indebted to (in Nepali, *aphno manche* or *hamro manche*, meaning 'our own people') are the central issues.

Belonging in many ways is a 'thicker' concept than that of collective identities. It allows us to focus on the ways individuals and groups are caught when they want to belong. It covers a number of different circles of attachment: to one's family; to one's house and other possessions; locality; lineage; ethnic group; nation-state; religion; professional organization; workplace; and, eventually, perhaps even a sect or a political party, many of them overlapping and intersecting each other. They provide individual persons with networks of links as well as orientations, enabling them to live and engage in society. In consequence, the diverse parameters of belonging—formal and informal memberships; material entitlements; and identifications, as well as social ties—carry with them sources of social and political mobilization. These parameters must be studied through relational approaches. The notion of belonging we therefore propose with this collection is a special property of social practices (see Schatzky et al., 2001) combining: *(a)* perceptions and performances of *commonality*; *(b)* a sense of *mutuality* and more or less formalized modalities of collective *allegiance*; as well as *(c)* material and immaterial *attachments* and a sense of *entitlement*. How these dimensions come to intersect, that is, 'When do we belong?' is an empirical question once we have agreed on their centrality for grasping this notion.

In the first part of this introduction, we develop analytical tools for capturing those dimensions of human sociability that instigate a sense of loyalty and mutual commitment under the conditions of powerful reconfigurations, which are only inadequately grasped through such conceptual short-cuts as 'modernity' and 'globalization' (Burawoy, 2000; Sassen, 2006). In the second part, we discuss major transformations in the Himalayan societies that impinge upon belonging—as analysed in the chapters of this volume. In the forefront of this endeavour is capturing the multidimensional concept

of belonging and pointing towards its potential utility in assisting us in adopting a fresh perspective on the social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. We are also interested in the questions why, when, and how collective dimensions of human existence and human attachments, that is, belonging, increasingly lose their tacit, 'cosy', and intimate character—a trend possibly rendering the concept of belonging increasingly pertinent nowadays, as we argue at the end of this introduction.

The concept of belonging takes up some of the basic preoccupations in social sciences, re-thinking their concepts and assumptions. The renewed interest in intimate attachments—already problematized in the context of modern reconfigurations by such thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche at the end of the nineteenth century through his concept of *'Heimatlosigkeit'* (homelessness), along with Georg Simmel, Max Weber, and others—is informed by fundamental intellectual concerns with a sense of place, as well as with the relational ties that bind people together. We take on Töennies' dichotomy opposing 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*)—considered as constituted by primordial bonds of blood, territory, culture, and/or language—to society (*Gesellschaft*), highlighting individualization and rationality, particularly as put forward in Max Weber's 'disenchantment thesis' (e.g., Weber, 1921: 308). In this vein, Durkheim's (1930) distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity is connected to this primeval opposition. This collection inquires into the key dimensions of Himalayan sociability considered 'traditional', and reveals their salience under the conditions of modernity. Let us stress from the beginning that our use of the dichotomy 'traditional vs modern' is geared merely to ideal types, while our analysis of the social practices of belonging questions such binary oppositions.

The notion of belonging is relevant to both: to collectives considered 'traditional' such as kinship units and also to 'modern' types of sociability such as nations. In other words, it can apply to social categories forged through ascription as well as achievement, to lineages as well as to class assertions, to *jatis* (castes) as well as to NGOs. This variety and ambiguity is one of its principal features of interest. Belonging emphasizes emotional investments, affective bonds, and desire for attachment. It helps us to understand and analyse what crystallizes a feeling of commitment in such collectives as nation-states (evoking a strong sense of familiarity), or any other strongly bonded unit, either imagined or real. We are interested when sentiments of belonging become socially effective. After all, the desire to

belong—to get, to be, and to stay inside—is, in all contexts, deeply rooted in us, as also the fear of separation and exclusion. Belonging, we assume, is one of the central preoccupations in people's lives. Without belonging, one suffers alienation and rootlessness.

The various parameters of belonging are tightly related to experiences of inclusion and exclusion. "To belong is to be accepted as part of a community, to feel safe within it and to have a stake in the future of such a community of membership", suggests Anthias (2006: 21), putting inclusion at the forefront. On the other hand, not to belong is to stand in the rain, to lack solidarity and recognition. Luhmann rightly stressed, time and again (e.g., Luhmann, 1997), that inclusion and exclusion work simultaneously (see also Schlee and Werner, 1996). So, for instance, national we-group constructions differentiate rights between the insiders and outsiders. In social movements, activists simultaneously operationalize belonging as we-group mobilization, as well as formulas of protest and opposition.

The concept of belonging is, therefore, well suited to studying boundary dynamics. But instead of taking social boundaries for granted, it helps us explore the shifting character of borders and frontiers, imagined and real, as well as the possibilities of boundary-crossing, boundary-shifting, and boundary-blurring (see van Schendel, 2005; Wimmer, 2008; Zolberg and Long, 1999). These dimensions are in fact elementary in any politics of belonging implemented by nation-states (see Crowley, 1999; Dieckhoff, 2004; Favell, 1999; Migdal, 2004). In particular, when buttressed by restrictive state policies or jealous exclusionary sentiments of nationalistic we-groups,[2] the notion of an 'Us' necessitates and implies boundaries and the recognition of an 'Other', often categorized as 'Them' (Bernot, 2000: 311–24) and depicted in culturally derogatory terms.

So far, the concept of belonging has mostly been used in academic research for analysing contemporary Western societies or migrant situations throughout the world. We have chosen to explore these diverse phenomena within various ethnographic contexts and cultural frameworks in the Himalayan region, where both editors have spent many decades as researchers. Interestingly, it is a region where societies and cultures are still deeply entangled in traditional social-ties and are still partly associated with pre-modern modes of production. It thus enables us to explore different patterns of belonging pertaining to kinship, religion, small communities, the state, politics, and so forth. We are convinced that the notion of belonging is a

useful tool to revivify studies on kinship, neighbourhood, religious organizations, identity, and ethnicity, and to broaden our understanding of change in the Himalayas. This collection of texts presents, thorough empirical research and rigorous case studies, a set of analyses that have mostly been written by senior researchers who already have a wide experience of the Himalayan range and its changing social horizons. The aim of the book is thus twofold: to contribute to the conceptualization of belonging in a comparative perspective and to offer a documented collection on Himalayan societies and cultures captured from this specific angle.

Our preoccupation with belonging draws upon the recent attempts in cultural and social studies to bring diverse fields of research together. Belonging thrives simultaneously upon symbolization, knowledge, embodiment, human relations to/with artefacts, spatial constellations, ordering, and contestations.[3] We acknowledge that, in present-day societies, constructions of belonging come about through a complex interplay of social configurations. Conflicting spatial logics, as well as contentious constellations of state and society are entangled in negotiations over social boundary-making, inclusion, and exclusion (Migdal, 2004). These parameters impinge upon our sense of belonging, rendering it an uncertain condition. What makes this notion so hard to grasp is its complex constitution, the multiple possibilities of its contestation as well as its occasional fluidity. Our preoccupation with belonging raises such issues as: What ties a collective together? Or, concerning the Himalayan region: What makes a Nepali, an Assamese, a Hindu, a Gurung, a Madhesi feel an insider or an outsider? How are individual lived experiences mobilized to belong to some group? How are people related together? When does somebody acquire the sense of being a full-fledged member of a collective? In order to answer these questions, we propose to analyse successively the three dimensions of belonging: *commonality*, *mutuality*, and *attachment*.

COMMONALITY: 'US' AND 'THEM' BEYOND AND BENEATH IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS

The concept of belonging drives our attention to the diversity of social practices forging commonality. We suggest widening the scope of analysis beyond identity constructions. While proposing the

'belonging-approach', we by no means intend to discard the term 'identity', which continues to be the major narrative for expressing commonality. These two notions of identity and belonging overlap in many ways. They are not mutually exclusive. We claim that the concept of 'collective identity' untenably narrows down the range of modalities through which commonalities come into existence. Furthermore, whereas identity focuses too much on the individual, and talk of 'collective identity' always raises the question of how far particular individuals actually share or buy into the postulated collective identities, belonging, on the other hand, implies already, from the start, relationships—not just with people, but with places and things.

In spite of fierce critiques of essentialist and reified understandings of identity, even in the prevailing constructive approaches, and even when theorized in a multiple, fragmented, and fluid manner,[4] the word 'identity', mainly in its plural form, is still widely and appropriately used in anthropological and sociological studies. We argue that belongingness encompasses the notion of identity (it includes more markers) and differs from 'identity' in its meaning. You may identify, but not feel that you belong, in the sense of being accepted or being a full member. Alternatively, you may feel that you are accepted and belong, but may not fully identify, or your allegiance may be split (Anthias, 2006: 19). Belonging focuses less on sameness among members of a group or category, and stresses more the feeling of common fate, mutuality, and purpose (this last recently evoked by Barack Obama, with his slogan 'Yes, we can'). It involves both a felt solidarity, or oneness with fellow group-members, and a distance *vis-à-vis* the others.

Identity matters, and so does belonging. Both notions privilege different dimensions of commonality and put their stress upon different parameters. But they are closely intertwined.[5] Belonging is inward-oriented (*inside-out-orientation*): it starts off from subjects as focal points or knots, located at junctions or intersections of relational ties. In the forefront is the sense of having a common core. What is outside a given horizon of relating may not matter, unless intrusions obtain. On the other hand, identity relies for its formation, confrontations with 'the other'. It cannot exist without the other, without a boundary created *vis-à-vis* the other and the resulting binary opposition. It is therefore oriented from outside to inside (*outside-in-orientation*); besides, clear-cut boundaries are drawn.

Furthermore, with culture understood as a set of symbols at the root of a people's sense of identity, as for instance in ethnic activism (see Gellner, 2009), neat boundaries instigate homogeneity and explicitness within collective units.

Both notions denote the central dimensions of human existence, but identity tends to be more overwhelming and exclusive. Turkish migrants to Germany, when asked about their identity, may be caught in an either/or dilemma, with hyphenated identities (Turkish–German) often not seeming an appropriate option for self-identification. At the same time, they may feel comfortable in asserting their belonging to a neighbourhood in Berlin (White, 2004). Also belonging can exert extreme power on people when patriotism calls them to war, but identity seems to be more overwhelming—whereas belonging does not preclude intersecting allegiances or shifting attachments. In consequence, the horizons of identity are likely to be broader, whereas belonging requires more intimacy, pertains to smaller units of sociability, and tends to be cosier. Without empirical evidence, it is impossible to assess when social constellations shift in scope and how tacit differences and porous boundaries become exclusionary. The proposed approach helps to answer such questions with more precision.

Both identity and belonging rely heavily on symbolization, but identity constructions often resort to practices of representation, whereas belonging is performed and embodied in localized contexts (though, as we argue below, the politics of belonging increasingly has recourse to representations as well). Here, intimate lived experiences acquire their bonding force in everyday practices. In this vein, Butler's (1993) concept of performativity is important for our understanding of belonging. In situations of co-presence, for instance, when villagers or migrants meet in a common space, they engage in practices that simultaneously express religious or quasi-religious allegiance, mutual acknowledgement of jointly 'being there', and commonality of purpose.[6] What binds them together is not merely a sense of unity, not merely routine or the reiteration of practices. Nor is reiteration simply replication 'of the same'. Butler (1993) argues that it is 'through the invocation' of convention that such common acts derive their binding power.

Performing commonality may be based upon reiterations of norms that precede and exceed the actors, only gradually revealing

their constraining power. The subtle embodiment of belonging affords it the quality of 'what goes without saying' and builds upon 'common-knowledge' repertoires.[7] However, given the prominence of identity in political communication, belonging is currently also becoming more and more explicit—which may be the main reason for its recent success in academic agendas. Given the overpowering strength of political boundary-making, legal limits, and identity assertions, a tacit sense of belonging is increasingly giving way to explicit demonstrations of social boundedness. This is precisely one of the reasons why belonging cannot be fully grasped without taking identity constructions into account. Like identity, belonging relies upon collective boundary-constructions. But at least initially their understanding does not require overt demonstrations: individuals and groups simply 'know' who does and who does not belong.

MUTUALITY: THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF BELONGING

Having identified commonality as an important aspect of belonging, we are now turning to the second element, that is, to the question, in what ways belonging is tied to specific social formations. Scholars have discerned a wide range of possibilities in human sociability. As the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1908) argued, people relate socially in such ephemeral situations as while going for a walk, and when entering into short-term contracts as much as through the durable ties of family life, the guilds of the Middle Ages, and shared nationality. According to Max Weber (1921: 13), humans relate to each other through fights, enmity, bodily love, friendship, and market transactions, and in other ways. Weber's notion of 'social relation' denotes a minimal standard of mutual orientation ('*Aufeinanderbezogensein*') and acting jointly ('*Zusammenhandeln*') (ibid.). However, he warns, different actors may place a different meaning ('*Sinngehalt*') on their social relations and have divergent mutual expectations. Therefore, mutuality cannot be taken for granted, neither in love, nor in contract relations. It then becomes of interest when and how mutuality evolves and when and how it crystallizes into bonds of belonging.

When dealing with modern social systems, sociology privileges either interactions or social relations that rely upon formalization, on

clear-cut role differentiation, as well as on contracts (see Wimmer, 2007). Luhmann's (1970) analysis of human sociability in modern societies distinguished between interaction, organization, and society. Salient forms of sociability in the contemporary Himalayas fall only partly under this tripartite typology. Obviously, interactions play a very important part in everyday life; and so do organizations, and old-established organizational forms, such as the religious *guthis* (Toffin, 2005), along with the collectives that are more and more frequently called into life through external interventions, such as 'youth groups' and 'women's groups', 'user groups', and 'saving associations'. In addition, a number of other organizational forms such as state agencies, development organizations, political parties, and ethnic organizations, as well as migrant organizations, form part of contemporary social life. Yet Himalayan social lives still thrive in such important social forms as family and neighbourhood, as well as 'local community', in the sense of corporate units, characterized by physical closeness, sharing common goods, and endorsing, at least to some extent, customary law. In anthropological terms, these social relations oscillate with regard to their duration and salience, their density and volume between Gluckman's (1955) concepts of 'multiplex social ties' and 'simplex social ties'. The former are certainly more likely to instigate the sense of belonging than the latter; and the former are certainly more prominent in 'traditional' social formations. Treating them as residual categories in the realm of contemporary societies is certainly inappropriate—as is documented in the chapters of this volume.

Before we proceed, we need to differentiate between the individual's relation to a collective, on the one hand, and collective belonging, on the other. The German language makes here a clear distinction that is not immediately discernible in the English word 'belonging' (the German language itself being in want of any single word that would translate 'belonging'). The German term *Zugehörigkeit* denotes an individual's belonging to a collective (as does the French term '*appartenance*'); whereas *Zusammengehörigkeit* stands for 'togetherness'. This distinction becomes of interest when we shift our perspective as observers from the group dynamics that are geared to maintaining the existence of a collective to a consideration of an individual who is seeking to gain or to maintain her/his membership of a collective.

While Himalayan anthropology brings the salience of traditional collective ties into contrast with modern social configurations, some sociologists[8] dealing with contemporary Western societies have called for including in Luhmann's typology the concept of a 'group', which reveals important dimensions of contemporary sociability. The notion of a group—which we apply to such Himalayan formations as kin units, or neighbourhoods—is of interest to our inquiry since it carries forward the conceptualization of belonging. The ideal of group life is that everybody knows everybody and engages in face-to-face interactions. Unlike groups, for which members' belonging is essential,[9] organizations need not rely upon a fixed membership, given their standardized goals, structures, and positions.

Unlike organizations, groups expect from their members commitment that often needs to be expressed either through generous donations, or through sufficient time-allocation, or both.[10] Groups scrutinize jealously whether their members partake in interactions and whether they are sufficiently committed. For this reason, they design devices to deal with absence and distance—which is not a trivial problem given the current transnationalization of Himalayan lives.[11] Repeated absence is likely to be noticed by other group members. Belonging is therefore not merely a privilege, but also entails mutual compulsion—an effort in which all 'insiders' need to partake. Groups' existence is, for instance, seriously threatened when contacts between their members loosen, and particularly so, when individual members withdraw. Periodic get-togethers and the performance of collective belonging[12] play a significant role in maintaining their continuity. It is through repeated interactions of (ideally) all the members that dense group processes evolve. The current challenges groups are facing through the enhanced scope of transnationality are only to some extent mitigated through networking, given the availability of new communications media. This topic will be pursued in our next volume.

Yet another aspect requires our attention. For forging (and for understanding) belonging, the temporal dimensions of group processes are crucial. Different temporalities are at stake here. On the one hand, groups are stabilized through interactions, and on the other hand, common memories and horizons of expectation are constructed through perceived trajectories and ties to the past. These trajectories between the past and the future are also shaped in significant ways through material and immaterial attachments.

ATTACHMENTS

In her book *The Values of Belonging*, Carol Lee Flinders (2002) postulates the importance of rediscovering balance, mutuality, intuition, and wholeness in a competitive world.[13] She evokes a 'culture of belonging' as one in which there is—as she puts it—intimate connection with the land to which one belongs, emphatic relationship to animals, self-restraint, custodial conservation, deliberateness, balance, expressiveness, generosity, egalitarianism, mutuality, affinity for alternative forms of knowing, playfulness, inclusiveness, nonviolent conflict resolution, and openness to spirit. bell hooks (2009) endorses the importance of these elements, highlighting the force of attachments, describing in emotional terms her return to the places of her childhood in the small rural world of Kentucky State (US)—which she comes to perceive and depict as perennially inscribed in her mind and body.

Even if Flinders's list is buttressed by specific personal experience and a great deal of spirituality that not everyone would share, it reveals that belonging is obviously stabilized through attachments of diverse kinds. In the forefront is the intimate connection to one's own surroundings that the body and mind remember, even after long spans of time, and the ensuing immediacy, kinship, and friendship ties, as well as the urge to protect such small worlds. The sense of place is reinforced through dense contacts with a not too large number of people who are likely to share experiences and knowledge as well as common memories. The attachments are intensified through material possessions (one's own belongings) as well as through immaterial connections—for instance, to fields, pastures, houses, and ritual sites. The link to a place is often reinforced through formal membership.[14]

Intimacy and collective memory, on the one hand, as well as entitlements and regulations, on the other, forge very strong ties to places. These ties can evoke a strong sense of urgency when one's living space is threatened (indigenous populations fighting timber or oil entrepreneurs encroaching on their territories), but also hold people back from leaving their precious homes behind, even when exile seems to be an urgent matter.[15] Time and again people have experienced the power of their attachments and possessions in situations of danger. In fact, people were often *possessed* by things and attachments, remaining where they were, while risking their lives.

Life in a diaspora appears to be the reverse of belonging: abandoning roots and attachments is its pre-condition. Given the tremendous power the original places exert upon people (including those in exile), forging new ties seems an almost impossible act. Still, as is well known, the creation of belonging in new places is part of translocal and transnational experience. As the numerous recent studies in the field of transnationality reveal, mobility does not preclude practices of localization (Glick Schiller, 2007). Migrants encounter manifold forms of exclusion, but they are often able to recreate their relations in new places and forge new rootedness. Churches, neighbourhoods, public meeting places, shops, and discos, as well as private homes, can all be 'taken possession of' by newcomers. Common performative acts render new territories intimate and meaningful. New entitlements, as well as participation in local politics buttress the sense of ownership and engagement. New symbolic markers, new elements of 'local knowledge', as well as an intensifying density of social relations (see, Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2005), all link people to new meaningful geographies of the heart. Flinders' list therefore resonates throughout the narrated experiences in our volume (de Sales, Krauskopff, Smadja, and Campbell), with attachments of diverse kinds instigating mutuality, participation, and engagement.

RE-CONSTRUCTING BELONGING IN THE CHANGING WORLDS OF THE HIMALAYAS

It is not possible, today, to imagine social worlds as stable, and as detached from other worlds and their entanglements. Even the remotest places in the Himalayan region are at present full of communications (Ardener, 1989) with very distant places. Colonial rule in India, its indirect influence in Nepal, nation-state integration, development and humanitarian aid interventions, and market expansion, as well as enhanced mass communication, have brought forceful transformations to this region. These dynamics are by no means new, but the last decades have significantly affected human interactions, in terms of mobility as well as of communicative horizons. New are also the 'local' perceptions of the ongoing change: an increasing number of Himalayan people live with the idea that they act and make meanings in a globalized world. In consequence, the shifting

constellations of belonging become an important object of human reflexivity. This collection reflects many of its major trends.

Himalayan history can be written as a succession of external interventions causing processes of disembedding (Giddens, 1991). 'Traditional' social relations based on direct interaction between people living close to each other have been increasingly affected by measures taken by rulers and governments deploying new communicative and transport technologies. 'Disembedding mechanisms' such as money and modern administrative devices 'have lifted out' decisions affecting persons in specific localities from their small-scale and intimate contexts. In their respective chapters, Smadja and Campbell document measures affecting local relations in their immediate contexts and with their own logics. Viewed from the local perspective, it makes a big difference whether decisions concerning one's immediate environment are reached through local negotiations, or whether they are compelled to follow some uniform policies designed in remote centres that leave little room for manoeuvre in local decision-making.

The imposition of 'external' political orders brought with it new categories of social ordering, impinging upon the local perceptions of commonality, on relations of mutuality, and even upon local attachments. As land-tillers, as political subjects, and eventually as citizens, and as 'objects' of development interventions,[16] members of local Himalayan societies were increasingly confronted with new formulas defining their status, membership, and allegiance within larger societal formations, in particular within the framework of the nation-state. With the modernization of state administration, the local population was counted and divided into uniform administrative units—which often did not coincide with the earlier boundaries of the local social realms. Their material belongings, such as land, were measured according to new metric standards and defined through new (and often more precise) territorial delineations. Modern forms of law, regulating offences as well as ownership, have contributed decisively to moulding social relations (see Berti and Michaels in this volume). New communicative devices additionally transformed the sense of spatial logic and of temporality, especially enhancing the speed of long-distance interactions.

Entering the modern era had contradictory effects on the local societies. Incorporation into broader societal units meant, throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, undergoing mobilization for the sake

of an abstract larger good, that is, the 'national interest' or 'national well-being'. Even today, local populations suffering eviction at construction sites of large infrastructural projects, such as dams, are told that they need to make a sacrifice for the sake of national prosperity, seen as relying upon progress and growth. Being denied the use of forest products that were formerly open to them, members of ethnic groups are expected to contribute to protection of nature (see Smadja, this volume). Such instances of modernist rationalization have greatly shaken the local sense of belonging, lifting the authority out of the hands of the local subjects. Consequently, local populations were kept subjugated under the remote rule of their governments and discouraged from engaging in political action—which caused resentment and resistance.

Since the late 1980s onwards, slogans deployed by development agents, such as 'small is beautiful' and 'thinking globally, acting locally' have partly reversed this trend, acknowledging the need for a sense of immediacy and the importance of local collective forms. Furthermore, the introduction of participatory models of action to local societies by development agents has instigated a sense of local agency. Measures aimed at including formerly marginalized population groups in the political process through quotas, etc., have also strengthened participatory forms. These dynamics had substantial effects upon the sense of belonging in the local Himalayan worlds, in yet another sense, translating into social and political mobilization all the more.

Systemic (state, market) colonization of local life-worlds (Habermas, 1981) resulted in rearranged relations, attachments, and aspirations. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that the local Himalayan social formations partly underwent striking dynamics of change and phases of self-assertion and/or resistance. 'Revolutionary' movements carried by the Maoists and the Naxalites, in particular the former, have substantially altered the outlook of rural societies, their allegiance, and their social fabric (see de Sales, this volume). Large infrastructural projects—along with capitalist interventions, like the encroachment upon forest resources that was challenged by the Chipko movement—have brought massive forms of protest as well as supra-local and supra-national civil society networking to the fore (see Gellner 2009, 2010). Again, these forms of protest have shifted the horizons of local solidarities, by creating new interest

groups and by linking up political formations that earlier were well beyond the scope of local vision.

Asymmetries of belonging based upon power differentials are increasingly becoming the object of contestations throughout the Himalayas, given the enhanced civic sensitivity towards negative depictions of underprivileged groups and the resulting critique of exclusionary practices. "The dirty work of boundary maintenance" (Crowley, 1999) by those involved in elitist and exclusionary practices has come under scrutiny, time and again. Individuals, collectives, and their sympathizers as well as their supporters joined forces—not always successfully—in challenging established social orders and rigid forms of social classifications. Enhanced media participation opens space for self-representations and for shaping common plans of action.

It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that those measures currently labelled as 'social inclusion', brought into the Himalayan space in particular through the think-tanks of the World Bank, touch upon the question of belonging. Practices of 'empowerment' as well as 'social upliftment' fall under this category, informing the current political and development discourse in large parts of the Himalayas. 'Grassroot' mobilization as well as civic activism (see Gellner 2009, 2010) has greatly buttressed the critique of the persisting inequalities and the salience of caste and ethnic boundary-making.

But notwithstanding the positive appeal of the current measures aiming at 'social inclusion' of formerly excluded and marginalized population sections, this notion tends to blur important social facts. Above all, this sympathetic term draws our attention away from the salience of the persisting striking asymmetries in contemporary Himalayan societies. Those 'who belong', being located at the upper levels of societal hierarchies, jealously guard their elevated positions and their resources. They seek to keep those trying to enter their ranks at bay and at a distance, knowing that 'inclusion' entails sharing and opening up the ranks. Such terms as 'social inclusion' as well as 'empowerment' are problematic, by discursively neglecting the significant power differentials and tensions entailed in the politics of belonging when individuals and collectives seek access to restricted positions. They draw our attention away from the highly contested nature of practices aimed at social inclusion. Our approach reveals furthermore that power differentials are all the more pronounced as

those who are excluded *do not belong*. 'Not belonging' means here not fitting into institutional arrangements (as is always the case with minorities) as well as not sharing established cultural codes. The tacit understanding of belonging, its subtle mechanisms, may therefore lead to uncovering the powerful effects of social exclusion.

Himalayan societies are characterized today by a broad scope of social movements and protests challenging the main thrust of modern nation-building, that is, a doctrine of cultural unity and uniformity as necessary preconditions for achieving societal progress. Over the last decades, ethnic activists have successfully challenged the homogenizing narratives of modernist assimilation practices, claiming diversity as an alternative mode of the modern condition. Global communication played an important role here, since all over the world ethnic activism has significantly gained momentum. Processes of ethnicization coupled with the 'third democratisation wave' (Huntington) and with the enhanced value stress put by development practitioners on 'the local' established the legitimacy of small-scale participatory forms carried by cultural collectives. While resistant to centralist interventions, ethnic and regional actors have repeatedly made a great point of having more command over their 'own' life-worlds. Constitutional reforms provided more and more space to religious, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, and they allow for significantly more autonomy for minority populations. Ethnic self-assertion instigated reflections on the desired forms of sociability, drawing new territorial demarcations and creating new collective representations through ethnic identity markers (see Sax, this volume).

It is impossible to grasp the shifting modalities and sense of belonging without taking the increased scope of human mobility under consideration (we will deal with this issue in more detail in our next volume). While only a few of the contributions collected here concentrate on human movement as their major topic, the consequences of migrations and travel show up in almost every chapter. For instance, throughout the Himalayan range, local societies are characterized by a more or less thorough caste and ethnic intermixing (see especially Ramirez, this volume). The movement of people goes hand-in-hand with the movement of ideas—as for instance Dana's chapter discusses. Migration also provides opportunities to observe one's own society from afar as well as to evaluate its culture(s) in comparison to forms and repertoires encountered away from home.

Gaenszle's contribution provides a very good example of how migrants contribute to shaping social and cultural life 'at home'. Visions of cultural reforms are even probably more likely to develop in distant contexts, when longing for the place of origin is paired with an urge to 'contribute something' meaningful—in exchange for being absent. The quest to render the distant home more perfect is buttressed by an exposure to new possibilities of engagement. Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001) speak of such situations as 'long-distance nationalism'. Against the backdrop of these general trends, we now turn to the individual chapters of this volume.

PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK

The basic understanding of belonging is common to all contributors although each author has focused on a different angle or a different topic. The book has been organized into three different sections corresponding to various patterns and forms of belonging prevailing in the Himalayas.

The first section, 'Territoriality and Indigeneity', examines 'primordial' loyalties and particularistic forms of belonging as dealt with mainly by anthropologists. It explores ways in which the interconnected questions of local territorial communities and ethnicity merge and are mobilized, maintained, and modified over time. These two fundamental types of attachment, based respectively on territory and blood, are crucial markers throughout the Himalayas, particularly among the so-called tribes—Janajati, Adivasi, Vanvasi, Vanyajati, 'Scheduled Tribes' (STs), or Tribal ('taybol'). They create a substantive link with ancestral land and with a set of relatives, which is often enforced by ritual practices. The ties thus created extend beyond individual experience and produce strong collective identities. They are frequently strengthened, manipulated, or modified by the state or other political agencies to suit their own aims or for political gains.

We have chosen to start with Anne de Sales's study of a distant Kham-Magar village, south of Dhaulagiri, in western Nepal. The author accurately pinpoints the importance of the imagined bonds constructed around co-residence within a clustered Himalayan village and indicates how the abstract notion of belonging resonates in local parlance. She shows how the notion of *hamro gaon*, 'our village',

familiar to most localities in the Nepalese middle hills, generates a strong feeling of attachment and a sense of cohesion which still prevails even after frequent journeys or migrations to the southern plains or beyond. The image of an integrated whole is given to outsiders, even if village life is marked by chronic factionalism. As a matter of fact, this idealized notion of community (or commonality) of the soil often hinders local conflicts. Only the best part is remembered and stands up to the hardship of daily life. In such cases, territoriality involves an intense emotional sentiment of commonness, which contributes to binding people together and anchors them in a particular place. These delicate bonds are forceful.

Gisèle Krauskopff presents another interesting case, taken from Tharu farmers and cattle-breeders living in the southern Nepalese Tarai plains bordering the Republic of India. The members of this ethnic group have a long past as a semi-nomadic people in search of products in the jungle and the rivers, and their original sense of belonging was predicated on movement. According to the author, the Dangaura Tharus, that is, those settled in the Dang Valley, had until very recently a broad conception of territorial links, based on agrarian relationships (tenant/ownership of land) and ritual ties. Such an assimilatory pattern, which recalls the pre-Shah situation in the Kathmandu Valley, has been recently 'frozen' by the Janajati rhetoric. It has transformed original forms of belonging into geographically bounded ethnic groups. 'Tharu' now corresponds more strictly to the current definition of an ethnic group as enhanced in the geopolitical imagination of the Maoists: it has been associated with an exclusive delineated territory. Soil has become an 'ethnic body'.

In the third chapter, David Gellner deals with the indigenous discourse that has prevailed in Nepal since the 1990s. This rhetoric, endorsed by the UN's language of indigenous rights, leads each of the country's different ethnic groups to claim a specific territory where they have supposedly lived longer than anyone else. The activists belonging to these movements argue that "they *belong* to that place and the place *belongs* to them". In the same way, Jyapu agriculturalists from the Newar community now claim to be the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley: all the other castes came later. Other indigenous intellectuals assert that Newar religion has its own specificities that owe nothing to India. These ideas enforce a sentiment of belongingness among the members of this ethnic group, to the detriment of the division into castes and separate religious groups (Buddhists/Hindus).

In Chapter 4, Philippe Ramirez focuses on the intrinsically fluid, frequently-changing boundaries of ethnic groups in the Assam hills, between the Meghalaya plateau and the southern Brahmaputra plains, in Northeast India. He presents various examples of a complex intercrossing between a sense of belonging and 'uncertain identities' where the social structure, cultural patterns, ethnic labels, and language coincide only partly and do not automatically create clear-cut groups. Like Krauskopff (Chapter 2), Ramirez argues that such a confused and open situation was the rule in the past, where, for instance, clanic belonging did not determine ethnic or tribal affiliation. Ethnicity is seen here as non-perennial, a constructed sentiment, according to historical contexts, with a possible conversion from one group to another, particularly in the pre-modern period. The recent creation of regional states has 'ethnicized' spaces by assigning exclusive rights over uninterrupted territories to a single ethnic group. The notion of belonging, restricted here to a 'series of affinities', has proved to be particularly fruitful.

The last chapter in this section attempts to sketch a synthetic overview of state formation in Nagaland throughout the twentieth century. Sanjay Kumar Pandey, a political scientist, reconstructs the history of Naga nationalism and shows the vital role the British played in merging the scattered Naga tribes into a communal national identity. Similarly, Christianity and modern education created a sense of community among various tribes whose political life was formerly focused on small-scale villages. The fight was won in the end for an autonomous 'ethnostate' encompassing various Naga tribes. These groups were accorded the right to have an exclusive territory and political sovereignty over it. Sociologically, the Nagas' sense of belonging was heavily sustained by the boundaries separating them from the Indians, who are seen as having a fundamentally different type of culture and persona.

The second section of the book, 'Socio-religious Bonding', investigates another parameter of belonging that has so far hardly been studied from such an angle. Basically, religion is a crucial factor throughout the world that ties people together and it shapes a pervasive sense of communality, more specifically of brotherhood, within a group of believers. The realm of the sacred is always emotionally charged for those approaching it. As is the case with other forms of belonging, places and groups play a central role here. Both are invested with a transcendental dimension and provide a

feeling of belonging to devout people. There is however a difference between these two components: religious groupings with a common set of religious signs and practices are generally oriented towards internal cohesion, whereas sacred spaces are usually at the same time bounded, that is, they refer to a particular point, and transcendent, that is, they are widely open to an undefined group of followers.

In his chapter, Axel Michaels focuses on a well-known sacred place in the Kathmandu Valley, the Pashupati Temple, which houses a form of Shiva who was the tutelary deity of the former Nepalese kings. Each year, the temple attracts thousands of Hindu pilgrims from various places in the Indian subcontinent. These people regard Pashupati as one of the most sacred *tirtha* for Hindus, a place of worship that transcends national boundaries. This transnational dimension explains at least partly the fact that the priests serving at the temple are chosen from South India, a region renowned for its learned Brahmans. The question therefore arises: To whom does this temple—a national sacred monument—belong? To these foreign Bhatta priests, accused by the locals of being greedy, corrupt, and outsiders, or else to the Nepalese priests, presently taking secondary position (as assistants), whether Newar or Parbatiya, instead? The question provokes vehement debate at a time when major transformations are affecting the country of Nepal and its temples.

In Chapter 7, Gérard Toffin considers a Krishnaite religious grouping in the light of the notion of belonging. This concept seems invaluable when attempting to understand the fervent and emotional bonds that bind together the members of the same exclusive sectarian movement, here the Krishna Pranami *sampradaya* (or *dharma*). All members feel that they belong to a common whole. They are not united through blood or soil, but by devotional songs, by a corpus of highly revered texts and by regularly frequenting a limited number of sacred sites. As in other religious congregations of the same type, belonging here is transmitted through a spiritual parentage, *parampara*, centred around religious teachers. A transnational dimension once again emerges from the study: the sectarian movement crosses over the boundaries between India and Nepal. Furthermore, the chief *maharaj* of the sect is a Brahman of Nepalese origin, long settled in India. In this case too, Hindu religion radiates beyond national boundaries and ultimately creates over-worldly and transcendental forms of belonging.

The role of religious representations and symbols associated with a territory is dealt with by William Sax in Chapter 8. This author convincingly shows that the widespread cult of the Nanda Devi goddess in Kumaon and Garhwal has contributed to enhancing a sentiment of belonging since the creation of Uttarakhand state in the year 2000. Ethnicity and language were not sufficient markers in this region to sustain a national sentiment around the newly recognized territory. The ritual landscape of the Himalayas and a procession occurring every 12 years in the Nanda Devi mountains supplement this deficiency. They are instrumental in creating a regional identity and are presently among the foremost symbols of belonging in Uttarakhand. The body of the state, in this case, has been inscribed in the mountainous landscape. This study provides evidence that territorial symbols and religious beliefs have the power to shape common feelings and belongingness. In the end, territories empower those who belong to them.

Some pilgrimage sites display a syncretistic character or combine different religions on the same spot. Any affiliation and identification with one's religion then become a puzzling issue and can lead to dilemmas of belonging. This is the issue raised by Jessamine Dana in her chapter, based on observations made in Muktinath, another famous religious site located in southern Mustang district, Nepal. Pilgrims visiting this place and religious people from different confessions permanently living there experience a sensation of space that holds both its own internal spiritual barriers and its common religious area. Such an experience is achieved by positioning oneself and others, including the anthropologist, who is sometimes included, and at other times excluded, from the category of religious persons, in the daily life of the shrine. The field of belonging then evolves into a dialogic type of entity and turns into a phenomenology of the mutual processes of definition and appropriation.

For the most part, the third section, 'Commitments and Conflicts', lies at the interface between cosmopolitan, metropolitan, and vernacular processes. It attempts to describe the interaction between local, indigenous forms of belonging and new modes of classification and ordering imposed though national integration and governmental modes of politics. It deals with more flexible forms of attachments, occasionally dual or hybrid, engendering tensions among social agents. It focuses on situations of conflicts between various aspects

of attachment, and/or between old and new patterns of state admin-istration, governing practices, and boundaries. Phenomena such as globalization, migrations, and new federal political structures are increasingly affecting the traditional social fabric. Moves from one place to another, and the subsequent deterritorialization especially, accelerate the creation of new forms of attachments that rupture with old parameters of belonging.

In Chapter 10, Martin Gaenszle analyses the Nepalese community who lived in Banaras (Varanasi), India, in the decades before Indian independence. He makes two strong statements, in tension with each other: *(a)* Nepalese settled in this sacred Hindu town, on the bank of the Ganges, experienced a cosmopolitan atmosphere, speaking an array of different languages, and identifying closely with the democratic struggle of the newly decolonized Republic of India; *(b)* however, they expressed emotional loyalties towards Nepal, their birthplace, participating in the rise of Nepalese nationalism against the Rana autocracy and in the formation of a modern Nepalese identity by publishing a successful Nepali journal (*Udaya*). Most of them belong to both places equally. This dual form of belonging was all the more easy to bear as the border between the two countries was less marked than today.

Kinship and territory are often viewed in anthropology textbooks as two separate modes of social organization and belonging. In his chapter, Ben Campbell runs against this clear-cut distinction, which he sees as an essentialist assumption. Taking as an example the Tamang-speaking villagers of Rasuwa district, in central Nepal, he documents examples of amalgamation between these two categories. Kin and locality are in fact intermingled in daily life and cannot be analysed separately since the Tamangs in this region are essentially mobility-oriented and forever on the move. Their kin-groups cannot be apprehended through sedentarist models. Similarly, the develop-ment programmes elaborated in outer spheres do not match the 'processual' and fluid forms of belonging so important in the local life of these agro-pastoralists. In the end, the contemporary social life of the local Tamangs is portrayed as being organized according to flexible patterns of strategic identifications, relational creativity, and shifting boundaries.

In Chapter 12, Joëlle Smadja analyses the transformation of for-ested areas and their surroundings into national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Such forced implementations negatively impact on the

populations, who previously used these territories for their subsist-ence. They are now considered outlaws when doing so. For the safety of protected animals in the well-known Kaziranga National Park (Assam) for instance, the Mising Scheduled Tribe has had to endure not only the setting up of the park in a wooded area, but also its various extensions on the shifting islands they have exploited up to now. They were used to moving freely over this land and to living off its resources. Deprived of their right to use these resources, they no longer feel they belong to them. Many of them are poachers and encroachers. Two world views—one vernacular, the other more international, oriented towards tourism and stressing the ecological dimension of nature—are opposed here. These ecological conflicts, which are becoming increasingly frequent today, could be solved by better participatory management. The focus here is the deep sense of belonging attached to any form of territory, the related material and immaterial possessions and the means of exploiting nature.

The emergence of new federal states in the Republic of India after 1947 must be viewed diachronically. This is what Maheshwar Joshi succeeds in doing in Chapter 13. He traces back the history of this part of the western Himalayas and shows in a most convincing way how conflicting senses of belongingness were at work during the creation of Uttarakhand in 2000. The main opposition was between Paharis (hills-people) and Maidanis (people from the plains), with the latter being seen as immigrants. M. Joshi analyses, among other things, the political reasons why this new state, in spite of a strong sense of identity associated with the hills and mountains, includes a portion of lowlands and has chosen a Maidani as its first chief minister.

The concept of belonging also fits in well with the study of other topics, such as the imposition of new rules, procedures, and admin-istrative schemes on local communities. Taking the example of a district court of justice in a small town of Himachal Pradesh, Daniela Berti (Chapter 14) shows how village-based forms of loyalties are confronted with judicial procedures rooted into an urban and state context. Here vernacular forms of belonging come in opposition with the 'national' or 'modern' system of justice, provoking a clash of values between two societies. The analysis of court proceedings particularly illustrates the difficulty that judicial institutions have in managing the local solidarities and dynamics at work inside the village. The position that each person involved adopts in the debates

and the negotiations regarding the issues at stake among the court officials open the door on a fascinating field of research.

BELONGING AS AN OBJECT OF REFLEXIVITY IN CONTEMPORARY HIMALAYAN SOCIETIES

Once we acknowledge the often striking asymmetries between diverse social locations of belonging as described in most of the chapters collected here and the powerful exclusionary practices between social 'insiders' and 'aspiring newcomers', some major facets of belonging come to light. The human quest to belong can either be buttressed by striving to maintain the status quo—feeling more or less compelled to protect one's social realm—or by striving for admission to a new collective. The concept of belonging alerts us to important dimensions of social struggles in the field of inequality and social mobility. The moment the social status quo is challenged, the sentiments of belonging can turn into certainties about who is part of us, and who does not belong. As a number of the chapters collected here reveal, under conditions of mobilization, things that go without saying—the tacit sense of belonging—are likely to turn into tools of social boundary-making. Consequently, the more people's sense of belonging coincides with clear-cut practices of boundary-making, the more reflexive—and exclusive—attachments, allegiances, and loyalties become.

When Glick Schiller (2007: 460ff.) distinguished between 'ways of being' and 'ways of belonging', she drew our attention to the manifold instances when personal characteristics and attachments are moulded into criteria of belonging or not-belonging in political contestations. Belonging ceases to be a property that goes without saying. Given the tremendous force of present-day identity politics and given the numerous challenges to old-established ways of belonging described in this volume, the human quest to belong explicitly appears more and more prominently on political agendas.

Belonging matters, we repeat. The human preoccupation with belonging increasingly translates into political action. It transcends our orientations towards the future. Kannabiran (2006) suggests making a distinction between the 'politics of belonging' and the 'politics of becoming'—the difference lying in the latter's possibilities for contesting the status quo. The collection of chapters in this volume demonstrates that modernization efforts are at work in both cases. Supra-local influences have rendered the search for belonging an issue. Nationalization of resources, displacement, homogenizing national we-group definitions, and other dynamics of disembedding have instigated the perception that social locations that were formerly taken for granted, come under threat. On the other hand, modernization has offered new opportunities. Social and spatial mobility, coupled with a dissemination of formerly unknown cultural repertoires and role models for social visions and action, induce actors to seek entry into new social realms and to forge new social bonds.

Today, the human sense of belonging becomes increasingly contested...and all the more precious. This loss is caused by frequent confrontations with social boundaries and with external forces, and is buttressed through a heightened alertness to new possibilities. With an increased number of options, the potentiality of choice renders belonging an object of reflection. Not being a tacit fact of life any more, the importance of the interplay between commonality, mutuality, and attachment is increasingly felt and acknowledged. Belonging becomes an object of debate, something that may be lost—and therefore something that ought to be protected. As impinging at social locations and horizons, globality itself becomes an object of reflexivity (Beck et al., 1994). More human preoccupations focus on locating oneself and one's peers within the global realm and on engaging in meaningful politics of one's own. Whether people belong by choice or by compulsion, the modern reflexivity opens up new opportunity spaces—as embattled as the envisaged options may be.

NOTES

1. We would like to thank David Gellner, Eva Gerharz, Felix Girke, Christian Meyer, and Susanne Kröhnert-Othman for helpful comments on drafts of this introduction.
2. One way in which the use of the term 'belonging' helps us to advance is because it shows up the nationalist and nativist assumptions underlying so many contemporary claims. Certain people belong, that is, have primordial links to particular places, while others do not. As powerfully argued by Simmel (1908): What place do nomadic people, for example, the irregular migrants, in the modern ecumene occupy, except precisely being viewed as disadvantaged and perennially forced to play on their history of victimhood?

3. Latour (1991) uncovered the problematic of such modern dichotomies as body/spirit, materiality/discourse, actor/object, and others—that were hitherto dealt with separately in diverse areas of research.

4. For a critique of the notion of identity, see Brubaker and Cooper (2000). More recently, see also Lenclud (2008).

5. Rosaldo (1989: 168–95), for instance, has driven our attention to 'multiplex subjectivities' with numerous intersecting identifications. We claim that commitments and loyalties entail, besides identifications, relations and attachments of diverse kinds.

6. See Fortier (1999) on how Italian immigrants to London took possession of Church, making it 'their place' of dense social relations.

7. Culture is what goes without saying for those who share knowledge—as powerfully argued by Luckmann, Schütz, Berger, and others.

8. Notably, Neidhardt (1979), Wimmer (2007), and Tyrell (2008).

9. We are here taking groups for 'collective actors' that are well aware of their complex constitution.

10. This passage relies upon Tyrell's (2008: 50ff.) discussion. In the Himalayan context, these dynamics were analysed by Ramble (2008).

11. Most probably, under the conditions of transnationality, groups turn partly into networks—an issue we shall take up in our next volume.

12. Already Weber (1921: 15) had highlighted the importance of ritualizations in the life of groups.

13. These elements form part of the subtitle. The context is the contemporary Western world.

14. As Fortier argues, "belonging refers to both 'possessions' and 'appartenance'. That is, practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings which mark out *terrains of commonality* that delineate the politics and social dynamics of 'fitting in'" (1999: 42, author's emphasis).

15. There are numerous examples from Nazi Germany of how a strong sense of attachment, including patriotism, prevented Jews from leaving the country in time.

16. Frequently depicted as 'target populations' or as 'clients'. Similar developments were recently described by Peter Geschiere (2009) for African contexts.

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