Sensing the Winds of Climate Change

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The Tamang-speaking people occupy mostly unirrigated terraced slopes of north central Nepal. On these open fields they grow wheat-finger millet-maize.
Land is normally inherited equally between brothers (*pashi*), if a daughter of a family with plenty of land marries a man with little, she might receive dowry (*deidso*)
Younger generations learn skills and mountain knowledge by being in the landscape.
The young make the place their own!
After months of drought last winter the forests caught fire!
No rain fell between November and March. The sun seen through the sky of smokey haze from forest fires
Wheat only survived drought on the most favourable fields.
Lost fields of wheat in less favorable conditions
Suspicions were voiced as to whether people might have started the fires

- This man lost his wife the previous year. The fire will make good grass grow well after the next monsoon, maybe
When exceptional or calamitous events happen, the relationship of people to the local gods of territory are discussed.

Terrible strong winds were attributed to the anger of shyibda that people had caused fire
Day of full moon offering to *Shyibda neda* - Lord of soil Lord of place
Shyibda gods are the autochthonous presences of village territory and come as vegetarian, or blood-demanding (king-snake of the local spring). They can either protect humans or inflict harm.
Tamangs interact with many seen and unseen presences in their landscape

- a ‘sentient’, responsive ecology giving the vitality of fecund possibility for human beings and their livelihoods

children learn to notice and respect dangerous aspects and agents of the landscape
Shaman declaring his lineage of ancestral generations to mountain god at pilgrimage, to ask for blessings of well being
the houses of the dead have their place
“there are no young men left in the village”

- 60% of households now have a member in Malaysia or the Gulf, earning cash to support the family
Before the new exodus, seasonal labour migrants slotted back into domestic farming routine.

A more specialist differentiation between brothers now (shades of Tibetan monk trader, farmer, herder?)
Blandine Ripert - educated Tamang youth have taken on ‘environmental’ agendas to challenge the power of the elders in village social organisation. Rejecting the intimate ‘Tamang geosophy’ (Smadje), these modernisers, who have internalised the criticisms of ignorant village practice, take it upon themselves to defend nature against thoughtless actions of deforestation by their parents. They also refuse to participate in agricultural labour, using their learning to set them apart from other villagers. They deploy their literacy to promote forest protection committees, and demonstrate their identification with wider Nepali society and its values, shattering any idea of cultural unanimity that might be assumed to enfold the co-residents of the mountainside village.

Histoire et Devenir des Paysages en Himalaya: représentations des milieux et gestion des resources au Népal et au Ladakh.

“going down”
[to the big wide world below]
A young man seeks travel papers for work abroad, being helped in Kathmandu by his auntie.
Climate Change and different cultural dispositions to future generations

• Industrial societies - little care for long term concerns, when profit can be made now (e.g. “god made teenagers to show us what we put our parents through”)

• Traditional societies - strong interdependence between generations, and some ‘kinship’ with the non-human (e.g. Mother Earth, forest as mother (Bird-David 1993))
John Foster (2008. *The Mirage of Sustainability: illusion and reality in the coming war on climate change*. London: Earthscan) - major polluters have not been seriously confronted to change carbon-emitting resource use, changes in patterns of consumption can be managed, ‘all in good time’, without future generations being disadvantaged

This is an ethically empty idea, pretending to make a fair deal with generations who are not yet born
The targets of carbon reductions are made in bad faith
- Foster may be technically correct within the logic of contract accountability, but it is an ecological modernist position

There are generational horizons of transmitted responsibilities that non-western cultures can provide examples of, but they are more about ongoing vital attendance than putting reserves in the bank
• When the UN and World Bank are organising indigenous peoples in conferences about climate change, are they making rhetorical capital from a supposed super-authentic expression of a commitment to future generations, that they would like to represent as a human universal?
Transgenerational relationships with environments, take different forms in different cultures. They cannot be homogenised as a relationship between generation A toward generation N in reference to an objective environment E. This imposes the mentality of a colonialist separation of people from environment before it adjudicates on the authenticity of one claim over another (Ingold 2000 *Perception of the Environment*).
• C. Hayden 2003 *When Nature Goes Public* - impossibility of finding bounded corporate communities to satisfy legal requirements to compensate indigenous communities for knowledge of medicinal plants

• A. Tsing *Friction* - Meratus people in Indonesia present a version of themselves to the state as stable, rule-bound traditional communities obedient to leadership (in order to be seen by the state not as jungle savages)

• PNG compensation for mining projects has imposed unprecedented boundaries around groups of kin
Concern from campaign groups about the manipulation of indigenous people in the climate change agenda:

To protect communities’ collective and customary forest uses, a forest-climate agreement should *inter alia*:

· Establish monitoring methods that distinguish between permanent and large-scale forest loss and temporary local forest loss under sustainable shifting cultivation and agro-forestry systems

· Involve methodologies at the national and local levels to protect the range of values forests hold for indigenous peoples and local communities, including non-monetary cultural, spiritual and subsistence values.

(FERN European campaign group)
Conclusion

For existing communities like the Tamang ‘transmission’ with reference to the landscape concerns a universe of practices and registers of meaning that only make sense in the flow of activity, and continuity of attendance to the sensed qualities of human and nonhuman interactions.

The politics of climate change (as well as the ethnic movement to achieve federal territorial autonomy) presents a completely new way of engaging with the environment as an entity in negotiation. Yet the migrants have already broken the intimacy of the old relation.