# MOBILE LIFEWORLDS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF TOURISM AND PILGRIMAGE IN THE HIMALAYAS

*By* Christopher A. Howard
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Where are we when we are travelling? What does it mean to travel to the Himalayas in late modernity? This book invites the reader to reflect on the implications and ramifications of what is today a popular individual undertaking. It is about the imaginaries, ideals, practices and meanings of Himalayan travel in late modernity. The research participants are individuals who travelled to the Himalayan region for leisure.

The book is based on the author's PhD thesis at Massey University, New Zealand. It is part of the *Routledge Studies in Pilgrimage, Religious Travel and Tourism* in which pilgrimage is the primary focus. Addressing the by now established blurring between pilgrimage and tourism, Howard demonstrates that late modern tourism, pilgrimage and mobile lifestyles intersect. According to his phenomenological position, non-institutionalised journeys can be considered pilgrimages. They display ritual traits and are charged with meaning. Chapter 1 (which is preceded by the introduction) is a discerning and encompassing review of theories of pilgrimage and tourism mobilities. Its first pages are somewhat grand in their description of the importance of pilgrimage for humanity, but are consistent with the author's concern with social systems. The book aims to situate pilgrimage within temporally and spatially extended contexts of global modernity. Indeed, the author shows individual travel projects and experiences to be interconnected with late modern society in 'relationally configure[d] mobile assemblages of human and non-human actors, industrial infrastructures, technological systems and forces of life' (p.155), rather than being singular or isolated events.

The main point the book makes, then, is that individual journeys are condi-

tioned by late modernity and reflect back on its state. Interestingly, the researcher's shift in objective itself manifests the predominance of mobile technologies and media and late modern lifestyle mobilities, more generally. He reports that his three-month-long fieldwork in Nepal and northern India, in particular the prevalence of mobile technologies there, made him reframe his initial focus on travel and contemporary religiosity. Having traced multiple directions of mobile assemblages, he concludes that Himalayan pilgrimages are symptomatic of global and cosmopolitan late modernity and of late modern personhood with its ideal of self-improvement, in particular.

The Himalayas here serve as a place of particular significance in late modernity. Chapter 2 examines utopian media representations of the Himalayas as a destination. It analyses the symbolism of the mountains and provides a brief mountaineering history. The book shows romantic imaginaries of the Himalayas as a place of power, enchantment and pristine nature to be consistent with Himalayan travellers' expectations and experiences. Chapter 5 discusses concepts of authenticity ('a modern ideal', p. 96), nature and culture, notably, travellers' anti-modern quest for the pure, unmediated Himalayan lifestyle. The notion of alienation through media in capitalist society might not be new but the author's application of the terms of irony and conflict accentuates his analysis of the dualistic categories which Himalayan travellers both use as well as undermine.

Here lies one of the main qualities of the book: it identifies and integrates various players in mobile assemblages and different levels of analysis. The encompassing core concept of the book, the 'lifeworld', epitomises the author's cross-level approach by including social conditions and individual experiences. It is locally situated (grounded in place) and part of a global environment 'of complex, interdependent systems (ecological, economic, political, technoscientific, sociocultural)' (p. xi). Howard argues that media and information technologies are part of the lifeworld and that lifeworlds themselves are mobile.

The 'lifeworld' highlights the book's phenomenological basis. Howard develops a phenomenology of travel through a 'mobile and multi-sited ethnography' (p. 10) and exploratory research (especially Chapters 4 to 7). In terms of methodology, he applies a combination of complementary approaches: phenomenology, the mobilities paradigm, social theory and a historical perspective. He thereby succeeds in including micro-, macro- and meta-levels of analysis, grasping embodied practices, performances and meanings as well as global networks. The author's auto-ethnographic narration of being sick on his travels underlines the affective body and the materialities of travel particularly compellingly. I

only felt that a more detailed exposition of the author's strategy of 'moving with' (adapted from Lee and Ingold's 'walking with') would have further strengthened the methodology chapter.

Over its seven chapters, the structure of the book partly mirrors the journey process (preparation, departure, arrival, etc.). Chapter 4 ties the pre-travel time and space into the trip, examining how imagination, memory and media such as film and literature shape people's motivations and expectations. Chapter 6 on embodied learning invites the reader to imagine his/her experience of arrival in Kathmandu and highlights the importance of material and embodied everyday travel practices. One value of the book is that it not only takes into account travellers' individual backgrounds but also their home societies as carrying over into the trip. It interprets their travel narratives of alien worlds within the continuity of daily life at home.

In the particularly innovative Chapter 7, the author coins the phenomenological concept of 'mobile inter-placing' and states that twenty-first-century lifeworlds are mobile assemblages of extended and interconnected places and people. Information communication technologies and media enable 'the global extension of embodied presence' (p.151) beyond bodies and the immediate environment. Howard ends by recommending an ethos of engaged letting-go, such as the mindful practice of slow travel, which adopts a more responsible attitude and cares for the immediate environment. Thus the book is an example of an ethnography of tourism which, through inter-placing, conceptually takes hold of such global extensions and travellers' emplaced being.

*Mobile Lifeworlds* is wide-ranging and comparative. It is about the present, while being strongly anchored in the past. A history of pilgrimages in the Himalayas provides a context for contemporary travels. In a topic which could have easily slipped into a logic of 'the agentive West and exotic rest', I appreciated the inclusion of various Asian pilgrimages and of early local representations of the Himalayas (Chapter 2). The author works with diverse types of sources (movies, ancient mythology, etc.), discourses and concepts, without however homogenising them. He draws on sociology (John Urry, Max Weber, Durkheim), philosophy (Husserl, Heidegger) and the anthropology of pilgrimage (Turner and Turner) and adopts 'classical' concepts such as *habitus* and *doxa*. Considering the variety of sources and concepts, a more comprehensive index would have been helpful to the reader. Still, while the book is strong in theory, it is also very engagingly written, using a language which grasps the colloquial tone of short travel encounters equally well. Chapters 4 to 6 offer particularly lively fieldwork descriptions and excerpts from travellers' interviews.

The book will be of interest to researchers across disciplines, to travel and/or Himalaya enthusiasts and those reflecting on our use of mass media and mobile communication systems in the everyday. It is a timely and important contribution to the studies on mobilities and globalisation and to the currently highly relevant Anthropocene discourse. Providing a well-founded and wide-ranging analysis of Himalayan travel in late modernity, it further opens up the topic of pilgrimage and travel in anthropology by highlighting how media and mobile technologies, mobilities and late modern society shape travellers' experiences.

## FACETS OF FIELDWORK: ESSAYS IN HONOR OF JÜRG WASSMANN

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Ethnographic fieldwork has long been claimed as the primary methodological contribution of anthropologists. Some scholars argue that field ethnography defines American cultural anthropology (Kutsche, *Field Ethnography* 1998). Schuster, in this *festschrift* for German anthropologist Jürg Wassmann, also argues that fieldwork is the soul of cultural anthropology (p.xi). Other disciplines may conduct ethnography in the technical sense; however, fieldwork for anthropologists involves a deeper level of participation with the people under study. As 'complete participation' (Spradley 1980, 61), fieldwork in this discipline involves robust emotional encounters; it is sometimes intimidating and frightening, but also exciting and satisfying. It is a unique emotional and intellectual experience for anthropologists, as it is the threshold and welcoming event for them, marking their official admission to the fraternity. Through their experiences of sentimental participation, anthropologists and ethnographers ideally will always end up with highly personalised answers to their big question: what does it mean to be human.

These individual, sentimental encounters create the unique character of each ethnography. This is the core idea of the book under review. The book explores the distinctiveness, particularities, localities, and exceptions of fieldwork by anthropologists working mainly in the Pacific. Seventeen papers by sixteen contributors to this volume provide unique and valuable accounts of the experience of ethnographic research.

Contributors are linked in various ways to Jürg Wassmann, a Heidelberg University anthropologist, to whom this *festschrift* is dedicated. Wassmann's former doctoral students (Anita von Poser, Alexis von Poser, Walda-Mandel, Meinerzag, Nadjmabadi, and Völkel) and colleagues (Schindlbeck, Gesch, Senft, Denner, Mückler, Ammann, Niles, Dasen, Funke), his wife and occasional co-ethnographer Verena Keck, have cooperated to make the *festschrift* happen. Chapters more or less reflect on what they learnt from Wassmann. However, as a German anthropologist, Wassmann represents a particular tradition, ethos, and approach to fieldwork.

Apart from the discussion of fieldwork as a research method, the book provides a number of fascinating stories for researchers. Schindlbeck, for instance, describes competitive relationships among members of the research team in the Basel Sepik Expedition which took place in 1972–1974. This case provides unique insights on what happens when ethnography is conducted within a large, long-term research project, either in one fieldwork site or many. This experience may result in shared fieldwork and collegial friendship, as described by Dasen and Funke in this *festschrift*. In their articles, Senft and von Poser separately describe how they benefitted from long-term research as they witnessed and absorbed socio-cultural changes in their field sites after frequent visits. Alexis Von Poser was even able to observe changes in the slit drum sound and Kayan patterns from pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods in Papua New Guinea (pp. 227–230). Wassmann, as a mentor, emphasised the empirical benefits that stem from the necessity of long-term ethnographic fieldwork and personal life-long engagement with interlocutors in the field.

Denner and Walda-Mandel share their experiences related to multi-sited fieldwork. The ideas of multivocality and multilocality, which have become trendy in relation to contemporary fieldwork practices, are important to consider as fieldworkers navigate their encounters with different interlocutors in various sites. More specifically, Walda-Mandel describes how she benefitted from linking her multi-sited fieldwork on the remote Micronesian island of Sonsorol to the globalised Sonsorolese diaspora in Portland, Oregon (p. 94).

Fieldworkers also benefitted from making use of their individual affinities with the specific topic of their research project. Through their personal love of music, as musicians and then as ethnomusicologists, Ammann, Niles and Gende could better observe and intuit the transmission of knowledge through music among people in Central Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea respectively.

This book encompasses methods and techniques for conducting fieldwork,

enriching the normative guidance that can be found in textbooks of ethnography. This *festschrift* is another version of what Wassmann always did for his students: inviting them to his house to listen to fieldwork experiences shared by his fellow ethnographers from around the world. However, the only criticism that could be made of this book is that contributors need to go further in linking their experiences to the normative ethnographic methods and strategies presented in textbooks. Do these experiences challenge, critique, or reinforce the prescriptive guidelines taught to anthropologists?

In addition to sentimentalising personal relationships, this book also teaches us that fieldwork is not just about openness and an ability to listen, but also the responsibility to give back. Keck's discussion of the university partnership and exchange program between Divine Word University in PNG and Heidelberg underscores the ethical and practical challenges that await anthropologists who want to give back to the people in their fieldwork sites (pp.198–199). This can create a kind of long-running 'sibling rivalry' with missionaries, or may lead anthropologists to be conflated with aid workers. The face of anthropology as an oxymoron (Reich in Kultche 1998) may become apparent in this regard.

This book is timely and highly important for several reasons. It demonstrates to readers that fieldwork is primarily and distinctively an anthropological undertaking. It validates what Franz Boas and his students in the in early twentieth century believed – that fieldwork was a corrective to nineteenth century armchair anthropologists. Similarly important, this book might be a warning about the contemporary tendency toward less fieldwork-based anthropology. However, so-called online fieldwork is very different from armchair anthropology or less fieldwork-based anthropology. Cyber fieldwork has been developed into a systematic and methodologically sound form of participant observation (Boelstorff *et al*. 2012).

For students and early career anthropologists, the fieldwork experiments discussed here could provide precious lessons on beginning (or restarting) fieldwork. Beyond the manuals and textbooks where methods and strategies for fieldwork, explanations of ethics, note taking, time management, and so forth are provided, this volume presents examples of communication and responses to fieldwork. However, one does not need to expect it to present all the issues associated with doing ethnography. Issues specific to urban ethnography (Ocejo 2013), cyber fieldwork (Boelstorff *et al.* 2012), interdisciplinary collaboration (Estatela and Criado 2018), ethnographic thinking (Hasbrouck 2018), to mention a few, for example, are absent in this book. Every fieldwork

– and fieldworker – is unique. This is the obvious contribution of this volume to the study of ethnography.

Additionally, this book is helpful for anthropologists of all career levels, from post-graduate students to senior professors. It teaches anthropologists how to become a dedicated long-life fieldworker, as reflected in the life of Jürg Wassmann. A real fieldworker should want to return to their first fieldwork site twenty or thirty years later. Last but not least, students and scholars of other disciplines may need to think about the importance of the qualitative data generated during long-term fieldwork. This will create excitement about conducting real ethnography: 'a demanding intellectual exercise [that is] more fun than reading other ethnography written by other ethnographers' (Kutsche 1998).

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