The Nirman Lecture
British Association for South Asian Studies (BASAS)
Cambridge, 29.03 2007

Tor Halfdan Aase
Professor
Department of Geography
University of Bergen, Norway

Local responses to large scale global changes in the Himalayas[1]

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and China, are among those countries of the world whose agriculture rely heavily on mountain discharge of water. Thus, what is going on in Himalaya in the era of globalisation has relevance far beyond the 70 to 90 million people who live there. In this lecture, my intention is to give a glimpse of some ongoing processes in the loft of South Asia, and to link those processes to events and tendencies on regional and global scales. That can be done in many ways. But if we look at Himalaya as a 'place', and if we, further, apply Doreen Massey's recent (2005) notion of place as a 'meeting-up of histories', I shall do so by focussing on one history, the history of Manang valley in the High Himalayas. Concentrating on Manang, I shall also touch upon other histories, which together produce the 'place' of Himalaya.

In the literature, it has become nearly doxic to describe the Himalayas in terms of 'fragility'. The mountain environment is fragile, and so are communities and livelihoods and identities. Since the concepts we apply to things and places shape the way we think about them, it is only to be expected that much research carried out in the region conclude with descriptions of present misery and gloomy futures. Fragile objects do not tolerate much change. The

[1] The paper is mainly based on collaborative research between Tribhuvan University Kathmandu and University of Bergen Norway carried out in Manang Valley Nepal during 2002-2006, funded by Norwegian Center for Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFU). The Research team consisted of Prof. Ram P. Chaudhary, Prof. Tor H. Aase, Dr Ole R. Vetaas, Prof Bhim P. Subedi, Prof Hari Lekakh, Dr Peter Andersen, Prof Vimal Gupta.

narrative that was labelled ‘The Theory of Himalayan Degradation’ by Jack Ives and Bruno Messerly, is well known to all who have an academic interest in the region. In line with that theory, the Asian Development Bank predicted in 1982 that there is a …”distinct danger that all accessible forests, especially in the Hills, will be eliminated within less than 20 years”. A Nepali geologist (Sharma) proposed sincerely in 1986 that half the population of the Middle Hills should be resettled on the plains in order to avoid further land degradation. Ives and Messerly, and others, have put much effort into refuting the theory, but new misery scenarios have emerged. According to Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon (2001), Nepal is still in a state of “crisis”, like it also was 20 years ago. Likewise, Adhikari and Bohle see “a permanent livelihood crisis” in the country (1998). In a recent analysis of economic globalisation in the “fragile” mountain communities of Himalaya, N.S. Jodha found some prospects for development, but on the whole he joins the ranks of pessimists. Globalisation leads to “uncontrolled demand-driven resource use intensification”, “declining resilience”, “over-extraction of niche resources (medicinal plants etc.)”, and a “disregard for customary law” (2005). A short review of recent literature, then, gives the overall impression that globalisation has more negative impacts than positive ones in the periphery, especially so if the periphery is ‘fragile’.

The late Dr Harka Gurung, well-known Nepali geographer who died in a helicopter crash last year, argues that the term ‘fragile mountains’ is a conceptual fallacy that for some reason has stuck to the Himalayas since the 1970s: “It would be more realistic to consider mountains as dynamic, certainly not fragile”, he wrote in one of his latest publications (Gurung 2004:16). Indeed, Gurung is right when it comes to the history of Manang, which is a stunning tale of a dynamic community in a harsh and magnificent valley. During two hundred years, Mananges have managed to develop from being one of the most miserable peoples of the Nepal, characterised by extreme poverty and regular starvation; rude manners; a reputation of being particularly hostile to outsiders; and practitioners of human sacrifice, into one of the wealthiest and most sophisticated and internationally oriented communities in the country. Their success was not achieved by avoiding the exploitative forces of globalisation, but precisely by linking up to such forces and exploiting them to their own advantage. The point of interest here is to ask how they have managed to do so. What makes the Mananges dynamic rather than fragile? What kind of qualities do they have that distinguishes them from other people who have not been similarly successful?

Let us go 200 years back in time to when it all started.

The Mananges is one of the Tibetan-speaking peoples who have lived for centuries along the border between Nepal and Tibet. Several of these people had great success in the historical trade between British India and Tibet, bringing rock salt to India and returning to Tibetan markets with tea and rice and textiles. The puzzle of why some peoples managed to accumulate great fortunes on the trade why others did not, has been object of much debate among students of the Himalayas. Two explanations have been given, focussing on different aspects.

An anthropologist, von Furer Haimendorf, suggested a cultural explanation. According to him, the mountain Buddhists are 'free agents' at an early age. At the time of marriage, a young couple establishes their own nuclear family and immediately inherits their share of the parents' property. The Hindus residing in the Middle hills and on the plains, on the other hand, are restricted by economic obligations to joint families headed by a patriarch. Furthermore, the egalitarian society of Buddhists were free from caste restrictions on selecting trade partners, and more relaxed gender roles implied that women could carry out most work in agriculture while their husbands were absent on trading ventures (von Furer Haimedorf 1975).

An alternative explanation was proposed by Andrew Manzardo. He advocated a combined geographical and ecological explanation. Successful trade was conditioned by a favourable location on one of the trading routes between India and Tibet, and access to wide pastures that were sufficient for raising big herds of pack animals, that is, yak and goat (Manzardo 1977, referred by Rogers 2004).

The case of Manang gives support to the cultural hypothesis. Manang does not have easy access to Tibet, and, accordingly, Mananges could not take part in the lucrative Tibet-India trade. Instead, they brought local goods like medicinal plants, scented glands of musk dear, and fur of snow leopard, to markets on the plains, and brought rice back to the valley. They learned that the longer distance they brought their goods from home, the better price they obtained, and during the twentieth century Delhi, Calcutta, Shillong in Assam, and Mandalay in Burma became nodes in a trading network that ultimately came to include all South- and Southeast Asia. Travelling that far from home, trade became de-linked from local goods.

Mananges became specialists in exploiting price differences between various Asian countries. They bought gemstones cheaply in Kashmir and sold at a profit in Thailand, from where they took silk to India, and so on. And they were really adventurous ‘free agents’, as von Furer Haimendorf claims. On one occasion, they bought glass beads in Kathmandu for Rs 10 a piece. Being told that the beads were imported from a place called Czechoslovakia, they reckoned that they might be bought at half the Kathmandu price there. So they went home to Manang and equipped a caravan of twelve yaks and set out for Czechoslovakia. That was before the Chinese annexation of Tibet, and the caravan reached all the way up to the Soviet border before they were bluntly turned back home!

During the time of import substitution policy in India, Mananges found a profitable market there for smuggled goods from Hong Kong and Singapore. But when Rajiv Gandhi liberalised Indian economy after 1984, the Indian market evaporated. By then, however, a new niche had emerged in Kathmandu. The increasing stream of western tourists to Nepal created a market for hotels, restaurants, and curio shops in the capital, which Mananges were quick to seize. They had accumulated substantial fortunes during years of international trade which could now be invested in the tourist market. Unlike the previous trade activity, running a business in Kathmandu claimed continuous presence in the city. Since 1970, some 5000 Mananges have settled in the capital, while only 4000 remain in the valley of origin.

The Manang history of migration has always been intimately related to trade and business. Mananges were never part of the comprehensive South Asian migration streams of wage labourers who sought out urban destinations on the subcontinent (labelled “laories” elsewhere in Nepal since it started with labour migration to Lahore), and later in the Gulf states and in Europe and North America. Today, Mananges constitute a wealthy and well-established community in the capital.

Looking back to their valley of origin, the massive exodus of people has had its consequences. The most immediate repercussion is the high degree of abandoned agricultural land. An estimated 60% of the land that was cultivated around 1970 is abandoned today. Nicely terraced fields with stone raisers up to three meters, which it must have taken years to construct, are now falling down. Agricultural production has of course decreased accordingly, and that is a pity in a country that has become a net importer of food lately. There are plenty of land-hungry peasants in the less fortunate neighbour valleys of Gorkha

and Dolpa who cannot boast a past of successful trade; and indeed, people from those districts work as land labourers in Manang during summer. Some are also allowed to sharecrop fields for Manang owners who reside in Kathmandu. If they were allowed buy the land of emigrated Mananges, the whole valley could be cultivated as it used to be forty years ago.

This situation is not unique to Manang. A recent study in two villages on the south side of Annapurna found the rate of land abandonment to be 46%. The authors blame the high rate of abandonment on a combination of out-migration and national land policy. The Land Reform Act of 1997 establishes the right of sharecroppers to claim ownership to half the land they cultivate, if they have paid 50% of the crops to the landowner during a certain period of time. The noble intention of this land redistribution was to enhance productivity and alleviate poverty, but the actual result was reluctance on the part of landowners to lease out their land. Since land taxes are negligible in Nepal, out-migrated landowners keep their land empty instead of selling it or leasing it out to sharecroppers (Khanal & Watanabe 2006).

These circumstances are also effective in Manang, but in addition, Mananges hold exclusive rights to all land in the valley. Farmers have individual land rights that are transferred to their children, but they are not allowed to sell it to non-Mananges. Thus, individual farmers have entitlement to land while endowments remain with the community. Even if this practice is detrimental to Nepali law, it is consistently enforced by the village councils. No land has ever been sold to non-Mananges. If an émigré wishes to sell his land – and there are plenty of potential buyers – he is not allowed to. The combined outcome of international trade, resettlement in Kathmandu, and ethnic monopoly of land, is that more than 60% of all farmland in Manang is now out of production.

The most recent chapter in the history of Manang started in 1977. During the 1960s, Manang was one of the bases for resistance against the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Tibetan freedom fighters – Khampas – had camps in the valley, from where they carried out operations into their homeland. In due respect – and probably fear – of its powerful neighbour to the north, Nepal was one of the first countries to recognise China's annexation of Tibet. Part of the endeavour to stay on good terms with China was, of course, to end operations from Nepali territory. During the 1970s the Nepali government persuaded Mananges to disarm the whole valley, in return for which the valley would be opened up for tourism. Guns were handed over to the Army, and in 1977 the first tourists were allowed to enter the valley. Manang is

luckily located on the Annapurna Circuit Trail that takes trekkers all around the Annapurna massif in three weeks. It soon became one of the most popular tourist destinations in Nepal. The annual number of tourists passing through Manang increased from 1000 in the initial year of 1977, to more than 14,000 in the record year of 2001. During the last six years, an average number of 11,300 tourists pass through the valley annually.

Over night, a market for new business had emerged in Manang. Trekkers spend on average 3 nights in Manang, resting and waiting to be acclimatised before entering the high Thorong La pass on the way around Annapurna. The market constitutes a demand for 35,000 bed-nights a year, a lot of food to hungry trekkers, and some local curio to bring home. Such a considerable market is, of course, expected to draw attention from investors far outside Manang valley itself.

It is quite common that new tourist destinations and market towns are dominated by outside capital. Manang's neighbour district to the west, Mustang, was allowed for tourists in 1992, 15 years later than Manang. There, tourist operators based in Kathmandu have managed to monopolise operation of hotels and tea-houses, to the great resentment of local people whose only blessing of the new activity is a 300% rise on prices on imported goods like rice, tea, and lentils (Ives 2006).

A similar outcome of tourism, but far more serious, occurred in the Pakistani town of Gilgit in the Karakorum mountains. When the Karakorum Highway that links the plains of Pakistan with Xinjiang in China was opened in the late 1970s, powerful business houses based in Peshawar were quick to take the opportunity and established hotels, shops, and restaurants in the town. The local shia-muslim population, who had neither the means nor the knowledge to take advantage of the new market opportunities, was marginalised by the sunni-traders from the south. In 1988 Gilgit exploded in a full civil war that probably killed 700 people during a few days of intense fighting. The town has been troubled by continuous tension and occasional fighting ever since, and ethnic cleansing of shias from areas south of the town. .

But in Manang, the ethnic monopoly of land kept non-local investors out. Since 1977 a number of hotels, cafes, and shops have come up along the trail. Without exception they are all owned by Mananges. Since outsiders are not allowed to buy land, they are ruled out as competitors in the tourist market. A number of families have now resettled in Manang,

leaving their Kathmandu business in charge of some relatives or partners. The ethnic monopoly of land, thus, has positive as well as negative effects. It has left more than half the farmland empty, but on the other hand it has effectively enabled local people to reap the benefits of the new tourism business. And the boom has not been confined to a few wealthy families only. About 50 hotels have come up since the first tourists appeared in 1977, and an even large number of hotels and shops. In 1975 there was not a single shop or lodge in the whole valley.

Again, Mananges have succeeded in utilising a new economic niche to their own advantage. In addition to Furer-Haimendorf's 'free agents', I argue that the reasons for this success in utilising externally induced changes must be sought in a particularly strong sense of community. Mananges have their own ways of pooling resources for big enterprises; they have an effective apparatus of sanctioning breaks of traditional rules; and they even manage to avoid destructive competition through self-imposed regulations. Even if they belong to different Buddhist sects, and even if the five clans have probably settled in the valley at different times, they possess a strong feeling of unity which sometimes amounts to ethic arrogance.

Lately, the group unity has been challenged by demographic factors. Many men stay away from the valley most of the year, leaving behind a predominantly female population. For example, some 100 men and 200 women spent the summer of 2004 in village Ngawal. The young men increasingly prefer to marry educated girls from Kathmandu, and some have also married foreigners. This preference leaves a lot of marriageable young girls without a prospective husband, who then look to non-Manange porters or land labourers for appropriate suitors. Such marriages are frowned upon in Manang, since ethnic identity is inherited through male lines. There is, however, a loophole in the ethnic fence of the group. An outsider may become Manage through the institution of *kura pasne*. Kura pasne implies that the applicant to Manange status must document spotless conduct during his time in the valley; he must swear to give priority to Manang code of conduct (parampara) above any other tradition; he must have an authentic Manange mentor who guarantees that he follows these rules; and, finally, he has to pay a substantial amount of money to the village council. Again, the adaptability of Manages comes to expression. The institution of *kura pasne* allows reproduction of the group even when demographic factors are unfavourable.

Mananges are not sure about their ethnic origin. Previously, when most people lived in the valley, that did also not matter so much. In their own community people were identified according to village of origin, clan (*phobe*) and agnatic kinship group (*khila*)[2], and that was probably sufficient. But since more than half the population moved to Kathmandu, the question of community has been challenged. Suddenly, it has become pertinent to ask 'who are we?'

Theoretically, the search for collective identity is either looked upon as a basic human predicament (e.g. Fernandez 1986), or it is conceived as an instrumental device intended to grant some advantages in the competitive pursuit of scarce resources (e.g. Cohen 1969). Whatever view is correct (the two do not exclude each other), Robertson has argued that globalisation is about to change the very conditions for identity formation. A basic characteristic of globalisation is the increasingly universal tendency to search for the particular: *The universalization of the particular refers to the global universality of the search for the particular, for increasingly fine-grained modes of identity presentation* (Robertson 1992:178). Since people all over the world experience frequent contact with each other – physically through migration and tourism and communicatively through television, internet, and the ubiquitous mobile phone – it becomes pertinent to demarcate one's own group as against other groups: *As the entire world becomes more compressed and singular the basis of doing identity are increasingly, but problematically 'shared', even though they may at the same time collide* (ibid:99). The outcome of this process is a global culture that consists of multiple and changing identities which are constructed with reference to each other. An ongoing *relativization of identities* is a constitutive aspect of globalisation.

The assertion of Robertson is echoed in this citation from the Manang monthly journal:

> "Have you ever wondered as to who we actually are by origin? Where did we come from? By which name should we call ourselves? Manangey, Nyeshangs, or Nyeshangbas? …. The real story of the complex ethnic history of Nyeshang is yet to be told" (Nyeshang Voice, Vol XII 2002:6)

---

[2] *Khila* in vernacular Manang language correspond to the Nepali *kul*; *phobe* is, however, different from Nepali *gotra*, which refers to marriage prohibitions only.

The outright question of origin and the confusion over ethnic label in this citation bear witness of an ethnic group in-the-making. Mananges exhibit great ardour at defining themselves as a community separate from other ethnic groups (*janajati*) of Nepal, in conformity with Robertson's relativized identities. In articles published in the Nyeshang Voice there is a palpable application of "us" in most contexts: "*our* beautiful homeland";" The Nyeshang Voice – *our* voice";" I feel *we* should cover more about *our* origin"; "*our* very own Nachong Gurung"; "*our* community"; "*our* football team". Thus, there is a widespread willingness to ascribe certain attributes to the group, but the problem is what those attributes should be.

In Kathmandu, Mananges were previously categorised as *Bhote*. The denotation of Bhote is simply 'people from Tibet'. It was – and still is – applied to all Tibetan-speaking peoples from the high Himalayas, including the well-known Sherpas. But Bhote has come to bear the negative connotation of unsophisticated people of rude manners. Accordingly, Bhote is no longer used in face-to-face situations, although it may still be used behind peoples' backs.

In order to avoid the stigma of Bhote previously ascribed to them, many Mananges have claimed to be Gurung. The Gurung are one of the largest ethnic groups of Nepal and are highly respected by others, not least because they are one of the four groups who supply soldiers to Gurkha regiments in India and the UK. One myth of settlement, supported by writers like Harka Gurung (1980), claims that the Gurungs originally came from Tibet. Some people settled in the upper valleys such as Manang, while others moved further down to the Middle Hills which now constitute the core Gurung areas. Whether it is historically correct or not, the problem with this myth is that Gurungs proper do not accept Mananges as authentic Gurung and refuse to intermarry with them. Mananges thus do not wish to be labelled Bhote, but they are not accepted as Gurung. What are they, then?

The Mananges are presently searching for a proper way to present themselves to the outside world, and in that respect the 'word' – the designation of the group – is an important aspect. As yet, they have not found the final answer.

If we ask people what constitutes them as Mananges or Nyeshangba or whatever, the unanimous answer is that they practise the same 'tradition' (*parampara*)[3]. Following

[3] The Manange word for tradition is *tongbo kapla*, but younger people use the Nepali word *parampara*.

parampara (tradition) constitutes the Manang way of life. It is not difficult to break with rules imposed by the outside world, Mananges say. Indeed, their urban fortunes are partly the result of shrewd avoidance of international trade barriers. But acting in opposition to Manang *parampara* is serious. It amounts to acting against one's own identity. A person who does not bother about *parampara* is hardly a Manange any more.

In every society there are certain ways of gaining merit and reputation. Merit is synonymous with symbolic capital in Bourdieu's terms, which can, again, be converted into other forms of capital. A highly respected man in Manang is given the title of *mitheba* (big man). A *mitheba* is entitled to sit in the village council and even become village headman. Merit is achieved by the conspicuous exhibition of certain items that are indexical of success in the traditional way of life. A big pile of firewood on the rooftop signifies that the owner can look forward to a pleasant winter. Big heaps of dung conspicuously located outside the houses are signs of success in farming. The most cherished item of conspicuous consumption is the horse. Even if horses are mainly kept for prestige, they nevertheless consume the crops of 14% of all cultivated land in the valley!

The problem is that the traditional markers of symbolic capital cannot be converted to the urban context. Kathmandu citizens are not impressed by dung heaps, and they prefer a Pajero car to fast horses. How do the Mananges in Kathmandu perform their 'politics of recognition', then? The answer is that they invest in monumental religious items.

The magnificent Manang Gomba (monastery) Swayambu is financed and operated jointly by all Mananges living in Kathmandu. Construction of Manang Gomba was initiated in 1990. It was completed in four years, which is quite an achievement, the monumental size of the building and the richness of ornaments taken into consideration. The gomba is built over two storeys. The first floor is used for community activities like meetings in Manange associations, dances, festivals, and celebrations of various kinds. The second floor is dedicated to religious activities. The interior as well as the exterior are beautifully decorated by the best artists available who were hired from distant places like Bhutan. The gomba emerges as a quite conspicuous structure amongst the surrounding shops and dwellings on the outskirts of the capital.

The gomba is not the only conspicuous structure built by Mananges during the recent years. In 2001 they erected the biggest Buddha in Kathmandu, located on the western slope of Swayambu hill not far from the gomba. Towering high among the trees and covered with golden paint and gemstones, it is quite an eye catcher. By-passers can also not avoid noticing the monumental golden *stupa* and the long prayer (*mane*) wall that are located in the same area.

A few thousand Mananges have indeed left their mark on the urban landscape of the capital. But the monumental buildings and sculptures have of course taken their toll on the aggregate savings of the community members. The new Buddha statute has been financed by people originating from Kangsar village alone. One man is said to have donated Rupees 500.000 out of his own pocket, and the others must also have contributed substantial amounts. Then the question arises: Why do Mananges in Kathmandu allot large amounts of money to monumental religious items? Several Mananges have built big hotels and shops in the capital, which is easily understandable since they are obvious productive investments that can generate a surplus. But why Buddhas and *stupa*s and *gomba*s?

In one sense, construction of religious items may be seen as investments in the hereafter, that can be harvested after we leave this world[4]. But in another sense, the investments also communicate a message to contemporary citizens who cannot avoid noticing them. The vividly decorated gomba, the towering Buddha, and the golden stupa have one thing in common: they are all meant to bee seen and noticed by passers-by. They are *conspicuous*.

Once the religious items have been constructed, they are applied as places of worship and social gathering. In that manner it is appropriate to say that they are consumed. What we see among the Mananges in Kathmandu, then, is a classic example of *conspicuous consumption*. The question to ask then is why Mananges spend substantial amounts of money on investments that are not productive in a strictly economical sense.

On the individual level, the person from Kangsar village who donated Rupees 500,000 to the Swayambu Buddha gained in repute, and so did all others who contributed financially to the construction. In Manang Gomba, the names of individual donors to the construction of the

[4] Gautama Buddha Himself would probably not have approved of such investments, since his very message was to abstain from worldly wealth in order to obtain enlightenment.

building and the amount of donations are engraved on pillars in the community hall. The publication of donors is obviously meant to yield something in return for their generosity, and that something is merit.

Individual Mananges, then, seem to gain merit by contributing to communal items of conspicuous consumption. In addition, it is reasonable to ask if the erection of monumental religious items has a more or less intended function that reaches beyond internal social mobility within the Manang community itself.

Only thirty years ago, Mananges had a rather dubious reputation in the capital: "They could be smelled on a distance and they never bothered to wash their faces", recalls a citizen of Kathmandu. It may well be that the conspicuous stupas and gombas are part of a strategy of impression management (Goffman 1959) relating to the whole group. Dumont's concept of sanscritization rests on the premise that individuals cannot escape the communal rank of the group (caste) to which they belong (Dumont 1980). If we apply the logic of sanscritization to Manange community in Kahmandu, the stupas and statutes can be understood in terms of improving the collective position of the group. Such a collective strategy does not preclude individual accumulation of merit internally in Manang society as well. The *community* gains merit in the city by letting it be known that a *stupa* is built by Mananges; the *individual donor* gains merit among fellow Mananges by having his name engraved on a pillar in the monastery. The exhibition of conspicuous religious items is thus a strategy of upward social mobility for individual Mananges as well as for the whole Manange community. Indeed, the names of the donor communities of all monumental structures are carefully made public to visitors. The public linking of name and item is a vital part of conspicuous consumption; otherwise the social surrounding would not know whom to admire.

The discovery that conspicuous consumption yields repute to the consumer was termed "the law of conspicuously wasteful expenditure of time and substance" by the economist Torstein Veblen (1899.:69). He was not content with the word 'waste' but did not find any better: "it is here called "waste" because this expenditure does not serve human life or human well-being on the whole" (ibid.:78). Even if Veblen himself did not approve of it, the juxtaposition of the terms 'conspicuous consumption' and 'conspicuous waste' (ibid.:79) is probably meaningful to Mananges. Several people are critical to the allocation of donated money to expensive and conspicuous decorations in the monasteries. Instead, critics claim, more

money should be spent on the social security function entrusted to it. One of the critics is the former Minister of Labour and Transport, Mr Palden Gurung, who diplomatically suggests that "There should be a balance between religious, social and economic activities." (Nyeshang Voice, XII 2002:11)

The reason why large sums of money are still spent on conspicuous religious items, in spite of occasional criticism of such extravagance, is probably to be found in the merit it yields upon individual donors and the Manange community at large. When Veblen labelled such spending "wasteful", he was thinking in pure economical terms. To those who practice it, it is far from wasteful. The immediate outcome or 'profit' of the conspicuous exposure of wealth is admiration and repute, which is termed *ijjat* in Nepali. The attainment of respect from the social surroundings is valued by itself; and moreover, a good reputation is an appropriate platform for the pursuit of strategies in various realms of life. Citizens of Kathmandu presently hold three connotations to Mananges in particular: Firstly, Mananges are perceived to be *wealthy*, which is an index of success in business. Secondly, their performances are related to *quality*. A customer who hires a Manange contractor to build his house is pretty sure that he shall have a solid and long-lasting building, even if he must pay more for it. And lastly, Kathmandu people think that Mananges are particularly *determined*. Whenever they have a goal they wish to accomplish, they do not hesitate to apply tough means in order to realize it.

These stereotypes do not necessarily reflect the real Manange personality or habitus, if there ever is a Manange habitus, but nevertheless they probably impinge upon interaction between Manange and the remaining citizens of Kathmandu. In addition to the aesthetic value and expected rewards in the afterlife, the conspicuous religious buildings and statutes communicate Manange success to the social surroundings and thus render them repute and merit. The good reputation can in its turn be utilised to enhance business, to obtain political influence, and to make life easier in the capital.

To summarise, the Mananges have achieved a remarkable success in adapting to changing socio-political environments. They were active participants in international trade long before the term 'globalisation' was thought of. International tourism was employed to good purpose by the local people thanks to a strong tradition that prescribed ethnic monopoly of land. And

they have managed to negotiate a respected position among the ‘relativised identities’ of Kathmandu, which is a constitutive aspect of globalisation according to Robertson.

These achievements have been possible due to a pragmatic outlook on life. Mananges seem to consider changes in the socio-political environment as potentialities rather than as restrictions to their economic pursuits. In addition to being the result of individual careers of ‘free agents’ in Furer-Haimendorf’s sense, their success should also be seen as the outcome of a particularly strong group cohesion. In many ways the Mananges have acted like a corporation, characterised by commonly orchestrated use of resources in a continuously changing environment, in the pursuit of the good life. The efforts at reformulating their ethnic identity in the urban context can thus be considered as an affirmation of the group’s corporate capabilities.

In the near future, the dynamism of Mananges may be put to yet another test, in the form of global warming. The glaciers of Manang have retreated dramatically during the last 40 years, signifying that a substantial climatic change is unfolding in the mountains. As yet, Mananges have not suffered from this, and neither have other peoples in the Trans Himalayan valleys. But a serious threat to local food production may occur if irrigation channels dry up. If the line of snow accumulation creeps upwards from around 5700 meters at present, to 6500 meters, glaciologists warn that an estimated two thirds of the glacial area of the Himalayas may disappear, if present rates of precipitation are constant. Such a scenario will of course have disastrous effects not only in the Himalayas itself, but in those vast areas of South Asia which are drained by the Indus, the Ganges, and the Brahmaputra.

But on the other hand, we should be careful not to repeat the apocalyptic predictions of some years ago. In 1979, the World Bank stated that …”Nepal has lost half of its forest cover within a thirty year period and by AD 2000 no accessible forests will remain” (cited in Ives 2005: 231). The forests have survived, and somehow the dynamic and innovative peoples of the high valleys will probably also be able to overcome climatic changes.

References:

Aase T.H & Vetaas O.R. 2007: Risk Management in Trans-Himalayan Farming. Communal Decision Making in Manang Valley of Central Nepal. To be published in *Human Ecology*

Bohle H.G and Adhikari J. 1998: Rural Livelihoods at Risk: How Nepalses farmers cope with food insecurity. *Mountain Research and Development* Vol 18 No 4, 321-332

Blaikie P.M., Cameron J., Seddon J.D. 2001: *Nepal in Crisis. Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery*. Adroit Publishers, Delhi

Cohen A. 2004 (1969): *Customs and Politics in Urban Africa*. Routledge, London

Dumont L. 1980: *Homo Hierarcicus. The Caste System and its Implications*. Chicago Univ. Press, Chicago

Fernandez J. W. 1986: *Persuasions and Performances. The Play of Tropes in Culture*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington

Goffman E. 1959: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books, New York

Gurung H. 1980: *Vignettes of Nepal*. Sajha Prakashan, Kathmandu

Gurung H. 2004: *Mountain Reflections*. Mandala Book Point, Kathmandu

Ives, J.D. 2006 (2004): *Himalayan Perceptions. Environmental change and the well-being of mountain peoples.* Routledge, Abingdon

Jodha N.S. 2005: Economic Globalisation and its Repercussions for Fragile Mountains and Communities in the Himalayas. In Huber U.M. et al. (eds): *Global Change and Mountain Regions*, 583-591. Springer Press, the Hague

Khanal N.R. and Watanabe T. 2006: Abandonment of land and its consequences. *Mountain Research and Development* Vol 26 No 1:32-40.

Massey D. 2005: *For Space* SAGE, London

Robertson R. & Chirico J. 1985: Humanity, Globalization, and Worldwide Religious Resurgence: A Theoretical Exploration. In *Sociological Analyses* 46:3 219-242.

Robertson R. 1992: *Globalisation. Social Theory and Global Culture*. SAGE Publ. London

Rogers, C. 2004: *Secrets of Manang. The story behind the phenomenal rise of Nepal's famed business community.* Mandala Book Point, Kathmandu

Sharma C.K. 1981 (1976): *Landslides and soil erosion in Nepal*. Navana Printing, Calcutta.

Van Spengen W. 1987: The Nyishangba of Manang: Geographical Perspectives on the Rise of a Nepalese Trading community. *Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies* vol XIII no 3-4 132-277. Kathmandu

Veblen T. 1899: *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Macmillan, New York