

PLACE-MAKING PROCESSES IN THE DIASPORIC NETWORK: A SHERPA GARDEN IN SCOTLAND

RITA MANCINI *

ABSTRACT

Diasporic networks are inhabited by displaced identities and communities that define and negotiate themselves through dispersion and belonging. What configures dispersion and belonging is culturally defined as depends on specific understandings of space and specific constructions of identity. This work focuses on a single knot of the Sherpa diasporic network: a Sherpa garden located in Southern Scotland. The analysis of place-making processes that take place outside the Sherpa homeland is particularly interesting because it describes a space that is possible to understand only overcoming methodological nationalism and western dualistic epistemology. Makers of the Sherpa indigenous knowledge and cultural understanding appear re-defining themselves in other landscapes, and the Sherpa identity negotiates itself together within the construction of new epistemic spaces. By engaging with post-colonial scholarships, the work presents the 'radical authenticity' of the Sherpa garden as a relational epistemic interaction between its occupants based on hybridity and creativity.

Keywords: Sherpa, Cultural Ecology, Diaspora, Emotional Geography, Identity.
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1. INTRODUCTION

To most of the world, the word Sherpa evokes the experience of trekking in Nepal (Parker 1989: 11). The Sherpas are a Tibeto-Burman eth-

* Fondazione Luigi Einaudi (Turin, Italy); University of Glasgow (Glasgow, UK). Address for correspondence: ri.mancini88@gmail.com. I would like to thank the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi, in particular professor Roberto Marchionatti for trust, help, and support. Moreover, I want to thank all the participants who made possible this research, especially Janet, Dawa and Ang Diki for all their time, their words, and their kindness.

nic group settled in the Solu-Khumbu district, North-Eastern Nepal. Solu-Khumbu is worldwide known because of the flourishing trekking and mountaineering industry established after the Second World War around the Mount Everest and other Himalayan peaks.

Recent social changes pushed by the transition from agro-pastoral to tourism-based economy resulted in seasonal and permanent migration flows from Solu-Khumbu to all over the world that generating the Sherpa diaspora.

One knot of the Sherpa diasporic network is ideally represented by the Craigieburn Garden and Nursery: a botanic garden and greenhouse on the Scottish/English borderland. Here, a Sherpa family moved permanently during the 1990s. Contrary to the ordinary reasons and dynamics behind the Sherpa diasporic mobility, this family moved in the Craigieburn Garden because of the friendship with its owner, Janet.

Through this work, I aim to analyse the place- and identity-making processes that take place in the garden. I look at what kind of understanding of place is generated through the co-existence of different epistemologies such as the indigenous and Western ones.

To do so, I combine three different bodies of literature (Himalayan studies, postcolonial scholarships on space and anthropology of mobility) and employ a mixed qualitative method (geographically informed ethnography, oral histories, walking interviews and photography).

I start by analysing the Sherpa epistemology: how it is rooted in endemic territorial cults and how it changed in response to short and long term stressors. I present the heterogeneity of the Sherpa cultural knowledge and ecological understanding and question its reproducibility outside the territory of Solu-Khumbu.

Then, I look at the Sherpa diaspora. More specifically, I focus on the 'ambiguity' of Sherpa diasporic identity based on the idea of 'belonging through dispersion'.

To conclude I look at the space of the Craigieburn Garden and its Sherpa Lodge to observe its 'hybridity' and coexistence of 'cultural heterogeneity'. I present the 'outside' garden and the 'inside' lodge through the words and photos of Dawa Sherpa, householder and gardener.

2. BACKGROUND: DISCLOSING THE CONTEMPORARY SHERPAS

Works on the Sherpa diaspora are rare and difficult to find as the Sherpa community is officially understood as a subset of Nepalese population. Given the variety of ethnic groups living within the Nepalese border (Ram-

ble 1997), and the heterogeneity of its orography (Bista 1962), trajectories and reasons behind the migrations flow from Nepal to all over the world are many (Chhetri 2019).

For what concerns the Sherpas, the migratory movement from Solu-Khumbu started as a response to the dramatic social and economic changes in the region led by the arrival of tourism. Such tourist-driven shift started with the first ascent of Mount Everest (Chomoulunga in Tibetan language) in 1953 and resulted in the gradual abandonment of the 'traditional' economic system rooted around the three pillars of subsistence: agriculture, pastoralism and long-distance trade (Berg 2008).

There are many studies that look at the economic (Kumwar 1989, Stevens 1996), social (Haimendorf 1984, Parker 1989), and cultural (Fisher 2004, Spoon 2011) features of what has been defined the 'Sherpa cultural transformation'.

In her work: *"De 'yak-driver' à 'taxi driver': Les pratiques de mobilité des Sherpa du Khumbu (Népal) à New York"* (2016), the French geographer Ornella Phuschiasis analyses the seasonal or permanent movement of the Sherpas from Solu-Khumbu and define it as a diasporic phenomenon (figure 1):



Figure 1. The Sherpa diaspora in the word (Puschiasis 2016).

The nature of social relations has changed profoundly since the 1950s, marked by the opening of the country and the ascent of Everest [...] The sponsorship relationship established initially between a guide and his client allowed some families real social mobility inherited these privileged contacts and allowed many people to migrate: migration spaces seem to be inherited from these privileged contacts with host countries that are those tourists who arrive in the area. So, we find many Sherpas in the United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, etc (Puschiasis 2016).

For the purpose of this work, it is important to take into account the cultural and religious linkages that shape and bond together the Sherpa's identity and the territory of Solu-Khumbu (Sherpa 2005). And to underline how such linkages changed along with the establishment of the so-called "fabric of Himalaya" (Brower 1991: 5).

2.1. 'There': Sherpa's epistemology and cultural understanding

The Sherpas arrived in the area of Solu-Khumbu around 1533 coming from Kham, a region in the Eastern Tibet that is still imagined as the Sherpa's homeland (Ortner 1980).

Stevens (1996), describes the Sherpa cultural geography as "a working vocabulary by which to organize the Sherpa enormous understanding of distinct, local micro-environments" where each element of the landscape has a sacred value and is linked to a specific taboo and code of conduct. The place specific Sherpa spirituality belongs to the ancient syncretic Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism, and combines folk, Bon and Buddhist elements (Tucci 1988). The religious landscape of Solu-Khumbu is 'occupied' by the Sherpas 'inhabited' by transcendent gods and local deities such as the *lu*: a snake-shaped water spirit (Ermakov 2008). Sherpa's system of beliefs is connected with the endemic ecological knowledge of Solu-Khumbu and shows heterogeneous and – to some degree – flexible features that have been able to adapt to long and short term internal and external stressors (Berkes 2008, Spoon 2011).

Two main features contribute to defining the specific Sherpa understanding of space and sense of place: *beyul* and *yul-lha*. From the analysis of the Sherpa cultural system of beliefs emerge two main features that define a specific understanding of the space. The term *beyul* indicates the sacred hidden valleys set aside by the progenitor of Tibetan Buddhism Guru Rinpoche in the VIII century as places of refuge for the Sherpa caravans arriving from Tibet. Solu and Khumbu are thought to be *beyul*. The *yul-lha* are deities subdued by Guru Rinpoche to be protectors of Buddhism, they live in Solu-Khumbu and can influence the life in the *beyul* according to their will and the conduct of both monks and laymen occupying the area.

Such beliefs are connected to specific codes of conduct that result in environmental benefits (Spoon 2011). Salick *et al.* (2007) observe how:

Observance of *beyul* and *yul-lha* appeared to influence how certain individuals interacted with the landscape and consequently resulted in some environmentally beneficial outcomes. Indeed, Tibetan sacred sites have been found to promote habitats with greater species richness, diversity and endemism and to preserve old-growth trees and forest structure (Salick *et al.* 2007).

The analysis of the Sherpa's ecological knowledge – as rooted in its territorial cult – is pivotal to understand place-making processes that 'take place' outside Solu-Khumbu. The cultural loss pushed by economic stressors annihilate such epistemology by means of the imposition of Western tourist-friendly policies and narratives on the Sherpas. To have an idea of the phenomenon it is sufficient to think at what the word 'Sherpa' brings to mind (Parker 1989, Fisher 2004) or to look at what appears by searching it on any web search engine. This is what Adams, already in 1997 meant saying:

What would it mean to have to call this mountain by her Tibetan name, Chomolungmo (Mother Goddess of Earth, as the Sherpas call her in the Sherpa language), in any discussion of her essential presence in the world? Using this name, her presence becomes even more socially contingent that when the title 'Everest' is used (Adams 1997).

2.2. 'Here': The Sherpa garden

The Craigieburn Garden and Nursery is a 6-acre garden near Moffat, a burg in the Dumfries and Galloway area, Southern Scotland. The garden has been inhabited for more than 5.000 years, remaining of an Iron Age fort can still be found among the trees (Wilson 2016). Nowadays, the garden is inhabited by its owner Janet, and by Dawa and And Diki Sherpa, the gardeners arrived from Kharikhola, a village in Solu-Khumbu district (Nepal) in 1997.

According to Puschiasis (2016), the United Kingdom is one of the main centres of the Sherpa diaspora in Europe. However, the way through which Dawa and his family decided to move from Kharikhola to Scotland is different from the ordinary ones. Dawa and Janet met in Nepal during a botanical research expedition. Their twenty-three-year friendship started as Dawa saved Janet's life in a landslide. The garden is structured in two main areas, the ancient traditional British garden and Nursery, and a more recent Sherpa Garden. The latter was designed and created by Dawa Sherpa as final work for the gardening course he undertook in the '90s to obtain the permission to stay in the United Kingdom. Over the course of the years, Dawa

and Ang Diki redesigned the ancient gate lodge of the garden into a proper Sherpa lodge. The garden and its surrounding landscape offer them the opportunity to meet their Nepalese friends and spend time hiking or having Nepalese or English food together. Moreover, not far from the Craigieburn Garden, in Langholm, there is the Kagyu Samye Ling Gonpa, only Tibetan monastery in Scotland. It follows that the Craigieburn Garden and Nursery and its surrounding space constitutes an important center for Nepalese and the few Sherpa people who are living in Scotland and in Northern England as well.

3. METHOD: THE FIELD AND THE GARDEN

I conducted the fieldwork from May to August 2018 in the area surrounding the Craigieburn Garden and Nursery. During these months I had the chance to take part in the everyday life of Janet, Dawa and Ang Diki, to meet their families, friends and other people somehow related the life in the garden. I had the chance to experience the *lived* space, the stories and intimate human and non-human relations that take place and define the day-to-day life in the garden. The non-human component has been pivotal for the ethnographic work: intra- and inter-actions with plants and animals constantly shape and reinforce stories, relations and the overall sense of place.

Geographically informed ethnography – that look at the “ordinary occupying specific spaces or possessing feelings about particular places” (Cloke *et al.* 2004: 35) – may highlight a new understanding and a renewed relationship between the ideas of *earth* writing and *people* writing (Hoggart *et al.* 2002).

However, conceiving the Garden as diasporic space involves a re-conceptualization of the field that goes beyond the physical perimeter of the garden. The space I tried to analyse is a space created by relations, emotions and collective imaginary. This kind of space can't be identified on a map, or with a topographic name. By overcoming the borders of the geography of power, this space is ideally bounded between Solu-Khumbu and the Craigieburn garden. Places, objects, photos analysed in this research are a continuous remanding of something that is 'here right now' and 'over there' at the same time. Cindy Katz (1994) suggests that: “to conduct fieldwork in human geography, invoke boundaries and blur borders. Boundaries between the research and everyday life, between the fieldwork and doing fieldwork, between the field and not, between the scholar and the subject”.

The aim of this work is to understand how space is involved in the definition of the Sherpa diasporic identity. More specifically, I look at the place making-processes that can be reproduced outside the sherpa territory. To do so, I employ a mixed qualitative method that combines ethnography with oral histories and walking interviews; both enriched by the use of photography as an additional tool. I believe that to combine a geographically informed ethnography with walking interviews oral histories and photography may provide a thicker sense of the processes and trajectories that define the sense of place in the garden.

On the one hand, participant-driven walking interviews (Capriano 2009) provide the opportunity to observe and not just to hear an account (Jones *et al.* 2008). Walking interviews have been widely employed to observe social collectivity mechanisms and to explore linkages between the place and sense of community, identity and traditions (Hodgson 2012).

During the whole fieldwork, I asked participants to shoot photos of the places around the garden they find important and/or worth to be explained: pictures have been shoot mostly during the walks but also during the face to face interviews with the camera I provided.

Here, I stress the validity of combining these methods in order to empower the role of the participant in the research process (Kinney 2017). Providing him/her with the possibility of choosing what to show, what to explain on the one hand, and the opportunity to choose what framing and describing through the performing act of shooting a photo. What the analysis of a photo can tell us is not the evidence of 'what's there' but 'what' and 'how' the photographer sees: his/her evaluation of the world. It makes clear how it is impossible to conceive the act of seeing as something unitary: "putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore like power" (Sontag 1977: 5). Therefore, photography can be thought of as "the paradigm of an inherently equivocal connection between self and world" (Sontag 1977: 123). Photography is a powerful tool to challenge the unidirectional western understanding of reality, by disclosing the relativity of the pluriversal world:

The contingency of photography confirms that everything is perishable; the arbitrariness of photographic evidence indicates that reality is fundamentally unclassifiable. Reality is summed up in an array of casual fragments – an endless alluring, poignantly reductive way of dealing with the world [...] the photographer's insistence that everything is real also implies that the real is not enough (Sontag 1977: 80).

On the other hand, to employ oral histories as process generated data helps to collect stories about the subject's own experience (Freund 2009). Such data have been mostly collected during the time spent inside the

Sherpa lodge and Janet's house. Historian Alexander Freund and Angela Thiessen argue that photographs do not simply trigger more detailed life memories in an oral history interview. Rather, photographs allow narrators to tell alternative life stories. Such visual life storytelling may uncover or generate conflicted feelings and understandings of one's life choices and experiences (Freund and Thompson 2011:28).

Moreover, the qualitative nature of the research and its informal approach creates room for the emergence of the experimental and the relational of emotions. Emotions – understood as “social objects” – are generated through social processes (McCarthy 1994). It implies that building on emotionally sensed knowledge of the research participants in such places reveals the “self who observes” (Behar 1996) and may help in developing additional and better insights (Lund 2012).

4. LITERATURE REVIEW: DEFINING THE SHERPA DIASPORIC SPACE

To accomplish this work it is necessary to combine three bodies of literature:

- Himalayan studies, as introduced in the previous paragraph,
- Postcolonial scholarship on space,
- Anthropology of mobility.

Many scholars complain about the lack of geographical engagement with indigenous ontologies and the lack of indigenous scholars. According to Kuokkanen (2007), this “epistemic ignorance” enables this exclusion of non-Western epistemic and intellectual traditions.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak claims for a radical self-reflexive rethinking of one's own epistemological and ontological assumptions or – as she says – “doing the homework” (Spivak 2000). To do the homework may create the conditions for a radical mental transformation: “leaving one's comfortable psychological, political, and discursive place to engage others in order to learning to learn about multiplicity” (Sundberg 2013). Spivak insists on the irreducible unknowability of ethical. However, this unknown space, may be understood as a site of “unstable meanings” where the self and other compel and repel to bring new alternatives to be negotiated without the sure foundations laid by – for instance – categories of identity.

To engage with indigenous knowledge involves and engagement with other understandings of space that do not refer to – borrowing from Johnson and Murton (2007) – the meta-narrative rooted in enlightenment thinking and globalized through colonial discourses. Among others, Juan-

ita Sundberg (2013) stresses the importance of being able to conceive and deal with: “a pluriversal world in which the multiplicity of living beings and objects are addressed as peers in constituting knowledges and worlds”. As Blaser (2012) states: “the pluriverse entails imagining the performative enactment of multiple, distinct ontologies or worlds, which bring themselves into being and sustain themselves even as they interact, interfere, and mingle with each other under asymmetrical circumstances” (Blaser 2012).

According to Watson and Huntington (2008), how knowers conceptualize space contributes to constitute their epistemologies. So, the ‘epistemic space’ itself constitutes a radical contemporary and never-ending knowledge. It implies that the analysis of the geographical understanding and the Sherpa identity– and place-making processes outside Solu-Khumbu means to explore the epistemic space co-constructed by the intimate relationship within living and non-living elements (Wright 2005).

Tourism is probably the most significant example of “mediation of otherness” in terms of experience differences (Sharp 2009: 85). Western imagined geography represents the Sherpas as trapped in place, ‘still there’ in Solu-Khumbu despite the huge permanent and seasonal migratory movements that have to configure the Sherpa diaspora (Fisher 1990, Puschiasis 2016).

Employing the conceptual category of the diaspora to analyse the Sherpa migrations implies a whole set of assumptions about cultural reproduction and the role of the space. In the book “*Defining diaspora: between dispersion and belonging*” (2016), Chowdhury and Akenson argue that the logic of diaspora resides in the process through which dispersion becomes belonging, through a set of narratives that can be real, imagined and invented. The idea of diaspora has the power to show something new about the conceptualisation of space. Therefore, the diasporic space can exist only through dispersion and is claimed thoroughly varied accumulation of belonging. This way of narrating about belonging discloses an ambivalent association with the territory:

Seen primarily as de-territorialised formations, diasporas, nevertheless, are predicated around claims of connection with a distant territory. Furthermore, diasporas inhabit a double ambivalence in their relationship with nation-states and the notion of nationhood [...] they become an embodiment of a critique of modernity and the shape of nation-states (Chowdhury and Akenson 2016: XIII).

The survival of a diaspora is linked to the ability of its members to preserve their culture in another culture through community institutions and network organization: it is a question for members of a diaspora to overcome spatial discontinuity through the use of communication and exchanges (Chowdhury and Akenson 2016). Anthropologist James Clifford

states: “anthropologist need to leave their preoccupation with discovering the ‘roots’ of sociocultural forms and identities behind and instead trace the ‘routes’ that reproduce them” (Clifford 1994: 8).

Conceiving culture as a never-ending process, rather than as a fixed system of beliefs, allows a radical rethinking of how the diasporic space is perceived, lived, and constructed. Moreover, it entails a rethinking of the space itself, conceived as the sphere of the “co-existing heterogeneity” (Massey 2005). The geographer Doreen Massey defines the space as the display of the contemporary plurality of space: space is always under construction and constituted through interactions. It should be thought of as the “simultaneity of stories so far” (Massey 2005). Among others, Massey (2004), Studley (2010) and Storey (2012) reflect on the role of space, land, territory and sense of place in the definition and reproduction of individual’s and communarians’ identity over time. According to Studely (2010), sense of place creates a sense of constant place-orientation at multiple locations. A place – according to Langer (1953) – a place can be re-established in many separate locations.

Belonging to a diasporic community shape a never-ending and interactive homeland/hostland relationship (Butler 2011, Stopani 2013). Diasporic subjectivity displays “a particular way of belonging the world” (Chowdhury and Akenson 2016), where difference and belonging lie on the very act of dispersion (Safran 1991). As Salzar points out: “human (in)mobility is a contested ideological construct involving much more than mere physical movement” (Salzar 2010).

Diasporic subjectivities challenge the cognitive bias of methodological nationalism (Sager 2014). Sager (2018) investigates categories and presuppositions that influence how we think about mobility and migration:

We filter out mobility and impose stasis in order to categorize and to measure. As long as we recognize this is what we are doing, this is not necessarily problematic – simplification and omission are necessary to comprehend the world. The danger is when we come to forget mobility and confuse representation with reality’ [...] Under sedentary assumptions, migration is reduced to movement from one fixed point to another. As a result, attention is focused on admission to a political community, rather than the journey itself and the role it plays in the larger context of individuals’ lives. People are treated either as citizens or foreigners, compatriots or strangers, ignoring the complexities of identity and the diverse ways in which place and space shape us (Sager 2018).

5.1. *Picturing 'here' and 'there', living the space in between*

The Sherpa Lodge and the small community in the Craigieburn Garden are a display of the diasporic identities. Though the analysis of the identity and place-making process far from the homeland emerges a new epistemology of belonging. Specific places, objects, living and non-living beings all together constitute the “assemblage” (Deleuze and Guattari 1998) through which such identity is reproduced. This is what emerges from what the participant decided to show me by shooting the photos. A photograph – according to Sontag – is not an accident, it is a concept: “The image exists in the photographer’s mind at or before the moment. Photography as knowledge is succeeded by photography as photography” (Sontag 1977: 117). These photos (figures 2-4) are the display of a specific “cultural connection” (CARTIER-BRESSON 1999) with space.

What emerges from the analysis of interviews and oral histories is the sense of displacement and belonging. For instance, the English word ‘home’ is equally used to talk about Kharikhola (Nepal) and the Craigieburn Garden (Scotland). Sense of ‘home’ entails with emotions and relations that cannot be fixed in a bounded geo-localised place: “the notion of diaspora can represent a multiple, pluri-local, constructed location of home, thus avoiding ideas of fixity, boundedness, and nostalgic exclusivity traditionally implied by the word home” (Walters 1923).

The Sherpa’s sense of belonging to a given homeland lies on ideas of spreading as they migrated from Kham and constructed their own identity on such movement. The very name Sherpa means people from the East (Eastern Tibet). History and myths of Sherpa’s origin refer to a constant interaction between Solu-Khumbu (the Sherpa’s sacred refuge) and Kahm (Sherpa’s homeland) (Ortner 1992). To be-come Sherpa implies movement and belonging. Moreover, as Chhetri (2019) points out, Sherpa’s identity always negotiates itself with the Nepalese one:

The declaration of secularism resulted in ethnic groups in Nepal reinforcing the notion of pan-ethnic identity, which in the case of Sherpas was a pan-Sherpa identity, forging collective consciousness with the diaspora while also drawing them into the struggle for greater recognition of their culture and identity (Chhetri 2019).

The same idea emerges from one of my first encounter with Dawa, when we were talking about Sherpa’s origin and – borrowing from Massey (2005: 73) – the “grotesqueness of the maps of power”:

Nepal is Nepal, is a country, but we are from Tibet, we crossed the Nangpa La, and we found a land that was empty. Nobody says this is my land, nobody said



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Figure 2. "This is my *pusa*, it is very important for me. I built it. Is for burning incense every morning and evening, twice a day. This is how we pray Buddha, we must burn the green Juniper outside. There must be smoke, Buddha will be around here. You can take juniper everywhere is pure and clean" (Dawa Sherpa). Figure 3. "These are my tomatoes, my cucumber and beans, I know you can find them in every supermarket but I always like to grow up here everything I grow up there. To feel home. This is not for selling, not for money. To feel home. I always want to grow my own food" (Dawa Sherpa). Figure 4. "This is my prayer flag. Special monks make them in Nepal. I put them to indicate the gate and on the big tree. They are for signal and good luck; if you see them, you feel safe, no ghosts, and no avalanches. Since I put prayer flags around here there are no ghosts anymore. Everybody was scared before, there were so many ghosts around here" (Dawa Sherpa).

this is a conservation area (*refers to the Sagarmatha National Park instituted in 1979*). And we started to grow plants. We always pray god, we always pray the mountain (Dawa Sherpa).

From the photos that Dawa instinctively shoot in the Sherpa Lodge, emerges the strong ink that bond together home and identity. Massey (2004) argues that the contemporary defragmented idea of home is rela-

tional as the idea of identity and that they are both co-constructed on the idea of otherness, unfamiliar and unknown: “each of these home-places is itself an equally complex product of the ever-shifting geography of social relations present and past” (Massey 1994: 172).

5.1.1. Questioning the role of emotions within place: landscape, plants and soil

The similarity between the landscapes of Moffat and Solu-Khumbu allows the creation of an emotional continuity that links and somehow overlap the way in which these places are experienced: “because of a few houses, hills and forests, I always feel my homeland that is why I set up here. I really don’t feel I am in Scotland” (Dawa Sherpa).

John Urry (in Urry *et al.* 2005: 81), argues that the language of the landscape itself is a language of mobility, of abstract features that the subject, by means of his own positionality, can emotionally perceive. There is a form of pleasure, in experiencing the places, that transforms nature into the landscape: “emotions are intimately tied into place” (Urry in Davidson *et al.* 2005: 77). Landscape photographs are – according to White (1969) – “inner landscapes” that contain the “humanity of the moment” as they reflect how the subject relate emotionally to a given landscape. Dawa and Ang Diki entertain a day-to-day relationship with the soil and the plants they are growing in the garden that goes beyond their being professional gardeners. The majority of the plants that grow in the Sherpa Garden come from Nepal. Dawa and Ang Diki brought them over the course of the year. Some of these plants are cuttings from their own garden in Kharikhola:

The plants I brought from home also is because I feel at home. And when I go home (refers to Kharikhola) I always bring some plant with me because I want to plant them at home, in Scotland, in Craigieburn. Then, when I plant them, and they survive, they make me feel stronger, sort of like ‘I like here, plant like here too. That is what I am here, and I do not feel any difference here (Dawa Sherpa).

Non-human components such as plants contribute to create and define a specific ‘sense of place’ and ‘sense of home’ by carrying things from home (Kharikhola) to grow back home (Craigieburn Garden).

From my conversations with Dawa and Ang Diki appears how the diasporic identity strongly relies on the physical space ‘outside there’. The familiar landscape, the soil that can grow the same plants, contribute to emotionally define emotionally their own way to belonging and living the surrounding space. As Urry states: “Places are emotionally pleasurable, they are about the relationship – with the elements of the landscape –

about the placing of materials and sets of objects rather than being fixed only through subjects and their uniquely human meaning and interaction” (Urry in Davidson *et al.* 2005: 80).

5.1.2. Here at home: imagined presence in the Sherpa’s Lodge

Everywhere, to settle means “to buy or construct a house somewhere” (Stopani 2013: 77). However, in the field of migration studies, the domestic space is controversial, it is conceived as a dual place. ‘Home’ is a complex universe where diasporans can try to reproduce the traditional forms of power and, meanwhile, it is the place where to experiment with cultural syncretises. In his book, “*Geografia delle diaspore*” (2013), the Italian geographer Antonio Stopani argues that the house is the space where – and through which – the multitude of manifestations of the diasporic sense of belonging takes place. In this sense, the house can be conceived as the affects, memories and emotions are inscribed and re-elaborated.

A large part of the fieldwork – excluding the walking interviews – took place within the Sherpa Lodge. I had the opportunity to share day and night time in the house with Janet, Dawa and Ang Diki, drinking Sherpa tea with their friends, looking at the family photo albums and enjoying Nepalese *dal bhat* and Scottish sandwiches together. I can remember exactly the sensation I had entering the house for the first time, and how that feeling accompanied me during the two hours we spent sitting in the living room. Furnishings, fireplace, rugs, and – most of all the smell of Tibetan incense and burned fresh juniper – were the same you can find in every lodge and private Sherpa house in Solu-Khumbu. It has meant to me and intense and weird feeling that I never experienced before. I felt – in a way – dislocated: there was nothing Scottish, British, European there. During those hours, I had constantly reminded myself of my physical location. Dawa proudly showed me the wooden shelf, which he made by with a specific timber he brought ‘from home’ (figure 5).

On the opposite wall of the living room, there is another shelf, which comes directly from Kharikhola. He carried it on his shoulders “from Kharikhola to the airport in Kathmandu”. Coppers, ornamental plates, Tibetan flags on the door, Tibetan rugs on the benches, and the image of the mountain range are typical of every Sherpa house.

Tolia-Kelly and Divya (2004) describe the house as the place – the “here” – where memories are accumulated: “photos of people and places, traditional utensils, decorations and so on”. Objects are highly significant in the nature of the place; they constitute the basis of an “imagined presence” across the member of a community (Urry in Davidson *et al.* 2005: 79). The idea of home that emerges from these words is an idea of belong-



Figure 5. Sherpa traditional furnitures and decorations in the Sherpa lodge (Dawa Sherpa).

ing related to emotions and relations, that cannot be fixed in a bounded geo-localised place (Walters 1923).

Dawa and Ang Diki speak Sherpa to each other and with their kids, and Nepalese with the friends that often come to the garden for a chat or a tea. Dawa knows how to speak in a proper Scottish accent and his Scottish and English friends, neighbours and customers have learned some Sherpa and Nepalese words over the course of the years. For instance, in their conversations, the word '*namaste*' occurs more often than the English 'hello'. All of these languages are blended, mixed with the others, and create a sense of juxtaposition that is typical in every migratory and diasporic framework. According to Chowdhury and Akenson (2016: 61), the language plays an "ambiguous and controvert" role in the maintenance of diasporic consciousness. Every language is the display of a specific system of knowledge, once created, words exist in this world and they shape it. To move constantly from a system of knowledge to another creates something new, define a new space and a new way of belonging (figures 6-7).



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Figure 6. “Ang Diki, my Sherpa wife, she is from Kharikhola, as me, and now she lives here with me, in Scotland” (Dawa Sherpa).
Figure 7. “Neru Sherpa, We got him here, four years ago but he is Sherpa. He understands English, Nepalese and Sherpa” (Ang Diki Sherpa).

5.1.3. Belonging through dispersion: negotiating 'sherpaness' in a relational space

By analysing the Sherpa's vocabulary, rituals and system of sponsorship, Adams (1997) highlights how the understanding of individuality is different from the European one that is intimately related to the body of every single person. On the contrary, Sherpa individuality melts with the community and is shaped by the people's agency, their intentions and their relationship with friends:

The exact location of the subject is quite extensive, spread out over groups of people and in territories shared by others. The subject is plural and expansive, contingent on the seductive and transient social relationship that, cumulatively and transformatively, produce the person (Adams 1997).

Impermanence and indeterminacy are paradoxically constitutive parts of Sherpa's understanding of individuality. This relational sphere of subjectivity affects the idea of belonging: being recognised as Sherpa, to establish a solid friendship on the base of difference and reciprocity is part of the process that generates the ideas of 'home' and 'belonging'. This clearly emerges from Dawa's words:

That is how I feel; I do not feel in two different countries. The main thing is friendship. I got so many friends here because of the business. When they visit me to buy plants then, they will never forget me. Everywhere I walk there are people saying "hi Dawa!". If people understand who I am, it means that I am not completely Sherpa, not completely British, not completely English, not completely Nepalese (Dawa Sherpa).

This specific way of perceiving personality in relation to the others relates to the Buddhist ideas of karma and reciprocity, which are the core of Sherpa's ontology as presented by Berg (2004, 2008), Haimendorf (1955, 1984), Fisher (1990) and Kumwar (1989). It follows that the Sherpa diasporic identity cannot be understood through the Western understanding of categories such as space and identity. Space, as experienced by the Sherpa is not the same that can be experienced by people with a different cultural background. What is worth to explore is the space created by the encounter and the relationships established by this Sherpa family and the other people that gravitate around the Craigieburn Garden and Nursery.

Living the diasporic epistemic space implies dealing with a multiplicity of human and non-human mobilities (Hage 2005). People, objects, plants and animals move together and reshape each other in a framework where real and unreal, physical and imaginary space intersect and overlap each

other: “places – even based upon a high degree of geographical propinquity – depend upon movement. Paths can show the accumulated imprint of countless journeys that have been made. [...] Places are massively interconnected to many other places through movement” (Urry in Davidson 2005: 80).

The space in the Craigieburn Garden is a space with blurry borders, constantly re-affirmed and constituted by its actors. Such relational space can be understood only overcoming the traditional discourses on borders and culture. As Hooks (1991: 341) suggests: “margins are the site of radical possibilities”. The Craigieburn Garden is the place where Ang Diki, Dawa, their sons and friends are constantly in transition, negotiating themselves by moving between an imagined and real ‘here and there’: “trans denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something” (Ong 1999: 4).

5.2. *Disclosing hybridity: growing food, picturing flowers*

If space is defined by the multiplicity of trajectories and relations (Massey 2005), it is also necessary to take in account the multiplicity and co-existence of culturally defined representations of space (and time). Sundberg (2013) recognises the ongoing epistemic interaction between time and space and claims for the needs of “learn and dialogue between epistemic worlds”. In other words, for the purpose of this work was important to question what was happening between Dawa, Janet and me when we were sitting on the bench in the garden, looking at the ‘same’ place and talking about the ‘same’ place.

Postcolonial scholarships (Bhabha 1990, Spivak 2000, Sharp 2009, Griffiths 2018) offer a way to overcome the hegemonic imagination of space and create room to hear other voices and then, to explore what happen within the encounter of such different understandings. Ideas of ‘hybridity’ and ‘third area’ can unveil dynamics and processes that take place in the garden.

More than once during our conversations, Dawa told me that he has the idea of building a Sherpa Garden within the Craigieburn Garden because of the strong similarity between the upper part of the garden and Solu-Khumbu, especially in terms of orography and because of the presence of waterfalls. Upon this resemblance, he built the Sherpa Garden as the final assignment for his ten years horticultural course, obtaining the highest score and so, the residence permit for the whole family.

Since 1997, he constantly brings plants from Nepal (figure 8).



Figure 8. Bamboo and other plants imported from Nepal by Dawa and Ang Diki (Dawa Sherpa).

Moreover, together with Ang Diki, he has built or brought from Kharikhola statues, prayer wheels (figure 9), fireplaces, a bridge (figure 10), and anything necessary to ‘sherpatise’ the area.

By means of the interaction between living and non-living beings carried from elsewhere, local ‘natural’ elements are converted into Sherpa Buddhist epistemologies: water of the Craigieburn river is now praying, the Scottish soil is growing Nepalese’s plants, *lu* spirits are living under the rocks near the bridge and the waterfalls.

Every photo unveils the assemblage of human and non-human entities. They are the display of interconnection and cultural contamination. The Sherpa Garden – here presented through Dawa’s eyes – appears to be the product of multiple interrelations, where each relation should be understood as embedded practices. Massey (2005) reminds us that space does not exist prior to identities/entities: “the relations between them, and the spatiality which is part of them, are all constitutive” (Massey 2005: 10).



Figure 9. Tibetan payer wheel in the Sherpa garden (Dawa Sherpa).



Figure 10. Bridge that crosses the Craigieburn river. The rocks nearby the water are inhabited by the lu spirit (Dawa Sherpa).

During the walking interviews, I noticed a great emphasis on both the religious geography of the garden (tied to Tibetan Buddhism) and the horticultural elements. Dawa stressed the ability of Sherpa people to grow vegetables and fruit in Solu-Khumbu despite its altitude. Dawa finds silly how ‘we’ Europeans relate to flowers and decorative plants, pretending to know their names and pretending to learn how to grow them on books or – even worse – on the internet: “we do grow food, we don’t have gardens, for us plants and food are the same”. Because of his attitude, I was surprised when he took a photo of a Himalayan Lily, proudly saying: “this is my best lily ever”, and nothing else (figure 11).

At the very beginning that photo was ‘uncomfortable’ to me: why a flower? And what does all this enthusiasm for a flower represent? I did not know how to ‘include’ this photo, this

information in the work. Later on, I realized I was probably thinking of Dawa merely as a Sherpa man trapped in the Sherpa unspoiled world I constructed upon my previous readings. Such imagination did not allow me to understand the genuine enthusiasm of a gardener for the flowers he grows. Moreover, the emphasis and joy emerged when he showed me the Himalayan Lilly demonstrates how: “culture shapes emotions, but the social context in which emotions emerge shapes them as well” (Mattley 2002).



Figure 11. "This is my best Lily ever" (Dawa Sherpa).

Postcolonial accounts claim for a radical rethinking of authenticity that overcomes the ideas of pure and unchanged. Such radical authenticity discloses the existence of authentic cultures based on "hybridity and creativity" (Sharp 2009: 104). Haomi K. Bhabha identifies with the word hybridity the displacement of value that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative (Bhabha, 1994: 113). Moreover, Bhabha conceives uncertainty, ambivalence and hybridity as postcolonial goals, with which define, imagine a third space, a space of multiple cultural borders. The idea of third space employs impurity and mixing as values. Dealing with cultural hybridity means to conceive and create something new out of difference. This idea – defined as third way, third space and grey area, generates new spaces of radical possibilities, that overcome the dualism of Western epistemologies. In this way, it is possible to conceive the space of the Craigieburn Garden and Nursery as the product of more than one culture, as the product of globalisation and – borrowing from Sharp (2009: 132) – "as an ever-integrating world system of politics, economy, culture and identity".

5.3. *Spatialising the history of globalised Sherpas*

To spatialise the history of the Sherpas means spatialise the history – even better the histories – of the contemporary Sherpa, not only the ones who are settled in Solu-Khumbu but also the members of the Sherpa diaspora. Dawa and Ang Diki can be thought of as a display of the contradictions, the ambivalences, and the bizarre juxtaposition of modern life. Their agency, their bodies are the embodiment of the “hybridizing processes of contemporary society” (Sharp 2009: 133). The geography of the Craigieburn Garden is much more than a surface where exotic plants are growing thanks to the work of exotic people settled there. The Sherpa Garden is a space where multitudes of narratives – real and symbolic – encounter each other and create something new, always in belonging, always open. Massey (2005) points out:

What might it mean to orientate this imagination, to question that habit of thinking of space as a surface? If, instead, we conceive of a meeting-up of histories, what happens to our implicit imaginations of time and space? [...] Not also history but also space is open. In this open interactional space, there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction, relations which may or may not be accomplished (Massey 2005: 67).

I argue that the authenticity of this place should be found in its being a projection of the social dimension of space in the sense of engagement with multiplicity. To observe differences and similarities between ‘here’ (Craigieburn) and ‘there’ (Solu-Khumbu) probably does not make sense and, anyway is not something that can be measured and observed in term of distance, since there is no “mechanical correlation between distance and difference” (Massey 2005: 91). It is worth to look at the garden as the space which celebrates the meaningfulness of heterogeneity, as the space where every living and non-living element is dynamically interconnected with the rest. Any attempt to define and describe the authenticity of this place needs to leave behind any modernist and dualist discourses on space, any map, any account of culture as a mere reproduction.

6. CONCLUSION

This work discusses place- and identity- making processes which take place in a diasporic framework, more specifically, in the Craigieburn Garden and Nursery, Southern Scotland.

Starting from the analysis of the Sherpa ecological and cultural understanding, I present the ambiguous space of the Sherpa diaspora to better

understand the radical contemporaneity and cultural hybridity of the garden beyond the methodological nationalism.

The analysis shows features and elements involved in the never-ending negotiation of the Sherpa identity in the uprooted context of the Scottish countryside. Through the use of a geographically informed ethnography, it has been possible to present the pluriverse of stories, relations and multiple understandings of 'reality' that take place altogether.

For what concerns the use of photography, I argue that photography – as performative act – facilitates postcolonial engagements with the alterity. As for words during interviews, the 'reality' displayed in the photos is constantly translated in our engagement with different epistemologies. The photos showed in this work may contribute to the "erosion of the very notion of meaning, to the parcelling out of the truth into relative truths which are taken for granted by the modern liberal consciousness" (Sontag 1977: 106).

I claim for the necessity of immersing every definition of place, belonging, and identity in a hybridized framework where both time and space are conceived as open and always in becoming. Sherpa's 'traditional' accounts of identity, Sherpa's 'traditional' systems of knowledge and epistemology cannot be thought as the starting point, as something that exists somewhere, and that can be employed to discover any depicted authenticity of these indigenous group. As Althusser (1970) reminds us: "there is no point of departure". Moreover, the place-making processes cannot be understood as something closed in the perimeter of the garden. Every aspect of life in the Craigieburn garden (from the soil to the social relations) has a talismanic function that constantly put in communication 'here' and 'there'. In doing so, it generates a place that is material and immaterial, tangible and intangible at the same time. Place- and identity- making processes that take place in the Craigieburn garden appear to be imagined according to the actors' agencies, identities and relations. The Italian anthropologist Ugo Fabietti highlights the role of imagination – understood as the capacity to imagine new possibilities – in the constitution of practices and representations. That globalised and de-territorialised people constantly create their own identities and culture in new worlds created by the imagination. These imaginaries should be taken in account as much as their representations because they are part of the "knowledge of contemporaneity" (Fabietti 2000).

To conclude, I stress the political relevance of marginal spaces like the Craigieburn Garden and Nursery to overcome a-spatial and self-reliant discourses on globalisation (Mouffe 1993, Massey 1994, Gibson-Graham 1996). People living the margins are – borrowing from Hart (1998) – "the product of diverse trajectories that are not always part of a linear progression toward market triumphalism".

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