

The Transformation of Sherpas and Anthropological Modes of Thought: A Research Note on the Notion of Change in Himalayan Nepal

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Introduction

According to the anthropologist Fredrik Barth, there is a tendency in social anthropology to treat social change “as if it were ... something that may be discussed in addition to, and preferably subsequent to, other substantive fields in the description of social systems.”¹⁾ With the acceleration of globalization, however, it has become impossible for anthropologists to place the notion of change in a secondary position. Even in remote areas of the least developed countries, rural societies have dramatically changed and/or are changing. As if in response to these social changes, anthropological approaches and their modes of thought have also changed. The goal of this paper is to examine social and cultural transformations in a remote area of one of the world’s least developed countries, Nepal, and analyze the modes of thought, especially the notion of change, of anthropologists who have studied these transformations.²⁾

As a case study, I propose to examine the Sherpas of the Khumbu region in Nepal, because they are a typical case of a people who have undergone drastic social change. Moreover, even though their population is less than three thousand,³⁾ many anthropologists have studied the Sherpas and as a result there is a great deal of anthropological literature on them.⁴⁾

Of these, there are three major books which focus on the transformation of the Sherpas.⁵⁾ This paper will compare the approaches of these three books. The first book, *The Sherpas Transformed: Social Change in a Buddhist Society of Nepal*, was written by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf⁶⁾ in 1984; the second, *Sherpas: Reflections on Change in Himalayan Nepal*, was by James F. Fisher⁷⁾ published in 1990; and the last book, *Tigers of the Snow and Other Virtual Sherpas: An Ethnography of Himalayan Encounters*, was by Vincanne Adams⁸⁾ in 1996. In the structural-functionalist tradition, v. Fürer-Haimendorf described what he called the “transformation” as change in society from one of homogeneity, harmony and equilibrium to one of conflict and disintegration caused by the impact of outside forces. He did not conceal his feelings of disappointment and sadness. On the other hand, Fisher tried to describe the changes as the Sherpas themselves saw and experienced them and to let the Sherpas speak for themselves. He ended up by proposing alternative views of change. Unlike these two anthropologists who saw themselves as sympathetic outsiders, Adams recognized herself to be incorporated into the process of change. She focused on the complexity of the reciprocal relationship between Westerners and Sherpas, in which the Sherpas become virtual Sherpas, via the mechanism of mimesis.

This paper will first examine the approaches by these anthropologists. I will examine

the characteristics of each approach in relation to their description of the transformation of the Sherpas, because the character of the approach sometimes emerges from the objects which are described. Second, I will examine and compare the transformation of the theoretical framework of change. The relationships between Sherpas and the West will be highlighted because they are crucial to understand the nature of social change. Third, I will examine the anthropological modes of thought of the three scholars as a backdrop of their notions of change. The concept of authenticity will be critically reviewed.

Three Approaches

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf

The stated purpose of v. Fürer-Haimendorf's book, *The Sherpas Transformed* (1984), is to trace the course of the transformation of the Sherpa society of Khumbu, and to view the present condition against the background of the traditional life (v. Fürer-Haimendorf 1984: xi-xii). "Comparing what he observed in Khumbu in 1953, 1957, 1971 and 1983, he noted that the scene had already greatly changed" by 1971, and that there were "much greater upheavals during the years 1971 and 1983" which brought about "the transformation of Sherpa society." "The basic pattern of the social order" had been altered (ibid.: x).

In order to understand his approach, it is interesting to compare the tables of contents of the book he wrote on the Sherpas in 1964, *The Sherpas of Nepal*, with his 1984 book *The Sherpas Transformed*. The Table of contents of his 1964 book is as follows:

1. Environment and Economy
2. An Open Society
3. The Pattern of Family Life
4. Village Organization
5. Monastic Institutions and Priesthood
6. The Practice of Religion
7. The Control of Invisible Forces
8. Value and Moral Concepts.

At that time, v. Fürer-Haimendorf followed the traditional composition of ethnography. Twenty years later his approach has hardly changed as can be seen from the Table of contents of *The Sherpas Transformed* (1984):

1. Environment and Economy
2. The Sherpa Society
3. Sex, Marriage Patterns and Family Life
4. Village Organization
5. The Impact of Tourism and Social Change
6. Buddhist Institutions and Practices
7. Morality and Social Values
8. Social Economic Change Among the Rolwaling
9. The Buddhist Community of Tashi Gompa

Although Sherpas society had been subject to drastic change, the composition of the

second book is almost the same as the first, adding only two chapters on social change. This implies that although the social system had been transformed, his framework of study or analysis remained unchanged. This consistency may be attributed to the limitation of his methodology, which I will examine later.

As factors which transformed Sherpa society, v. Fürer-Haimendorf placed emphasis on tourism, especially mass-tourism, and described the consequent changes. Here I extract the eleven changes which he thought were caused by the impact of tourism.

- (a) The involvement in tourism: more than half of the families of the village were involved in activities of tourism in 1983 (64).
- (b) The loss of virtues: Sherpa honesty, loyalty and hospitality were being eroded (68-9).
- (c) The degradation in cultural consciousness: the Sherpas have become blind to their cultural treasures through the contact with the tourists who have little understanding of the local population and culture (68-9).
- (d) The emigration to Kathmandu: many men have emigrated to the capital for tourism activities (69-71).
- (e) High adult male mortality: often the most enterprising men, who could have become the leaders of future generations, perished in the accidents of mountain expeditions (74-5).
- (f) The increase of international marriage: especially between Sherpa men and Western women (76-7). This and (d) result in the break-up of many families (81).
- (g) The decrease of the production of traditional crafts except for a few items of souvenirs (79-81).
- (h) The improvement of the material standard of living (80).
- (i) The improvement of the condition of diet (80).
- (j) The changes in the type of clothes: many Sherpas now wear down jackets like foreign trekkers (81).
- (k) The decline of population in the area: a fall in fertility, (d), (e) and other factors resulted in this decline (82-3).

Enumerating these changes, v. Fürer-Haimendorf also tried to distinguish the advantages and disadvantages of tourism. As a disadvantage and one of the most serious effects, he pointed out international marriage and regarded it as a factor which tended to corrupt the society and culture of the Sherpas (81-2). A detailed description of these individual cases, however, angered the Sherpas involved (Adams 1996: 57, 267-8).

James F. Fisher

The goal of James Fisher's book, *Sherpas: Reflections on Change in Himalayan Nepal* (1990) was to 'trace the impact on contemporary Sherpa society of modern education and mass tourism and assess the Sherpas' view of their collective future' (Fisher 1990: xxi). Fisher participated in the construction of schools in Khumbu initiated by Sir Edmund Hillary in 1964 and visited Khumbu in 1974, 1978 and 1985-86 (ibid.: xxi).

One of the characteristics of his approach was to place emphasis on the Sherpas'

view on changes taking place in their society. According to Fisher, It is “time to hear directly from the Sherpas themselves.... I attempt throughout to let the Sherpas speak for themselves whenever possible” (xxv).

Another conspicuous characteristic was his inclusion of many attractive photos. Fisher used a total of 120 photographs as an important part of the book in order ‘to document many of the before-and-after phenomena’ and substantial changes which “prose cannot capture.” (xxiv) This was, in other words, a method of letting the photographs speak for themselves.

Another characteristic of his study was to reconsider recent changes in the context of long-term historical changes. Starting from the immigration and settlement of ancestors of the Sherpas, Fisher provided a historical review of the social changes of the Sherpas. Here follows a series of fourteen historical changes which he describes.

1. The migration to Solu-Khumbu some 450 years ago: Sherpas migrated from the eastern Tibetan province of Kham, 1,250 miles away (55).
2. The monopoly on trade with Tibet via the almost-19,000-foot Nangpa La from 1828: Namche Sherpas acquired a monopoly right on this trade in 1828 by a government decision (58).
3. The introduction of the potato around the middle of the nineteenth century: potatoes were introduced and have become the dominant crop, accounting now for 90 percent of all planted fields (59).
4. The second wave of Tibetan immigration after potatoes were introduced in Solu-Khumbu (61).
5. The large growth of the population after potatoes were introduced in Solu-Khumbu: the number of households in Khumbu increased from 169 in 1836 to 596 in 1957 (58).
6. The emigration to Darjeeling: beginning about the 1850s, Sherpas had begun to emigrate to Darjeeling seeking for job opportunities after the British began building roads and tea plantation there (59).
7. The establishment of celibate monasteries in the beginning of the twentieth century: monasteries have been developed and they have had full-time ‘professional’ monks (58). Tengboche monastery, the central monastery of this area, was constructed in 1916 (60).
8. The invasion of China into Tibet and sudden curtailment of trade in 1959: the Chinese invaded Tibet in the 1950s and curtailed trade over the Nangpa La in 1959, the main and only route from Solu-Khumbu to Tibet (63).
9. The enormous influx of refugees since 1959: a number of refugees fled to Khumbu following the flight of the Dalai Lama from Lhasa in 1959 (64). At one point in the early 1960s over 6,000 Tibetan refugees lived in Khumbu, along with the normal Sherpa population of that time of just over 2,200, although only 10 refugee families are now settled in Khumbu (64).
10. Mountaineering expeditions and trekking tourism since the 1950s: mountaineering expeditions started in the 1950s and trekking tourism has developed gradually. The annual number of tourist exceeds more than 6,000 (66).

11. The establishment of schools since 1961: the first elementary school was constructed in Khumbu (66). They brought literacy not in Tibetan but in Nepali and English.
12. The construction of the airstrip in 1964: An airstrip was constructed in 1964 at Lukla shortening the travel time from Kathmandu to Khumbu from two weeks to forty minutes (66).
13. The establishment of a hospital in 1966: a hospital in Khunde was established in 1966. It brought wide-ranging effects such as the virtual elimination of thyroid deficiency diseases such as cretinism and goitre (the incidence of the latter had been more than 90 per cent)(66).
14. The establishment of governmental institutions since the 1960s: the panchayat system was introduced in the 1960s and the Sagarmatha National Park was established in 1975. These effectively ended several centuries of regional political autonomy (66).

Enumerating these historical changes, Fisher showed that Sherpa society was not static, but rather subject to constant historical change. He proposed the notion of a “tradition of change.” (64) Moreover, avoiding value judgments such as the dichotomy of benefits and disadvantages of tourism, instead he distinguished the changes according to the directions in which they result. There are directions of changes regarding Tibet, Nepal, the West, and Sherpaness itself. We will examine his notion of change later.

Vincanne Adams

Adams’s approach is provocative. She asserted that “the whole notion of the Sherpas, hitherto taken for granted in most ethnographies, is troublesome.” (Adams 1996: 33) Examining the Western gaze on the Sherpas, she criticized conventional ethnography and described the “transnational” mechanism of the construction of the Sherpa identity. Instead of the traditional style of ethnography exemplified by v. Fürer-Haimendorf which described various aspects of the social system, she focused “not on Sherpas but on their relationships to people like me who choose to write about and ‘represent’ them.” (25) Therefore she writes “an ethnography of encounters rather than an ethnography of Sherpas.” (25)

In her context, “the West” means “the whole complicated and pluralistic set of relationships Sherpas have had with modernization ... through tourism, development aid, and anthropology.” (11) She treats anthropology as “part of the apparatus of modernization emergent in their lives.” (26) Therefore “the persistent desire among anthropologists to distinguish themselves from development workers, and especially from tourists, breaks down.” (26) She prefers the term transnational to globalization-localization in order to avoid Western ethnocentrism. (35)

Her analytical approach emerged from her relationships with the Sherpas. (11) She began her book writing about the death of the first Nepalese woman who reached the summit of Mount Everest in 1993. When Adams met her husband, she asked why the woman wanted to climb Everest. He answered simply, “she wanted to!” (7) She started asking herself how she could understand this desire. Originally the idea of

climbing a mountain with such a desire belongs to Westerners. She again asks herself why the woman climbed at the risk of her life spending a huge amount of money and how the alien desire was internalized and how her identity was transformed. Adams explores the mechanism of mimesis and proposes what she calls a “virtual theory.”

In this way she explores the mechanism of the emergence of phenomena in which she is also involved. She does not demonstrate the changes of the Sherpas in the way v. Fürer-Haimendorf and Fisher did. We will examine in the next section the relationships with and the mechanism of her “ethnography of encounter” in comparison with those of v. Fürer-Haimendorf and Fisher.

Changing Frameworks of Change

Change as Encroachment

“I cannot veil the feeling of *disappointment* and *sadness* to see this seemingly *ideal society* and life style *transformed by the impact of outside forces* which disrupted the delicately balanced social fabric and undermined the traditional ideology that had dominated Sherpa thinking and conduct for countless generations. Happiness is a phenomenon difficult to measure, but my subjective impression is that the Sherpas I knew in the 1950’s *were happier* than they or their descendants are in the 1980’s.” (v. Fürer-Haimendorf 1986: xi, Italics added)

It seems that v. Fürer-Haimendorf’s notion of change is concentrated in this paragraph. He takes a harmonious and stable ‘traditional society’ for granted. Change means for him the imposition of disturbance from outside,⁹⁾ in this case, the West, and the collapse of the equilibrium of the social system. He simply ‘traces’ the difference which he distinguished between traditional social patterns and the present situation, but fails to demonstrate how Sherpas adapt to change and reconstruct their identity and social system; in other words, v. Fürer-Haimendorf is not concerned with the dynamic mechanism of change. Sherpas are described as passive victims who have suffered from an uncontrollable torrent of changes.

The Tradition of Change

Unlike the conceptual dichotomy of tradition and change held by v. Fürer-Haimendorf, Fisher proposed the concept of “tradition of change.” In this way, he demonstrated that the notion of tradition and change are compatible and can be integrated. For him equilibrium is not static but continuously changing. Moreover he asserted that “Change occurs in the circumvention or shortcutting of tradition, not its elimination or transformation.” (Fisher 1990: 166)

He appreciated the role of schools as an important factor to maintain equilibrium. Sherpas, especially educated Sherpas, are described as active actors coping with change. “It is the schools that ... have enabled Sherpas to exploit the forces of change. Having successfully met the modern world on its own ground, these educated Sherpas have the cultural self-confidence to intensify their ethnic identity.... The schools brought change but also gave Sherpa society the tools to maintain its cultural equilibrium’.” (ibid.: 172-3)

Regarding the directions of change toward which Sherpa society proceeds, Fisher noted areas of Tibetanization, Nepalization, Westernization and the reinforcement of

Sherpahood. He explained the pre-1961 changes as “those of scale and elaboration: more clans, more food, more people, more trade (until it was curtailed in 1959), more lamas, more rituals (and more elaborate rituals), more differentiation (as traders and tax collectors accumulated wealth), more emigration.” (ibid.: 64) These changes are the reinforcement of Tibetness to which Sherpas belong.

Fisher saw the post-1961 changes as those which “intensified Sherpa life and made it ‘more Sherpa’ than ever”. (64) “Instead of self-deprecating, they are proud of their identity. (136) Their Sherpahood has been flaunted by themselves.” (137)

That is because “Westerners have developed a positive image of Sherpas: that of an egalitarian, peaceful, hardy, honest, polite, industrious, hospitable, cheerful, independent, brave, heroic, compassionate people”.(124) Therefore “successful trekking Sherpas realize that they are, in part, paid professional actors and entertainers. They know what clients want and wear masks.” (125) As a consequence of this change, even other ethnic groups, for example Tamangs, frequently try to perform the role of “Sherpa.” He calls this process “Sherpaization.” (137)

In addition, there were changes toward Nepalization and Westernization. The forces pushing the Sherpas in these directions have become stronger because of the overwhelming power of economy and politics. However Sherpas seem to maintain the power of decision whether they accept or not and the “cultural identity that is strongly and exclusively Sherpa.” (136)

The Mechanism of Mimesis

According to Fisher, the only reason Sherpas climb is that they need the high income they cannot earn in any other way. (ibid.: 129) However, this cannot explain the reason why the woman who perished wanted to climb at the risk of her life. Moreover, Fisher asserts that the process of identity reinforcement allows the Sherpa to know “who he/she is.” (166) This sort of discourse was untenable for Adams. Instead, she explored a more complex and dynamic identity construction.

According to Adams, mimesis is “a process of identity construction - the imitation of what is taken to be one’s “natural” self by the Other, through whom one’s constructed identity is made visible to oneself through a variety of representations.” (Adams 1996: 17) A logic of mimesis is as follows: “Sherpas actually give these opportunities to Westerners, being able to mirror Western desires. On the other hand, Sherpas recruit Western Others to become their sponsors (jindak), ‘lifelong’ friends, and supporters who provide them with gifts, money, advice, employment, and more, in response to Western desire to become part of ‘the Sherpa world’. In this process Westerners become mirrors reflecting Sherpa interests and desires.” (ibid.: 9)

Through this mechanism, virtual Sherpas emerge. Virtual Sherpas are taken to be more ‘real’ than reality itself (20). Virtual Sherpas have “no original in the West, only in that which was produced in the relationship between Westerners’ desires and Sherpas’ desires to meet them.” (20) Virtual Sherpas become a “floating signifier.” She calls this series of mechanisms “virtual theory.” (24)

Relationships with Others and Change

The frameworks of these three anthropologists which seek to understand the

changes and relationships between Sherpas and Others are different and seem to be diachronically transformed. (See Figure) (Insert the Figure “Relationships between the Sherpas and the West” her e.)

As to v. Fürer-Haimendorf, the relationship between the West and the Sherpas is almost one-way. The West imposes change on the Sherpas, who are compelled to be transformed as passive victims. Their identity is corrupted. In Fisher, the relationship is two-way. Even though the advent of the West causes overwhelming changes among the Sherpas, they adapt themselves to the circumstances as active participants. Their identity is maintained. In Adams, the relationship is not two-way, but multi-reflective. Both the desires of the Sherpas and the West are projected on each other, and, through the mechanism of mimesis, virtual Sherpas and virtual Westerners emerge, amplifying each other. Sherpas identity and subjectivity are “floating.”

For v. Fürer-Haimendorf, the direction of change is unilinear, which is from the traditional lifestyle to modernity. For him this means the collapse of traditional society. For Fisher, the changes are towards emulating several static models, characterized variously as Tibetization, Nepalization, Westernization and reinforcement of Sherpaness. In Adams, there are no models towards which the Sherpas change. Even though Sherpas mimic “the West,” the object is virtual and floating, depending on the Sherpas themselves.

We should not neglect reciprocal relationships that exist within Sherpa society. In contrast to Haimendorf who emphasizes the dissolution of solidarity among the Sherpas, Adams emphasizes the reconstitution of reciprocal labour relationships. (Adams 1992a) According to her, tourism has provided Sherpas with the opportunities to exploit the traditional “hierarchical form of patron-client relations.” (ibid.:550) Sherpas also use religious and secular rituals during the off-season of tourism to establish or strengthen their work relationships during the tourism season. Through these rituals, reciprocal relationships among the relatives and fictive kins are extended to non-kin relations. (544) In this way Sherpas reconstitute their social relationships and “their own culture of capitalism.” (552)

Anthropological Modes of Thought

Here, following the lead of Adams’ critique, we will review the different anthropological modes of thought regarding change in Sherpa society. According to Adams, “the history of anthropological involvement with the Sherpas is in part a history of attempts to locate authentic Sherpas; in turn it is also a history of anthropological attempts to locate an authentic anthropology.” (Adams 1996: 27) Therefore, “a history of anthropology of the Sherpas follows the discursive genealogy of anthropology itself; Sherpas become something of a mirror of production for ethnography.” (ibid.: 28)

Adams herself is also involved in this history but, after her efforts to locate authentic Sherpas or Sherpa culture, she has reached the conclusion that “Sherpa culture is ... a process of engagement with others like myself, with Westerners” (26) so that “one cannot capture such authenticity because authenticity is always a product of the relationship between observers and observed.” (37)

Although v. Fürer-Haimendorf laments the loss of the original Sherpa, Sherpa

culture is not located “in Sherpas *sui generis* but in the relationships they have with others.” (10-11)

According to Adams, “Haimendorf was interested in documenting a Himalayan peasant life that he thought might well disappear with the changes promised by involvement in a global economy.... Haimendorf looked to the Sherpas to demonstrate the utility of a structural-functionalist approach in ethnography.” (28)

v. Fürer-Haimendorf himself acknowledged his tendency to love and lament. “Anthropologists are supposed to give impartial accounts of the people they study, uninfluenced by the value of their own society and their personal likes and dislikes. I am conscious, however, that it is difficult to follow this rule when re-studying a people one has learnt to love and admire.” (v. Fürer-Haimendorf 1984: xi)

This quote also shows Haimendorf’s adherence to a holistic approach as a structural-functionalist. However we have been led by Adams to query the objectivity and authenticity not only of his re-study but also of his whole studies. His bias as a structural-functionalist and as a Western researcher of his study of the Sherpas should be under scrutiny, examining the mode of his gaze upon Sherpas.

Fisher’s book relocates, according to Adams, “the discourse of anthropology of Sherpas considerably by showing how Sherpas actually engage with a variety of modernizing influences.” (Adams 1996: 33) To what extent, however, has his let-Sherpas-speak-for-themselves method succeeded in grasping and representing the reality?

One problem is his sampling and the style of interview. Surprisingly enough, all the persons interviewed are male and most of them are wealthy. (see Fisher 1990: 154) Though he acknowledges the difference of concerns about the future of Sherpas between interviewer and interviewed, it seems the answers have not gone beyond what the interviewer wanted to ask. (see *ibid.*: 153-161)

Another problem is the “originality” of what the Sherpas have said. One of the persons interviewed in Fisher’s book wrote a book on Sherpa society and culture. But his “selection of categories to detail Sherpa culture reveals mimesis with representations by Westerners.” (Adams 1996: 64) According to Adams, what he says is a “mimetic product.” (65) Noone cannot escape the mechanism of mimesis and virtuality.

His usage of photographs has almost the same problem. The photographs of people laughing reinforce his ‘optimism’ (Mchugh’s word, 1992: 556) that the Sherpa people are confident of themselves and ready to construct their own future.

In short his let-Sherpas-speak-for-themselves method does not escape from the gaze of Fisher, rather it reinforces and empowers the Fisher world giving it ‘greater authenticity.’ (Adams 1996: 69) This could, in turn, lead to the disempowerment of the Sherpas involved. (*ibid.*: 69)

Finally, let us examine the issue of a thorough deconstruction of Sherpaness. Adams poses the possibility that “deconstructing the various versions of Sherpas would empower Sherpas by exposing the creators of such authenticity.” (69) Sherpas may come to know through the deconstructing process how to deal with essentialized authenticity itself. (70) On the other hand, she also acknowledges that “an attempt entirely to deconstruct their ‘essentialized’ identity ... disempowers the Sherpas.” (69-

70) This is because this essentialized authentic identity is a part of the economic and “cultural capital”, which yield profits for them. (70) Therefore she declares that “I do not want to deconstruct entirely the essentialist identity configurations — the sites for authenticity — with which Sherpas and I work.” (70)

This seems to be a typical case of the discourses of “postmodern” scholars which query all authenticities. If no one who has participated in the relations between Sherpas and the West can escape from the mechanism of mimesis, is the only way to do so not to be involved? What does her discourse yield other than a call for a total moratorium?

Conclusion

Sherpas have dramatically changed and the anthropological discourse surrounding Sherpas has also drastically changed. For v. Fürer-Haimendorf, exogenous change has been forced by the sudden encroachment of mass-tourism. He lamented the loss of a harmonious and ideal society. Sherpas were described as passive victims. For Fisher, Sherpas have been changing since their historical immigration and thus they have a tradition of change. Sherpas, especially educated Sherpas, are sturdy enough to meet the changes and construct their own future without the loss of their identity. The changes have directionality; the pre-1961 changes proceeded toward Tibetanization, whereas the post-1961 changes proceed mainly toward the reinforcement of Sherpa-ness. For Adams, there are no presupposed “true” Sherpas and she queries all attempts of anthropology to locate authenticity. She demonstrates the mechanism of mimesis through which a virtual Sherpa and a virtual West are constructed and emerge. Sherpas exist in the relationship between Sherpas and the West and thus we cannot capture “true” Sherpa-ness. Sherpas exploit the image of Sherpa-ness as economic and cultural capital and they themselves are aware of its “constructedness.”

In this way our attempt to understand the transformation of Sherpa society inevitably links with understanding the notions of change and, as their backdrop, anthropological modes of thought. The construction of Fisher’s discourse is inspired by his reflections on v. Fürer-Haimendorf’s. The construction of Adams’s discourse is inspired by her reflections on the former two. Can we call this transformation of the modes of thought an evolution? If Sherpas are a ‘site’ through which anthropological modes of thought are produced, what type of ethnography will emerge in future? Although ethnographies by Sherpas seem to be limited as yet to the mimesis of Western anthropological modes of thought, are there any possibilities for Sherpas to deconstruct previous ones and create a new ethnography beyond their limitations? How can outsiders empower their process of construction/deconstruction? One thing which is certain is that this paper, which raises these questions, is also involved in the transnational process of the transformation of Sherpas in the Himalayas.

Notes

- 1) Barth, Fredrik. (1967). “On the Study of Social Change”. *American Anthropologist*. 69: 661-669. p.661.
- 2) Usually transformation means structural change and I will basically follow this usage. I will examine the conceptual framework later.
- 3) Fisher 1990, 55. The total population of Sherpas throughout Nepal is about 20,000.
- 4) Among the books are Fürer-Haimendorf, Christoph von. (1964) *The Sherpas of Nepal: Buddhist*

Highlanders. Berkeley: University of California Press, (1984) *The Sherpas Transformed — Social Change in a Buddhist Society of Nepal*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers; Ortner, Sherry. (1978) *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1989) *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Paul, Robert. (1982) *The Tibetan Symbolic World: Psychoanalytic Explanation*. Chicago: Chicago University Press; Kunwor, Ramesh Raj. (1987) *Fire of Himal: An Anthropological Study of the Sherpas of Nepal Himalayan Region*. New Delhi: Nirala; Fisher, James F. (ed.) (1978) *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface*. Hague: Mouton; Brower, Barbara. (1991) *Sherpa of Khumbu: People, Livestock, and Landscape*. Delhi: Oxford University Press; Stevens, Stanley F. (1993) *Claiming the High Ground: Sherpas, Subsistence, and Environmental Change in the Highest Himalaya*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; Adams 1996. Among periodical papers are Cox 1985; Fisher 1986a; Draper 1988; Bishop 1989, 1993; Adams 1992a, 1992b and so on.

- 5) A book by Ortner (1989) also focuses on change among the Sherpa society, but it is about historical change in relation to the construction of monarchies.
- 6) Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf established the Department of Anthropology in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is also the author of *Himalayan Traders* (1975) and the editor of *Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon: Anthropological Studies in Hindu-Buddhist Contact Zones* (1966).
- 7) James F. Fisher is Professor of Anthropology at Carleton College. He is also the author of *Trans-Himalayan Traders* (1986b) and the editor of *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface* (1978).
- 8) Vincanne Adams is Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology, History and Social Medicine at the University of California.
- 9) See Smith 1973, Strasser and Randall 1981.