Parallel landscapes: ritual and political values of a shamanic soul journey

Tamu (Gurung) shamanic practice is linked to the landscape in a multi-dimensional physical and conceptual relationship. Simultaneously the setting for ritual practice and the site of ordinary activities, the shamanic landscape also incorporates the historic map of the ancestral world. Shamanic journeys reach upwards from the town and villages towards the uplands (hyê) just like the trails of people.

In this chapter I examine how aspects of the ritual landscape of the Tamu pachyu and klehri shamans of west-central Nepal have become accessible to non-shamans and thereby involved in a wider discourse about history and identity. I explain how the conceptual landscape of a shamanic journey has been made physically explicit and why urban-dwelling Tamu activists have chosen to re-enact the shamans' ritual journey on the ground. The shamanic landscape thereby becomes known in another sense and becomes mapped in a particular way, metamorphosing into a landscape in which to enact meaning, a potential pilgrimage site, a place where the past is embodied and an arena in which new identities are constructed.

The shamanic journey discussed in this chapter is the soul journey made by the pachyu shamans at the pwe laba funeral rite. The purpose of the journey is to escort the soul(s) of the dead to the Afterworld. The journey begins at the house of the deceased. It then takes a northerly route across a physical landscape which is known by local people either from first-hand experience or from stories. The journeys of shamans from different villages travel along diverse routes but eventually merge in the high pastures of Thurju. From there they collectively follow a trail across the Annapurna and Lamjung Himal into Manang district. The trail eventually ascends the dome-shaped rock of Wable to a landscape in a northern world which is known to shamans but which no one has seen in the ordinary sense. The supposed historic migration route is paralleled in reverse by the routes of the shamanic journeys to the land of origin which is widely believed to be somewhere in 'Mongolia'.
In this multi-dimensional landscape past and present, history, and ritual interact in different and overlapping temporal frameworks. A stone resting place (*nhe*) may simultaneously be a place-name on the ritual journey, the scene of a historic battle, a place where the soul(s) (*plah*) rests en route to the Afterworld and a resting place for shepherds. This parallel geography serves to pattern and contextualise both history and contemporary activity. The resting place is not only the focus of historical memory but also of more recent memories such as the site of an archaeological investigation and the place “where we made a video last year”.

Thus the journey referred to in this chapter is a journey in two senses. Firstly, it refers to the shamans’ ritual journey.5 Secondly, it refers to a physical journey on foot which corresponds to the shamans’ journey. A primary concern of this paper is to understand the correspondence between these two journeys.

There is an important political dimension to this. The parallel between shamanic and historical geography has only become explicit to the Tamu-mai since the restauration of democracy in Nepal in 1990. The *Jana Āndolan* (People’s Movement) created new possibilities for organisation and discourse among the people who call themselves *janajāti* (ethnic minorities or minority nationalities), and *ādivāsi* (indigenous peoples). Much of this new discourse relates to their position within the nation state, their desire to negotiate a new relationship to the state and to enjoy new rights within it. The demands of the present are based on the realities of today and the experiences of the past, experiences which are being carefully examined from the perspective of the long-term effects that they have had on the *janajāti*. This process of re-examination is taking place on many levels and, in talking to a wider national forum, the Tamu-mai are also talking to themselves. The prime topics of discussion include the question of historical origin, the hotly contested issue of hierarchy between the *Kugi* and *Sōgi* (*Sorājāt* and *Cārjāt* in Nepali) clan groups, the effects of Hinduisation and incorporation into the Hindu state, the religion(s) of the Tamu-mai, the preservation of language and loss of culture. This discourse has led, in the post-āndolan years, to the foundation of a plethora of new ethnic organisations.

One such organisation is the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh (Tamu Religious and Cultural Organisation)6 which was founded in Pokhara in 19907. Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh’s (TPLS) self-appointed mandate is to preserve and revitalise Tamu cultural traditions and in particular the shamanic traditions of the *pachyu* and *klehbri* and the ‘*bonist*’ *lama*.8 It is concerned with shamanic interpretations of the past, the effects of Hinduisation and status relationships between the clans. While a significant number of other Tamu organisations exist, including the national Tamu organis-
isation Tamu Chọj Dhī, the Kaski district organisation Tamu Dhī and the Buddhist organisations Bauddha Arghaun Sadan and Tamu Bauddha Sewā Samitī, TPLS is the only organisation which is directly concerned with shamanic religion and its position as such is uncontested. Its stance on the relationships between the clans, however, while widely supported at an overt level, is contested, often covertly, by those Tamu-mai who perceive a hierarchical relationship to exist.

Urbanisation, Nepalisation and an ever-infringing global world have led to both a real and perceived situation of culture loss. This is particularly evident in the towns where few of the second-generation urban-dwellers can speak the Tamu language and where among some there is a degree of uncertainty about "how to do things the Tamu way". This is matched by a decline in the overall number of practising shamans and difficulty in recruiting young people to train as apprentices. From the TPLS's perspective loss of culture also refers to the threat to the shamanic traditions of the Pye-tå Lhu-tå from Tibetan Buddhism, which is becoming increasingly popular among the Tamu-mai. Buddhism is viewed by many Tamus as an international, modern, 'respectable',10 literate tradition. Unlike Hinduism, in which official positions are not available to the Tamu-mai, young Tamus can train to be Buddhist monks or nuns. Of particular concern to shamans and their supporters is the increasing substitution of Tibetan Buddhist-trained lamas for shamans in the performance of the core ritual — the three day pwe laba death ritual.

The movement to save culture11 spearheaded by TPLS envisages culture as something that links past and present. The cultural practices of the present are perceived to be continuities with the past. As culture requires saving in the present, it requires locating in the past. In other words it requires 'proper' interpretation — the provision of representations which counter the prevailing Hinduised version of history. History-making concerns the experiences of life today. "The past is only useful as it sheds meaning on the problems of the present" (Rappaport 1990: 179). To address the past is to address the present in a particular way.

The construction of personal and social identity is intimately tied to historical representation. For my Tamu informants, identities are being constructed and reconstructed on the basis of shamanic knowledge and practices which link past and present, ancestors and descendants, the shamanic and the non-shamanic worlds. Identities are tied to a landscape which is simultaneously shamanic, historic, and contemporary. This landscape extends north to the land of origin, south to the Himalaya and along the migration trails to a world beyond Nepal, to identities which are eminently non-Hindu.
History-making provides not only fertile ground for the construction of identity, but is the as yet unpainted portrait of our future. As Tonkin (1992: 1) notes, we, "try to shape our futures in the light of past experience — or what we understand to have been past experience — and representing how things were, we draw a social portrait, a model which is a reference list of what to follow and what to avoid."

By focusing on particular images of the past, contemporary interests draw attention to the effects of Hinduisation, and in particular to the Brahmanical interpretation of social organisation which led to one section of Tamu society being constructed as 'superior' and the other as 'inferior'. By drawing attention to these issues the desire is to change the ideology of hierarchy in the present, and to ensure that relations of power are different in the future. As Rappaport (1990: 15) writes, "History is a question of power in the present, not of detached reflection upon the past. It can serve to maintain power, or can become a vehicle for empowerment".

By controlling the past there is the possibility of defining the future. There is also the potential for constructing images which give impetus to action in the present, which empower and can be directly opposed to those which oppress. Thus, shamanic images from the past can be posited against Buddhist images of the present and each becomes more reified in the process. Images of a past in which hierarchy was negotiated primarily on Tamu terms, can be opposed to a past (and present) in which hierarchy was negotiated on terms which were introduced from outside. Images of an ancestral world which was characterised by 'healthy culture' can be held in opposition to those of a present which is characterised by 'unhealthy culture'.

The question of the Tamu past is a complex one. While most Tamu-mai consider that their origins lie in the north and that they are a 'Mongolian people', there are those who do not accept this interpretation, and suggest that they are descended from both Indo-Aryan and 'Mongolian' settlers. The issue of origins is closely related to the effects of Hinduisation and the writing of 17th and 19th century Hindu-authored genealogies, which postulated a mixed Indo-Aryan and 'Mongolian' origin, and portrayed one group of clan lineages (the Sūgī) as being 'superior' to another (the Kugi).

In the absence of documented sources the present re-examination of Tamu history is proceeding along different lines of enquiry (see Des Chene 1996: 117). This includes the search for evidence of Tamu kingdoms, the re-evaluation of the place of the Tamu-mai in the Hindu kingdoms, the study of language and the study of religious history. The last of these is the approach taken by members of the TPLS.
Tamu shamans are considered by many to be experts in indigenous knowledge and understandings of the past. What they know about Tamu history is based on knowledge contained within the chanted oral texts\(^\text{13}\) (**pye**) including those such as the *Töhdii* which narrates the downward migration of the Tamu-mai. This route is retraced in reverse during the shamans' soul journey in the *pwe laba*.

In August 1992 I accompanied members of the TPLS on their expedition northward along this route through the districts of Kaski, Lamjung, Manang and Mustang. Although this was the first major expedition organised by TPLS, it was not the first exploratory journey into the ancestral/shamanic landscape. An earlier journey along part of this route was undertaken in 1990 by TPLS founder members Yarjung Tamu and Balasing Tamu. While the ideal of the 1992 journey would have been to travel the length of the entire migration journey, in practice it was only possible to trace that section of the journey which lies within the borders of Nepal. The lower portion of the route followed was that of the shamans from the village of Yangjakot. This route was chosen as several of the TPLS participants were from Yangjakot and one of the organising members of the group was *pachyu* shaman Yarjung Tamu.

Although the TPLS participants knew that most of the geographic places on the route existed, they hoped that the trek would provide concrete (experiential but non-shamanic) confirmation and documentation of their existence. The journey was therefore not only of spiritual importance, but also of emotional, historical and political importance. It was simultaneously a pilgrimage to sacred places and a journey into the past. More importantly, it was a quest for origins — origins which are perceived to be in Mongolia and intimately tied to the shamanic traditions. Oral texts narrate both the northern-directed soul journeys and the downward migration. Thus, it was not only the oral texts which were under scrutiny, but also the entire orientation of the shamanic world.

The TPLS trip members, none of whom had visited more than a few places on the proposed route, were very conscious of the political nature of their venture. They knew that a successful trip would place them in a much better position to address questions of the past and the cultural embeddedness of the Pye-tä Lhu-tä. There was much use of the term “proof” and on several occasions I heard people saying that they were “going to get proof”. “Proof” referred to verification of the historical migration route as well as the shamanic journeys. Not surprisingly, the trip received considerable attention, particularly in Pokhara.
1. The journey to the land of the ancestors

August, 1992.

We leave Pokhara early on the morning of the 9th of August. We are a group of sixteen – eight participants (seven TPLS members, two of whom are shamans, and myself), one guide, five porters and two cooks. Our first night is spent in Yangjakot, and the second at the site of the ancestral village of Khuīdu. Khuīdu marks the metaphorical start of our journey. By leaving the forests at Krapu...
Pachyu Chiba (Head Shaman) Yarjun Tamu and Guide Damarsingh Tamu at Kohla, 1992
behind, we have passed beyond the landscape of the village, and into a landscape which is pervaded with memories of the past. There is a sense of excitement and anticipation. The landscape takes on a different meaning. It is no longer primarily a place to perform the daily activities of cutting wood or bamboo, it is an ancestral world waiting to be revealed. It is, however, a selective ancestral world. The search is for a ‘pure Tamu past’, Tamu villages and evidence of Tamu habitation.

On our third morning we see the historic village of Kohla for the first time, a small, distant, un-treed area amidst the heavily forested south-facing slopes of the Lamjung Himal. We share the view with travellers from the Lamjung villages who are on pilgrimage to the lake of Dudh Pokhari, young girls holding large bunches of alpine flowers who demand to be photographed against the backdrop of the Annapurna and Lamjung Himal. Bhovar, Yarjung and I linger behind, talking, filming. We catch up with the group at Chikrei — our first sight of the ancestral villages at close hand. We clamber around the ruins at Chikrei, Khusiman runs past me with a measuring tape. As he passes he shouts “it’s five meters long, didi [‘older sister’]”. Yarjung comments that he thinks that Chikrei was a Kromchhāí village. Hom Bahadur thinks otherwise: “it was probably a mixed village, with people from different clans”. There is some discussion about Chikrei’s place in historical chronology. Yarjung states that Chikrei is an older village than Kohla, then he corrects himself “no, it was after Kohla”.

On the fourth night we make camp in a dismal monsoon downpour above the tree line at Naudi Pak. In the early hours of the next morning we hike down to Kohla. I know of its importance. I had been told many times “that it was the last joint village before the Tamu-mai split into smaller groups and moved down”. I have heard the village referred to in the shamans’ pye and have read a description by an anthropologist who had visited briefly twenty years ago. I was, however, not expecting what we found — the standing ruins of a very large village. With notebooks, measuring tapes, cameras and a video we move through the ruins recording what we can see despite the high monsoon overgrowth. It is decided that one of the large houses must have been the “Ghale king’s house”, the standing stone to its side, “the stable”. We cannot locate the cemetery, but when Yarjung starts to get pre-trance sensations after touching some large stones, people say “that’s probably the cemetery or a place where rituals used to take place. The ancestors are near here — that is why Thagu [eldest son] feels shaky”.
As the *pachyu* and *klehbri pye* refer to Kohla, it is decided that a few minutes of video should be filmed of both *pye* being chanted. A suitable backdrop of trees and buildings is selected and Ba Klehbri, positioned in front of the camera, chants the *klehbri pye*. It is then Yarjung’s turn to chant the *pachyu pye*. He refuses, saying “I can’t, if I do I will go into trance, I am already shaking”. Instead I interview Hom Bahadur: “How does it feel to be in Kohla?” — “Great, it’s our old village, the place of our ancestors”. He follows this up with “I think that we should get people up here with shovels to dig the place up and put the proof in the *kohibo*”. I remark “if anyone is going to dig it up there should be archaeologists involved”. As we leave the village Yarjung comments “we are going to the area where Pakreī [shamanic protective deity] prowls, I’ll become *klhye kahba* [tranced]. Its OK becoming *klhye kahba* in a ritual, because then I need the protection of Pakreī in my body, but up here I don’t like it. When I’m shaking things get broken or lost. I get worried about who will look after me”.

We walk for hours in a steady downpour through a landscape devoid of trees. We get lost briefly and someone comments, “I think that the ancestors aren’t happy with us. We visited them in Kohla but we didn’t burn any herbs for them”. In the fading light of dusk, but before we reached Pakreī, Yarjung becomes *klhye kahba*. Khusiman and I fumble in his pack for his herbs, spilling them all in the process. We build a fire and Yarjung, still shaking, sits in front of it inhaling the herbs and reciting *ngo* [incantations].

We spend two nights at Thurju, fighting for space in the shepherds’ huts, in competition with hundreds of pilgrims who are en route to nearby Dudh Pokhari. Some of our group join the pilgrims and visit the lake; others say “I don’t need to go, it’s a Hindu place”. We cross into Manang district by cutting through the mountains, up and over Yekre, where the souls of those who are dying “prowl” in the hours and moments before death. In Manang our route takes on an added dimension. As well as being the trail of the shamanic soul journey, the ancestors’ migration route and the salt trade route, it becomes other peoples’ trails — an important tourist route, the trail down which the Buddhism-spreading Tibetan refugees travelled, a route dotted with small Tibetan and Tamu villages. Tamu deities, shamans and ancestors thus share their landscape with foreign hikers, Buddhist lamas, Tibetans, and Brahmans from Kathmandu imported to run the local bureaucracy.

At Wable, in the shadow of the large dome rock which the dead ascend to reach the Afterworld, and in competition with the noise of the fast flowing Marsyandi river, the group practice the singing and dancing of the *pachyu serga*
The serga sends the deceased to the Afterworld in the pué laba. The section referring to the local landscape will be sung at Myju Deurali, the site of an ancestral village, and the point on the route where the human trail goes to the left and the trail of the dead goes to the right [up and over Wable]. The two Tamang cooks look on with mild amusement. At Myju the construction of the deurāli begins. Yarjung, assisted by Bhovar, chisels out the initials 'TPLS' on a piece of flat stone, to be placed in front of the deurāli "for remembrance, so that everyone can see that the TPLS was here in 1992".\textsuperscript{16} The group — the TPLS members, the porters, the guide \textit{and} the two Tamang cooks — form a circle and the serga begins, at first a little falteringly and then with gusto. I have been given instructions to take both close and long shots and some photographs. Afterwards, Indra Bahadur and Yarjung provide explanations for the video audience. One narration is done in English, the other in Tamu Kyui. A group photograph, or rather a series of photographs so that everyone gets included, are taken. As we continue our journey we pass the villages that are listed in the pye, "where our ancestors lived". The list corresponds to that given in the texts; landscape corroborates the shamanic version of the past. The ancestors, however, have left little trace of their habitation. The contemporary villages are all Tibetan. The landscape, at this point, is more ancestral and less shamanic.

\textit{Performing the serga at Myju Deurali, 1992}
Wable marked the forking of the ways. The separation of routes, however, does not mean the abandoning of the shamanic. The landscape is populated by gods that can be beckoned by contemporary Tamu shamans who live on the other side of the Himal. The valleys leading to Torang La Pass, which is famed and feared by trekkers, are inhabited by Tamu gods. With the Pass in the background, Yarjung, sitting on a large stone in front of the camera, chants the *pye* which refers to the area, a list of gods and a description of an area which is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, a landscape which he ‘flies’ over but walks through ‘sight’ unseen. Crossing the Pass the following morning we look down, in the early hours of the dawn, on a landscape which incorporates the famous Hindu pilgrimage site of Muktinath.

A high point of the expedition is the side-trip to the village of Lupra (Lipro Mharso in the *pye*), a place of past learning for the *klehbris*. Today’s village is inhabited by Tibetan-speaking people who have no memory of the *klehbris* and are bemused by the group’s earnest enquiries. We are taken to see the *gompa* [Buddhist monastery]. Excitedly Jang Bahadur, Ba Klehbri, Yarjung and Khusiman examine the painted deities on the ceiling, which bear a great resemblance to those on the *klehbri urgyan* ['crown']. As Yarjung films the images he narrates the names of the gods to the camera. As we leave the *gompa* someone points to a miniature iron bird that is suspended just above eye-level and cries “look, it’s just like the *klehbri* bird”. Bhovar questions the villagers: “where did this come from?”, “what do you think it is?”, but the locals have no idea. We are told of an old monastery which is on the other side of the ridge behind the village. There is talk of sending myself and a couple of others up to video and photograph it, but there is no time. We leave. There is a distinct, but unspoken awareness that our excitement is not shared by the locals, a certain disappointment that they do not realise how “important and historic their village is”. At a distance from the village Ba Klehbri chants the *pye* which refers to Lipro Mharson. Lipro is ‘reclaimed’ for the Tamu-mai.

We reach Jomsom. To the locals we are just another group of tourists looking for accommodation. We decide to press on. Time, money and supplies are beginning to run short. There are only a brief few minutes in which to video and chant the *pye* of the village of Thini [Thini Kyhalsô in the *pyel*]. We are now in Thakali country. In Tukche we buy apples for friends and families and hire a porter to carry them. The landscape is less familiar, of less interest. We have become more like tourists and less like pilgrims.
By the 14th day we have entered a more familiar landscape. We pass the large waterfall of Maiwha Chhara which is mentioned in the pye of Prōprō. The pye tells of how the mō [demons] who live in the fall used to be able to change into people. One day a ritual was held in the village and all the pots and pans were laid out. During the ritual a ladle was stolen and since that day the mō have not been able to change into people. According to Yarjung a “king and queen still live in the waterfall”. The local people have a similar story. We approach an old man weaving a bamboo basket. “Do you ever hear the sound of bells and drums coming from the waterfall?” asks Yarjung. “Yes we do”, replies the old man. On the morning of the 17th day we reach Baglung. The new Chinese-built road to Pokhara is closed — a landslide. In the afternoon we finally manage to get a truck which will take us to Pokhara. In slanting rain, huddled under sheets of plastic, we perch atop the Chinese truck. Through the rain, and between the hairpin bends of the new road, we pass the familiar villages of Birethanti, Naya Phul, Lumle. At Dhampus, Yarjung says “My father had a bad fight with witches in that village about 30 years ago”. It is almost dusk when we finally reach Pokhara.

We meet the following day — to celebrate, to apologise should we have offended each other in the difficult circumstances of the trip, to thank the porters, guide and cooks, and to watch the video. We have received messages of congratulations from many people and requests to watch the video. We have been to the land of the ancestors and have returned.

The expedition recounted above is the second in the chronology of Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh journeys into the land of the ancestors. It formed the basis for the construction of new historical narratives, and as “our 1992 trek”, it has become part of the history that it was designed to create.

Following this trip, TPLS members asked me to make contact with archaeologists who could help with a research project on the archaeology and ethno-history of the village of Kohla and other ancestral villages. Out of this request the Kohla Project for Archaeology and Ethno-History developed as a collaborative venture between University of Cambridge researchers and the TPLS.

The project has completed two seasons of survey and in conjunction with His Majesty’s Government of Nepal, Department of Archaeology has received permission to undertake three seasons of excavation at the village of Kohla beginning in 2000. The first survey, conducted at Kohla in 1994, was in many ways a repeat of the 1992 journey. Although there are at least three possible routes to Kohla the orig-
inal route through the village of Yangjakot was chosen (see map). This choice was made because several ruined villages, which required archaeological investigation, had been identified on this trail en route to Kohla in 1992. It was also chosen because it was the route of the ritual journey of the Yangjakot shamans. One of the co-directors of the Kohla Project is Yarjung Tamu, a Pokhara-based Yangjakot shaman. Of importance to the archaeologists was the fact that Yarjung’s oral texts provided information about the sites of the ancestral villages between Yangjakot and Kohla.

The later expeditions of the project, although designed to be research ventures, are viewed by locals as direct descendants of the 1992 trip. Although the journeys into the shamanic landscape are seen to be interlinked they have not become institutionalised. Rather the process is triggered each time a research expedition takes place. Like the earlier trek the research journeys have become caught up in narratives in which past and present are closely intertwined. They have become events which are undertaken by different actors with different agendas.

Chief archaeologist and co-director of the project Christopher Evans (1999: 441) describes the journey:

"'Delegation walking' lies at the core of the venture... Marked by much ceremony and often 'parade-like', the march is something of a community event. Reminiscent of expeditions from an earlier era, all supplies and equipment must be portered-in involving the hire of ten-twenty men. The team is accompanied by various members of the TPLS and, whilst in the field, visits are made to the sites by various seniors (and shamans) from both villages and Pokhara. Such walking of the route itself serves as an act of cultural/historical reclamation."

Archaeological research has plotted new routes into the landscape of the ancestors. The land has been re-mapped but in a different way and the archaeological maps do not always coincide with the existing interpretations. The new maps provided by the archaeologists have expanded indigenous understandings of the landscape and have also provided new material for interpretation. That the scripts are somewhat different has to date been relatively unimportant, although it has been the source of much discussion. The interpretations co-exist in simultaneously overlapping and separate domains. Local people and archaeologists talk both to each other and past each other. What is important is the journey, for it is the journey which provides the context and opportunity for interpretation and the construction of narratives. My initial role as a broker for the project has continued and much of what I do as the anthropologist on the project is to act as an interpreter.
What I interpret includes the usual range of language and cultural meaning but also includes mediating between different modes of thinking, knowledge and interpretation as shamans, local people and foreign archaeologists engage in an ongoing dialogue about the Tamu past.

The encounter with archaeology has generated a degree of accessibility to a previously closed ancestral world. The emotionality of journeying into the landscape of the ancestors (and conversely the landscape of the ritual journey) is further enhanced by actual physical contact with the ancestors’ material culture. Unlike the original TPLS journey, the range of people who can at some level participate, who can ‘touch and be touched’, is very wide. The first archaeological expedition’s return to Pokhara attracted a wide audience to the kohibo who came to ‘look and feel’. As Evans notes (ibid: 442), strongly-felt emotions were evoked:

“The presentation of artefacts evokes enthusiasm and weeping (particularly a fingerprint-impressed sherd — the ‘imprint of the ancestors’).”

Journeying, of the type undertaken by the TPLS on their 1992 trek, is an attempt to show that the places mentioned in the pye do exist, and thus prove the historical ‘authenticity’ of the shamanic version of history, which can be counterposed against what now appears as the historical ‘inauthenticity’ of the Hinduised ver-
sion. This perspective is informed by moral overtones — the righting of wrongs and the separation of ‘pure’ from ‘impure’. Geography fosters a moral continuity with the past. Landscape and morality are linked in a manner that is reminiscent of that described by Basso (1984: 19–55) for the western Apache. Among the Apache, moral narratives are constructed in landscape. One does not necessarily need to hear the stories but only to see or remember the landscape of the stories: “the moral significance of geographical locations... is established by historical tales with which the locations are associated” (ibid: 44). What is different in the Tamu case is that the encoding of morality in landscape is based not on historical tales but on narratives constructed in the present, but which relate to the landscape and memories of the past. It is also different in that it concerns historical morality rather than everyday conduct. Through landscape, a ‘moral’ shamanic practice and an ‘immoral’ Hinduism can be diametrically opposed. The shamanic is the part of history which has to do with the journey and a ‘moral’ Tamu past. Hinduism has to do with an ‘immoral’ post-genealogy history.

Landscape and morality are linked through the ancestors. The landscape must be negotiated in a particular way — to be disrespectful to the land is potentially to be disrespectful to the ancestors. To simultaneously pay respect to ancestors and manage the pragmatics of everyday life requires constant negotiation. The situation is similar to that described by Turner (1974: 182–83) for pilgrims. As the pilgrim moves away from home, s/he becomes increasingly sacralised as s/he meets shrines and sacred places and objects, and increasingly secularised as s/he must cope with the difficult practical demands of everyday life in a strange and temporary place. Those who journey confront problems created by this juxtaposition of roles. Sometimes the subtle balance is lost. As I showed in the case history, following our brief 1992 visit to Kohla it was suggested that we had got lost because we had not burnt herbs and said prayers to the ancestors. On another occasion herbs were hastily burnt because it was felt that we had constructed our toilet near the abode of an area god. The arbiters of morality in landscape are the shamans who decide when to appease or not appease the Otherworld. On our 1994 research journey to Kohla the frequency of hailstones worried some members of the research team who often urged the shamans to burn herbs to keep the ancestors happy. The underlying fear was that we were perhaps making the ancestors unhappy thereby causing them to send hail. The shamans, working on a different understanding of, and relationship to the landscape, usually refused, explaining that it was the weather and not the ancestors. Journeying, which requires shamanic mediation
between landscape and the ancestors, provides an additional domain of moral authority for shamanic practice.

Journeying contextualises past in present, future in past. By using the rhetoric of the present (loss of culture) and the need to save culture (whose locus is in the past) they provide images of a future in which the culture of the past is revived. They also firmly locate time in landscape — the past is as ‘real’ and locatable as the present, a continuity they hope can be maintained in the future.

While ‘proof in the landscape’ provides the basis of a reconstruction of history, I suggest that journeying is the actual construction of historical narrative — the writing (or walking) of history. As an alternative to the committal of historical account to paper, journeying is the construction of a performative historical narrative located in landscape. As Tilley (1994: 28) writes, “movement through space constructs ‘spatial stories’, forms of narrative understanding”. As Tamu revivalists walk up and down the trails from town to high Himalaya, they construct both for themselves and others a chronology which is simultaneously past and present, and past in the present. A narrative is constructed which includes and interlinks the actors of the past with the actors of the present. Thus a perspective is created which associates the contemporary actors with the telling of history, and thereby establishes authority. As the shamanic and the historic interact, the establishment of history-making authority is simultaneously the enhancement of shamanic authority.

To understand the potential that journeying has in conveying an interpretation of history, it is necessary to consider the audience that history-making is directed towards. While it might be important to provide written accounts of the Tamu past for outsiders — to explain and share perceptions of the injustices of the past, to reinterpret, to assert an identity based on one’s own cultural practices, it is more important to provide an account for one’s own people. While published historical accounts may get the attention of a small number of well-educated people, most Tamus still live in villages where educational levels are low and books an expensive luxury. For certain sections of village society, understandings of the past continue to be based on the Hindu genealogies. While some villagers are engaged in the re-examination of the past, and others are aware of it and eager to learn more, there are Tamu people who premise their understandings of social life on notions of clan hierarchy and dismiss these activities as “the talk of people who have got a chip on their shoulders”.

Of more interest to most people are the local events of the village, the ‘lived-in’ experiences. Of interest also is the landscape — the forests above the villages where people go to cut firewood, the stones, rocks and rivers where the world of the
human and the spirit overlap. The ancestral landscape is one which the Tamu shepherds traverse, where people go to cut bamboo, gather herbs and walk through en route to Hindu pilgrimage spots. These places have well-known and emotive names, like Kohla, Chomrong, Thurju, Duddh Pokhari, places which a great many people from all clans aspire to visit — places that exist in consciousness, seen or unseen.

While the past as a written account, or even as a narrative account, normally does not receive much attention from villagers when detached from the landscape, the past 'located' in the landscape is a different matter. A high-profile visit by urban-dwellers with video cameras and maps, accompanied by foreign researchers and local porters who are "going to the old villages to study Tamu history", gains enormous attention. So does the return trip a month later, and the subsequent showing of the video of the trip. This attention is reinforced by the hearth-side recollections of the porters and support workers, hired from the villages, and the villagers' own stories of what the visitors did, where they went and what they said. The stories are 'brought home' in a manner reminiscent of Kwon's (1993: 67-74) account of stories recollected in the evenings by Orochon reindeer herder-hunters from Siberia. As in the narratives of Kwon's herder-hunters, the stories of what happened in the landscape can only be shared if one "has a certain shared map. The location, where an observation or a recollection is made, is not referred to by east or west" (ibid: 67), but by the location of events or in relation to a particular geographical feature. Thus the stories and place construct and reproduce each other (Tilley 1994: 33). As with the Orochon, Tamu stories create and alter social relations, and differentials exist between the old and the young. The teller of tales, however, can enjoy temporary elevation to a status 'above' that of his/her normal one.

Narratives are constructed and located in the ancestral landscape which they are intended to address — narratives which include the events of the journey, interspersed with images of the actual history-making activities. Thus an account of,

"how the cook used to send Thagu ['eldest son', a support worker hired from a village] through the forest at Chikrei carrying mugs of tea and biscuits for the researchers and their helpers, who were measuring the old houses, drawing the kuni (rice grinder) we found near the trail and looking for the chogō (cemetery)" is simultaneously a recollection of a rather amusing daily life event and the conveying of historical information. At Chikrei there are old houses, material culture which is continuous with the present, and the burial place of ancestors. The potential for reinterpretation is extensive. History becomes meaningful, relevant and close by. Links are created to the present — trails along which both past and pre-
sent can be experienced. Events which are contemporary are interrelated with powerful visual images of the past. The ancestor's *kuni* can be looked at, touched, held. It becomes a relic. The old buildings can be inspected and wondered about. Everyone can enter the discussion about why the *chogō* (cemetery) was not found.

En route to the ancestral landscape, villagers told us of places and things to look out for. The possibility exists for everyone to be a historian, for stories about places, people, gods, spirits, ancestors to be remembered, brought out, constructed, interpreted, and reinterpreted. The possibility, however, does not exist for everyone to be an expert. This remains the domain of the few: those who have entered the landscape to research it, those who have established the authority to investigate the past and make it speak in the present — those who have made the journey, those also, who have the knowledge to speak to the past, those who know the *pye*, those who have the migration genealogies, in other words, the shamans. The research team could not have operated without a shaman as a central figure. For those who are interested, and many clearly are, shamanic practice narrates and locates the past and by doing so locates itself.

As identity is bound up with place (Tilley 1994: 15), journeying contributes to the construction of identity. The potential that journeying of this kind has to contribute to identity is substantial particularly when considered alongside the already established role that the ritual journey plays in the ongoing re-creation of identity. Journeying associates those making the journey with what is considered to be quintessentially Tamu — the world of Tamu ancestors. Those who make the journey are simultaneously seen, and see themselves, to be associated with the essence of a cultural past. Despite their residence in the town, by journeying they establish their lineal continuity with the culture of their ancestors. The people who go on these journeys show themselves to be town-dwellers who “can walk”. Thus, the stereotype of town people who “cannot walk” is debunked. Not only can they walk, but they can walk further than many villagers who have never been in the *hyē* (uplands). To journey to the ancestral landscape, to have ‘dealings’ with the ancestors, not only establishes a lineal continuity with the ancestors but also a moral continuity which can be matched against the perceived ‘immorality’ of the town. Journeying from the town up to the *hyē* and back knits together several domains of Tamu social life/experience which people feel are drifting too far apart. It creates a shared Tamu *hyulla* (‘country’/locale) — a *hyulla* which includes town-dwellers, villagers and ancestors. In other words, a common sense of landscape is constructed in which town and country, and past and present can be merged. Journeying is thus transformative in the sense that a pilgrimage is transformative.
Parallel landscapes 265

(Turner 1974: 204-206) — those who have made the journey have at some level transformed how they are perceived and how they perceive themselves.

The aims of journeying in the first instance are intra-ethnic rather than ethno-political. The main audience here is other Tamu-mai. Journeying, however, is also political in a wider domain. It is a visible and public reinterpretation of the past based on indigenous knowledge, enacted by the descendants of those who see their histories as having been submerged. It is thus simultaneously an assertion of identity, and the reassertion of history. It is the re-socialising of an ancestral world, and conversely it is the re-socialising of the contemporary world. Despite the designation of the uplands as ‘government land’, and their further division into grazing rights belonging to different Tamu villages, the relationship between those who journey and the ancestors transcends this mundanity. The ancestors whose remains are in the landscape and the revivalists who journey to the places of the ancestors have claims on each other. They are guardians of each other. Literal control of this land is not the goal. Rather, the land is a vehicle towards the goal of history-making and the construction of identity. It is thus a vehicle towards the control of the revivalists’ own lives.

Journeys into the landscape of history are simultaneously journeys into the geographical and metaphorical landscape of the shamanic. Shamanic landscape overlaps with the landscape of history, reaching northwards to the Afterworld and origins, and southwards like history to the landscape of the present. Like the past, shamanic practice exists in other spaces and other times. To discourse with the history of the landscape is to discourse with the landscape of the shamanic. The historical significance of landscape is enhanced through ritual, which, “invests historicity in sites that do not themselves embody events of the past” (Rappaport 1990: 153). The performance of ritual activities, as illustrated in the account of the journey described earlier, imbues (or reimbues) geographical location with both shamanic and historical significance. For the audience watching the video of the journey, the chanting of the pye at Myju, Lupra and Thini not only invests these locations (which for many would have previously only been names) with historicity, but associates the conferring of historicity with shamanic action. The shamanic legitimises both history and landscape. In this relationship the shamanic is the senior player. Shamanic action in landscape has been continuous (it has never ceased). History (as in a non-Hindu interpretation) has been discontinuous. History in landscape is being relocated and re-created by those who have never left the landscape — the shamans. As interest is refocused on the past, it is simultaneously refocused on the shamanic. At a time when shamanic practice is on the
decline and under pressure from other ideologies, this kind of history-making is contributing to its revival.

2. Conclusion

It is not surprising that Tamus interested in a re-examination of their past should look to shamanic practice to throw light on the subject. The shamans are key repositories of indigenous knowledge, and it is known that the pye addresses the past. It is perhaps more unexpected that in their quest for "proof", the activists should make the landscape of the ritual journey physically explicit. However, when the full cultural embeddedness and importance of the ritual journey is appreciated the activist’s interest in shamanic knowledge becomes less surprising.

At the level of physical geography the journey, traverses the landscape of the migration route. The matching of oral texts to land provides some undeniable evidence for a northern ‘Mongolian’ past, which can be directly opposed to the images of a mixed ‘Aryan-Mongolian’ past for which there is no such evidence. To act in the landscape of the ancestors is to act in communion with the them and to re-socialise the ancestors is to remind wider Tamu society of where they resided. For no one, not even those Tamu-mai who postulate a mixed ancestry, deny that the Tamu-mai lived in an immediate northern landscape above the present-day villages, and at Kohla.

The shamans’ ritual journey provides the key to the landscape of the ancestors. The journey, which maps the ancestral geography, provides a route to the ancestors, entry to their world and evidence of the Otherworld. In doing so it reminds the Tamu-mai of the cultural centrality of the Pye-tä Lhu-tä. The use of the ritual journey to argue for a northern-directed ‘Mongolian’ past is to give substance to a deeply embedded symbolic image. Explicit revivalist rhetoric attends to such issues as "research", "preservation" and "proof", and screens an inner meaning which addresses a body of deeply emotional shared cultural significance. The shamanic ritual journey provides linkages between different temporal and spatial dimensions of Tamu life. It facilitates access to an ancestral world, a route to the Afterlife and also plays a role in shaping and re-shaping the political and cultural future of the Tamu-mai. The ritual journey traverses an emotional landscape into a ‘close-up far-off world’. This juxtaposition of distance, time and space provides rich ground for the construction of new identities. In the space between ‘knowing where you came from’ and ‘where you will go to’ there exists the possibility of
exploring what it means to be a contemporary Tamu. The re-writing of history is done through a re-walking on the ground — a re-tracing in two senses. Changing the reading of history in the land has the effect of changing how those who do the re-inscribing see themselves and are seen by others. By walking the trails from town to hyê the revivalists are simultaneously re-writing history and participating in emotional journeys along which they explore the meaning of being a Tamu.

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Orthography

There is no standardised orthography for Tamu Kyui (Tamu language). Since I have worked in a context where it served exclusively as a spoken language, I have given it the simplest possible spelling. In most cases words are spelt as they sound. The only diacritic used is the tilde (~) which denotes that the vowel is nasalised. In the word “pwe” the é is pronounced as in French.

Notes

1 ‘Tamu’ is the singular of ‘Tamu-mai’, the term that the people who are better known as ‘Gurungs’ apply to themselves when they speak in their own language — Tamu Kyui. In today’s post-Jana Andolan (People’s Movement) Nepal many people who would have previously called themselves ‘Gurung’ are now referring to themselves as ‘Tamu’, including the majority of my informants. I have chosen to follow their practice and use the terms ‘Tamu’ and ‘Tamu-mai’ (plural) throughout this paper.

2 Women are believed to have seven souls and men are believed to have nine.

3 Village shamans frequently belong to the same family and collectively serve the
villages of their hyoīdo (roughly equivalent to a parish). With the exception of the performance of the major public three-day death ritual, the pwē labu, shamans from other villages do not regularly collaborate.

4 Although this paper is primarily concerned with movement along the north-south up-down axis the east-west axis is also important in Tamu shamanic practice. Each direction has a corresponding god and certain shamanic actions/journeys take place on an east-west axis.

5 There are other types of ritual journeys, for example, the journey on which a shaman embarks when looking for a lost soul. I do not discuss this journey or other types of Tamu shamanic journeys here as they don’t have the same institutionalised directionality and exist more in the realm of secret knowledge.

6 This TPLS translation is not literal. See below for a discussion of the terms ‘Pye’ and ‘Lhu’.

7 The majority of the founder members are ex-British Gurkha soldiers who are either shamans, sons of shamans or members of shamanic clans. They are all male.

8 Although the belief system, cosmology and linguistic traditions of the pachyu and klehbrī are essentially shared, they perform slightly different functions. The klehbrī is primarily, but not exclusively, a death specialist and in some villages is intimately involved with the performance of certain calendrical rituals to village and clan deities. The pachyu is an exorcist, healer and death specialist. Both, but predominantly the pachyu, perform ‘rituals of affliction’ — day-to-day rituals (tēhmaī) which are involved with the removal or prevention of human ‘misery’ (Turner 1967: 9–16). Certain ritual activities overlap and some rites can be performed by either practitioner.

‘Bonist’ lama is the term TPLS members apply to the lamas who conduct death rituals in collaboration with the shamans and like them include animal sacrifice as an integral element of their practice. In the village they are referred to as ‘purano’ lamas (‘old’ lamas in contrast to the ‘new’ Tibetan Buddhist lamas).

9 The Pye-tā Lhu-tā is the shamanic religion of the pachyu, klehbrī and ‘bonist’ lama. The term ‘Pye’ refers to the oral texts and according to my informants the term ‘Lhu’ refers to the manner in which things are created. For a slightly different interpretation see Pignede (1993: 342) and Strickland (1982: 252–287).

10 This refers to the fact that Buddhist rituals do not incorporate animal sacrifice, which is an intrinsic aspect of shamanic rituals — a position which is now contested by some shamans and their clients.

11 Saving culture is simultaneously changing culture. The activities of preservationists are leading to the emergence of innovative and syncretic cultural forms which have their origins in the past but their expression in the present. Change is thus taking place in the guise of continuity, and the process is facilitating the emergence of new Tamu identities. For further discussion of this topic, see Pettigrew (1995).

12 Oral history and the shamanic texts recall that the Klye (Ghale) conquered and ruled the Tamu-mai. The difference between this conquest and subsequent ones
was that the Klye became Tamu — a situation very different from what happened following the conquests of the Hindu Shah kings.

13 Oral texts is the term preferred by shaman informants who speak English. They feel that the use of the word myth is inappropriate as it underestimates the historical importance of the pye.

14 Kohla is not actually on the Yangjakot pachyus soul journey. Our visit to Kohla marked a divergence from the soul journey route.

15 The kohtbo is TPLS’s headquarters in Pokhara. It is a striking building whose architectural design is based on shamanic symbology. It serves as a cultural centre, shamanic ‘temple’ or ‘monastery’, office and meeting place. It also contains a museum.

16 A deurilli is a small stone-pile structure built to honour/pacify/request assistance from a deity (or ancestors) at the entrance to the deities’ locale.

17 These journeys cannot at present be considered to be pilgrimages as they lack the institutionalised conventionality of a pilgrimage. They do, however, have the potential to become pilgrimages.

18 The model for interpretation based on journeying is located in the framework of the shamanic. Journeying, mapping and interpreting are basic shamanic activities. The shaman maps the upper, middle and lower worlds, travels the trails into other worlds, confronts, mediates, negotiates and returns to the community to provide interpretation.

19 There is a widespread opinion that the purest, most authentic Tamu life/culture is lived by those who remain in the villages.

20 For a discussion on other forms of ‘evidence’ see Pettigrew 1995.

References


