

Mélanie Vandenhelsken

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Current position

Project leader: *Trans-border religion. Re-composing Limbu rituals in the Nepal-Sikkim borderlands*, 2016-2020, funded by the Austrian Science Funds [project P 29805-G24 (2016-2021)].

Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Documentation of Inner and South Asian Cultural History (CIRDIS), Vienna University

Main areas of research

Anthropology, religious institutions and practices, ethnicity, cultural and ritual dynamics, ethnic politics in Sikkim (India, eastern Himalayas)

Academic career

2001-2008: Associate member to the *Centre de recherche sur les civilisations chinoise, japonaise et tibétaine* (UMR CNRS 8155), Paris.

2001-2008: Member of the *Centre d'études et de recherches comparatives en ethnologie* (CERCE, EA 3532), Montpellier 3 University, France.

2002-2005: Part Time University Lecturer, University Paul Valéry, Montpellier3, France.

2006-2008: Project co-leader *Namgyal Institute of Tibetology*, Gangtok, Sikkim, India.

2008-2009: Full time "Temporary Attaché for Teaching and Research", University Lille 1, France.

2008-2010: Member of *Centre d'études et de recherches sociologiques et économiques* (UMR CNRS 8019), Lille 1 University, France.

2010-2015: Researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, project *Social grouping, ethnicity and state in Sikkim. Constructions of social groups and interethnic relationships in a Himalayan State of India* (Austrian Science Funds, directed by Guntram Hazod), Austria.

Conferences and workshops

2017: "'They have turned a deity into a God'. Sanitized religion versus Animism among the Limbu in Sikkim", International Workshop: *Changes and Continuities in the Religious Landscape of Northeast India*, Guwahati (North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati, India, and Department of Estonian et Comparative Folklore et Asian Centre, University of Tartu, Estonie).

2018: "Re-composing rituals across frontiers and boundaries among Limbus in Sikkim and Nepal" (panel *Ritual flows and ruptures in Northeast India*), and convenor of the panel, *Transborder peoples in Northeast India*. Conference: *Locating North-East India: Human Mobility, Resource Flows, and Spatial Linkages*, Université de Tezpur University (Assam, Inde).

2018: "Limbu through the Nepal-Sikkim border: displacing the boundaries to make the community" (panel, *Borders between the Bay of Bengal and the Himalayas: Locating spaces in Northeast India*); and discussant in the panel *Borders and Boundaries in Asia, Borders in South Asia*. Association for Borderlands Studies World Conference 2018, Vienna, Austria.

2018: “Limbu Through the Nepal-Sikkim Border: Displacing the Boundaries to Make the Community”. International Conference, *Borderlands Spaces: Ruins, Revival(s) and Resources*, Asian Borderlands Research Networks, American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

2019: “The Limbu in Sikkim: Part and Resistant to the Kingdom”, fifteen conference of the *International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Paris, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris.

2019: “A community as borderland, the Limbu in Sikkim: Cultural bordering, trans-border mobility and national belonging” (panel *Connectivity, Mobility and Borders: Continuity and Change in Northeast India*). *11th International Convention of Asia Scholars* (Leiden University, GIS Asie et IIAS), Leiden, Netherland.

2019: “Mobile goods, cheap labour, and illegal settlement: Experiencing transnationalism in the Nepal-Sikkim borderland”. Yearly conference of the *Swiss Anthropological Association* (« The Global as Method: Ethnographic Scales in the 21st century »), Geneva.

2020: keynote address “Land and Citizenship in Sikkim: Ethnicity, Inequalities, Rights and Exclusion”, international conference *Land, Labour and Nation in Contemporary South Asia: Claims and Contestation*, Department of Political Sciences, Dibrugarh University, Assam.

Publications

Edited book

2018: Vandenhelsken, M., Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, M., & Karlsson, B. G., *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian Studies*. Delhi, Oxford: Routledge

Edited special issues

2020: Vandenhelsken, M., “Ancestrality, Migration, Rights and Exclusion: Citizenship in the Indian State of Sikkim”, *Asian Ethnicity*, online 2020; final publication: March 2021.

2016: Vandenhelsken, M., Bengt G. Karlsson, and Jürgen Schopf, “Fluid Attachments in Northeast India”, *Asian Ethnicity*, vol. 17, no. 3.

Peer-reviewed journal articles

2009/2010 (published in 2016). “Reification of Ethnicity in Sikkim: ‘Tribalism’ in progress”, *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Special Issue: *The Dragon and the Hidden Land: Social and Historical Studies on Sikkim and Bhutan*, edited by S. Mullard, vol. 45 no. 2 (2009), vol. 46 issue 1 (2010), pp. 161-194.

www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/bot

2011: “The Enactment of Tribal Unity at the Periphery of India. The political Role of a new Form of the Panglhapsol Buddhist Ritual in Sikkim”, *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, vol. 38, pp. 81-118.

<http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/ebhr/index.php?selection=38>

2016. “The Politics of ethnicity amongst the Limbu in Sikkim: literary development, religious reforms and the making of the community”, *Irish Journal of Anthropology*, Special Issue: *Emerging Adivasi and Indigenous Studies II – Identity Assertions and Symbolic Re-appropriations in India*, edited by L. Guzy and M. Carrin, vol. 19 no. 2, pp. 69-83.

<http://anthropologyireland.org/ija/archives>

2019: co-authored with Martin Gaenzle, “Limbu: Limbu Religion and the Remaking of the Community”, in Marine Carrin, Michel Boivin, Gérard Toffin, Paul Hockings, Raphaël Rousseleau, Tanka Subba, et Harald Lambs-Tyche (éds), *Encyclopedia of the Religions of the Indigenous People of South Asia Online*, Leiden : Brill ;

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2665-9093BEROCOM032248>.

2020. "Introduction: Ancestrality, Migration, Rights and Exclusion: Citizenship in the Indian State of Sikkim", *Asian Ethnicity*, Special Issue: *Ancestrality, Migration, Rights and Exclusion: Citizenship in the Indian State of Sikkim*, edited by M. Vandenhsken, online 2020: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2020.1802575>.

2020. Co-authored with Buddhi L. Khamdhak. "Loyalty, Resistance, Subalterneity: A History of Limbu 'Participation' in Sikkim", *Asian Ethnicity*, Special Issue: *Ancestrality, Migration, Rights and Exclusion: Citizenship in the Indian State of Sikkim*, edited by M. Vandenhsken, online 2020: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2020.1763777>).

2020. "The 1961 Sikkim Subject Regulation and 'Indirect Rule' in Sikkim: Ancestrality, Land Property and Unequal Citizenship", *Asian Ethnicity*, Special Issue: *Ancestrality, Migration, Rights and Exclusion: Citizenship in the Indian State of Sikkim*, edited by M. Vandenhsken, online 2020: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2020.1801338>).

2020 (in press). "Transformations in Buddhist Institutions in Sikkim." in Brill's *Encyclopedia of the Religions of Indigenous People of South Asia*.

2020 (in press). "'Ils ont transformé la divinité Yuma en Dieu !' Recompositions religieuses et dissensions chez les Limbu du Sikkim ». In *Mobilités Territoires et Pouvoirs en Himalaya, Dialogues posthumes avec Philippe Sagant*, edited by Gisèle Krauskopff, Paris: Ateliers d'Anthropologie.

Book chapters

2018: "Ethnographic study and cultural production in Sikkim". In *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian Studies*, edited by Vandenhsken, M., Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, M., & Karlsson, B G. Delhi, Oxford: Routledge, pp. 89-106.

2018: "Identifications, State Categorizations, and Religious Changes among Sikkimese Gurungs". In *Global Nepalis, Religion, Culture, and Community in a New and Old Diaspora*, edited by David N. Gellner & Sondra L. Hausner. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 49-79.