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Review of web sites, CD-ROMs and books

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Web Sites on Cultural Diversity in Mountain Areas

In 1995, the International NGO Consultation on the Mountain Agenda of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development defined cultural diversity as one of its key issues. In general, important development actors do not focus on "cultural diversity" as such but address it within the framework of ecosystem approaches and sustainable development. This is the case, for example, with the Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF), the World Resources Institute (WRI), IUCN–The World Conservation Union, UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB), and the FAO. Cultural diversity is generally included in global environmental conventions such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) or the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). "Cultural diversity in mountain areas" is even listed less frequently as an item in development agendas, but it is mentioned in approaches, events, and publications by mountain-related institutions (eg the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps [CIPRA] and the Alpine Forum). Nevertheless, a search for web sites on "cultural diversity in mountains" produces a rich number of hits with publications. The following web sites have been selected because of their significance or the originality of their approach. The list makes no claim to comprehensiveness.

Mountain Forum (MF)
www.mtnforum.org
The MF search engine delivers a broad range of electronic papers linking cultural diversity with biological diversity, and discussing their roles for sustainable development. The following two articles have become key documents:

www.mtnforum.org/resources/library/mehtm95a.htm
www.mtnforum.org/resources/library/mehtm95b.htm
"Cultural diversity in the mountains: Issues of integration and marginality in sustainable development." This article by Manjari Mehta (Boston University) was prepared for the consultation on the Mountain Agenda in Lima, Peru, 1995, and is often cited with regard to the issue of cultural diversity in sustainable development. Metha presents a gender-sensitive analysis and argues that "local experiences and practices have an important role to play in illuminating some of the central questions driving mountain development and policy regarding self-regulating development strategies." In her final chapter she presents recommendations.

www.mtnforum.org/resources/library/mcnej95a.htm
"Conserving diversity in mountain environments: Biological and cultural approaches." Author Jeffrey A. McNeely (IUCN–The World Conservation Union) also prepared his article for the Mountain Agenda consultation in Lima; it provides 10 key principles and 5 strategic actions for conserving cultural and biological diversity.

ICIMOD
www.icimod.org/iym2002/culture/web/reference/index.htm
ICIMOD collected Internet references of articles on cultural diversity for the e-conference on "Integrating Mountain Culture into Natural Resource Management (MCNRM)," 17 August–14 September 2001.

Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK)
www.cbik.org
CBIK is an NGO in southwest China. It is dedicated to biodiversity conservation and community livelihood development, as well as to documentation of indigenous knowledge and technical innovations. Among other things, the NGO focuses on cultural and ethnic diversity and mountain livelihoods.

The Banff Centre for Mountain Culture
www.banffcentre.ca/mountainculture
The Banff Centre—presented in previous issues of *MRD*—provides a series of useful references to articles on cultural diversity in mountain areas.

Mountain Voices
www.mountainvoices.org
"Mountain Voices: Oral Testimonies from Mountains and Highland Regions Around the World." This web site presents interviews with over 300 people who live in mountain and highland regions around the world. Their testimonies offer a personal perspective on change and development. (A selection of interviews is also available in printed form, reviewed in this issue of *MRD*.) This project was initiated by the Panos Oral Testimony Programme.

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Books

Voices from the Mountain Series. Oral Testimonies from India, Nepal, Pakistan, Kenya, Lesotho, Ethiopia, Peru, Mexico, China, Poland.

Compiled by The Panos Institute. London: Panos, 2000–2004. 10 booklets, 50 pp. each. UK£5.00 each. ISBN 1-870670-51-5; -52-3; -53-1; -54-X; -58-2; -59-0; -63-9; -64-7.

People from the mountains have a voice. They have individual concerns, thoughts, and their own life stories. It

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is the aim of these 10 booklets to give the often marginalized and disadvantaged people of the mountains a voice: to raise awareness and understanding of the accelerating impact of development processes on mountain societies and mountain environments, and to communicate people's experience and perceptions of the social, economic, and environmental changes with which they are confronted. By giving ordinary people a chance to express their thoughts and thus show us their rich knowledge of their own society and environment, and their scepticism about modern developments, the booklets succeed in countering the belief that mountain people "have nothing to offer the world, that [they] are people without a history."

Voices from the Mountain is a series of booklets published by Panos London's Oral Testimony Programme, as part of its international mountain project. The programme has been working through partners, mainly local NGOs, with a variety of highland communities for several years. Over 350 interviews have been conducted by local people in local languages, recorded, translated, and abridged. The full interviews can be found at www.mountainvoices.org. Ten collections have been published since 2001, covering mountain regions all over the world: the Himalayas (India 2003 and Nepal 2003); the Karakorum (Pakistan 2004); the central Andes (Peru 2002); the Sierra Norte (Mexico 2004); Mount Elgon (Kenya 2001); the highlands of Ethiopia (2001) and Lesotho (2001); southwest and southeast China (2002); and the Sudety mountains (Poland 2001). Each booklet is comprised of 15 to 20 abridged oral testimonies of 2 to 4 pages each by individuals from the mountains, several photographs, and a small map of the study area. An introduction gives an outline of the major concerns of the respondents, and informs the reader about the general political, environmental, and socioeconomic conditions in the area. At the beginning of each narration some brief information about the narrator, her/his occupation and major concerns is given.

In contrast to many other mountain-related publications, here the individuals living in mountain areas are at the centre. Their narrations show us a multifaceted picture of mountain people's thoughts and concerns, with their individual life stories as the starting point, and thus offer sometimes very personal insights. However, the reader also learns a great deal from the oral testimonies about the changing environments and cultures of these mountain regions; for instance, about livelihood strategies, common utilization of pastures, or the pros and cons of modern developments, such as infrastructure projects or the introduction of new beliefs and ideas into the area. Social aspects are also often stressed by the narrators: ideas about their own role within the community or family, their thoughts about family ties and gender relations, or about social exclusion of specific community members—eg the blacksmiths in Ethiopia.

Some of these formulated concerns are really mountain-related, like the highland–lowland dichotomy pointed out by Vimla, aged 58, from Tehri Garhwal, India: "The irony is that better-off people from the plains can come up and enjoy the mountains, while many mountain people are forced to leave for the plains to find work." Nevertheless, it is obvious that many other aspects, eg labor migration, pollution, and land degradation are troubles which mountain people share with the inhabitants of many rural communities all over the world. And it becomes apparent that general statements about *the* specific mountain problems cannot be formulated. Many concerns are similar, but others are truly individual. For instance, the anxieties of people in the central Andes are often related to the nearby mines, pollution and the hardship of work. In the highlands of Lesotho, communities worry about the planned construction of a large dam; they worry about resettlement, but also about the flooding of their graveyard, which is a violation of their respect for the dead. The hunger crisis of the 1980s, a permanent fear of famine, and their general poverty dominate the thoughts of the highlanders in Ethiopia. Although mountain communities and their needs are often ignored by national politicians, these people have sometimes found themselves in the crossfire between conflicting parties, as in Nepal between the Maoists and the national forces. The different oral testimonies make it clear that the mountain communities do not have just one voice; they have many individual voices and opinions. One person may point out the positive impacts of modernization, the next criticizes the same development.

The booklets do not offer a summary or a list of contents for the reader to get a quick impression of the narratives. That is good, since everybody has his/her own view and should be heard with the same emphasis, nobody is put above someone else: the old woman and the young labor migrant, the village elder or the divorced housewife—all are given the same status. It is the intention of the project to allow the least vocal and least powerful members of society to speak for themselves, rather than through outsiders or "experts."

When reading these booklets, I asked myself for whom they were published. Will the voices of the mountain people be heard by decision-makers? The fascinating material carefully collected in remote mountain societies should not go unnoticed by development workers, decision-makers and researchers dealing with the specific region, since it will add many new insights to their knowledge or may even

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change their view of the mountains. The particular attraction of the booklets is the reflection of individual concerns and stories, as Hezron, a village elder aged 48 from Kenya, states: "The story you see in this book is mine. Whether it is lies or the truth that I have told, it is my story." One can only hope that these voices will be heard and recognized by those people who want to bring "modernization" or "improvements" to the people in the mountains.

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Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America.

By Timothy Silver. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. xii + 32 pp. US$19.95, UK£14.95. ISBN 0-8078-5423-9 (paperback).

Mount Mitchell, the highest peak west of the Mississippi River in the USA, is located in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, and has been long revered by both ecologists and outdoor recreationists. The Black Mountains, located in western North Carolina, represent one of the most unique natural environments in the American South. Timothy Silver, Professor of History at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, combines his personal experiences hiking and fishing in the Black Mountains with a solid and intriguing environmental history of the range. The focus of his book, however, is Mount Mitchell, a locale that Silver uses to illustrate the relationship between natural resources and human activity. Silver effectively argues that mountain resources in general are threatened by how humans perceive and value these resources.

The book is organized around the seasons of the year, and Silver's historical analysis is interwoven with his journal entries from visits to the Black Mountain Range. His observations give the reader a different sense of the natural beauty and the peril that has faced these mountains, both historically and in present times. This innovative approach results in a book that is comprehensive and scholarly but also accessible.

Silver's first 2 chapters provide a geological and ecological history of the Black Mountains; his discussion includes a description of the forests, weather patterns, and the geography of the rivers, creeks, and coves. Silver introduces the basic ideas of ecosystem theory but uses the comparison of Chaos Theory with Patch Dynamics to explain the changes that have occurred in the Black Mountains over time. He returns, later in the book, to Patch Dynamics to explain the more recent history of the range.

The history of human settlement in western North Carolina is essentially the history of the Cherokee tribe of Indians, and Silver focuses on the Swannanoa River valley on the edge of the Black Mountains to illustrate how the Cherokees lived and used the resources provided by the mountains. The first inhabitants of the area were part of the semi-nomadic Archaic era, who fished and hunted as well as gathered food from the wild plants. They were followed, successively, by woodland groups and by the Pisgah people who lived year round on the Swannanoa River. These people first practiced agriculture and were antecedent to the Cherokee, who built palisaded villages, planted crops, managed game resources, and used fire to clear and maintain the forests. It was during this period that humans began to change the mountain environment that sustained them. Silver argues that this history suggests that, rather than the romantic notion of indigenous peoples living in Eden, a more dynamic relationship between humans and the natural environment existed in the Black Mountains region in those days.

The dynamics changed again in the 16th century when the Spanish Conquistadors arrived in the area. Hernando DeSoto was the first European to visit the Southern Appalachians and he—as well as those who followed him—searched for gold and other minerals in the mountains. Although they were not successful in their efforts, their treatment of the Cherokees and the mountains presaged the future. The English followed the Spanish and saw the mountains as a source of deerskins for millinery trade in London. Though these traders brought both disease and more visitors to the mountains, they also brought others who were interested in the scientific study of the local flora: descriptions of the area were widely published. Those by André Micheaux and John Fraser led to yet more visitation to the Black Mountains and finally to European settlement and the establishment of commercial agriculture and livestock production.

In one of the most compelling chapters, Silver tells the story of Elisha Mitchell, for whom the highest peak in the Black Mountains is named. Mitchell, a professor of Natural Science at the University of North Carolina, spent his professional life exploring and charting the Black Mountains and, in fact, fell to his death during one of his visits in 1857. He had earlier become involved in a very public dispute with Thomas Clingman, his former student, over which peak in the Blacks was the tallest (and for whom it should be named). While this is a fascinating story with early North Carolina political overtones, Silver indicates that its real importance lies in the publicity that was

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generated about the mountains—which led to a blossoming of public interest in the Black Mountains and then to changes in attitudes toward the mountains that threatened their present and future ecology.

The modern history of the Black Mountains is not very different from that of most mountain ranges in the USA. Silver argues that agricultural failure and the Civil War combined to wreak havoc on the mountain landscape. Drought in the 1860s, combined with the lack of arable land, put considerable stress on the wildlife as mountain people struggled to survive. Roving bands of soldiers from both sides of the Civil War devastated the farms and the mountainsides. However, the greater devastation was to come.

The turn of the 20th century saw the Black Mountains become a battleground for the lumber and tourist industries. The lumber companies from the North clearcut much of the lower elevations. Conservationists thus began to worry about the destruction of the forests and, allied with local business people, put pressure on the North Carolina government, which resulted in the creation of the first State Park at Mount Mitchell. The railroads built by the lumber companies to transport logs out of the mountains ironically opened up the mountains to tourists who came to experience the "wilderness." Thirty years later, the United States government also became involved in the preservation of the Black Mountain environment, when it routed the Blue Ridge Parkway close enough to Mount Mitchell to provide automobile access to the peak.

In his analysis of the many facets of, and influences on, the Black Mountains, Silver also discusses the American chestnut blight and its effect on the mountain landscape, and he ends his story with a perceptive discussion of the death of the Fraser firs that began in the 1980s. He presents the arguments about the causes of this problem including the roles of ozone depletion, air pollution, and insect infestation.

Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains is the instructive story of both ecological change and the impact of human activity on the natural environment. The author's references are extensive and include many original sources, as well as numerous useful maps and photos. His interweaving of his personal journal of visits to the mountains adds a surprisingly spiritual dimension to the scholarly narrative. This book is politically, culturally, philosophically, biologically, and—for its author and its readers—personally engaging.

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L'eau, miroir d'une société—Irrigation paysanne au Népal central

By Olivia Aubriot. Paris: CNRS [Centre national de la recherche scientifique] Éditions, 2004. 321 pp. 22 photos, 70 drawings and maps. €32.00, US$38.00. ISBN 2-271-06204-7.

The aim of this book is to try to understand the paradox of the precise distribution and management of water in an irrigation system in Aslewacaur, a village in central Nepal, though there is no apparent water deficiency in this area. It further tries to explain the water distribution according to family lines. For this purpose, Aubriot follows an inter- and multidisciplinary approach to explain the chosen irrigation techniques in a socio-political, economic and environmental context, using methods from ethnology, agronomy and geography.

To begin, Aubriot introduces the paradox in more detail and indicates some first possible reasons for it. One is the fragility of the canal, in terms of landslides and slumps. Another potential reason is the social organization in the village according to family lines, on the basis of which the water seems to be distributed and managed. The author then puts water in the context of different societies that are prevalent in the village: the society of the Brahmans, the local society of the village, the family lines, and finally an evolving society in terms of socioeconomic conditions or from the perspective of women.

The first chapter reflects on the history of irrigation and the irrigation society in central Nepal. Aubriot argues that the combination of rice cultivation with irrigation in the study area is a technique imported by the Indo-Nepalese population, by shedding light on the biophysical and social context of the traditional and evolved rice cultivation practices. She further argues that the management of resources has gone through a process of individualization from collective to individual management during the 20th century, in a time of agricultural intensification on both irrigated and rainfed agricultural land. This is explained by the demographic explosion around the 1930s and the construction of numerous irrigation canals in the 20th century.

The remaining chapters focus on the study area in Aslewacaur. In Chapter 2, the focus is on the village itself and the irrigation system of the principal canal. The village is discussed in its environmental and social context; it is located on an old river terrace which results in a unique arrangement of the irrigated fields and the necessary infrastructure. The area is densely populated and landholdings are very small; most households have less than 0.5 ha of irrigated land. The family structure is fragmented, with most of the households being nuclear families with about 5 peo-

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ple. The small landholdings force the households to find additional income to cover their needs, mostly through temporary migration to India. Aslewacaur and its neighboring villages are principally inhabited by Indo-Nepalese castes. In Aslewacaur, people mostly belong to the same family line and clan, the Pandeys.

The construction of the principal irrigation canal was initiated in the late 19th century, but it was initially not used so that it degraded. Only in the early 20th century was it renovated and irrigation began. The water rights were distributed according to the landholdings, but were mainly in the hands of the Pandey clan. The management rules, as well as rights to protect the canal, are discussed in detail. The difficulty of mobilizing the necessary workforce for maintenance activities is highlighted and partly blamed on the temporary outmigration of men and political changes. The management of the irrigation system is then observed in the light of these political changes in the country.

Chapter 3 shows the distribution of the water from the principal canal, first into 3 secondary channels with the help of a divisor. From here on, water distribution was traditionally measured with a water clock, which was later replaced by watches. The distribution of water to the parcels—the timing as well as the order—is discussed and it is shown that equal water distribution is achieved at the level of a family line.

Chapter 4 discusses the spatial distribution of irrigation water and shows an analogy between social organization, spatial organization, and the distribution of water. In brief, the society divides the water in the same way as it divides the fields and in the same way it is organized. Though water distribution is generally strictly organized, a certain flexibility and adjustment to different conditions are possible. Over the years, the irrigation system adapted and now reflects the current society, though the management rules are from the past.

The book concludes that the paradox can only be explained by a combination of social factors in a technical, economic, and political context. Environmental factors combined with high dependence on the canal have led to increased tension around water. Interrupted irrigation risks provoking interruption in food supply, which is encountered with collective organization of water management. On the other hand, individual water rights are in place, based on the conditions at the time of canal construction. The water clock also helped the initiator of the canal project to make it appear to be efficient and therefore to gain the support of the other villagers.

The distribution of water, though currently seemingly unequal, was certainly appropriate at the time when the irrigation system was initiated, and reflects social organization. It is based on an equal distribution between family lines, rather than on technical considerations. Maintenance of the system is done by collective action, but initiated by the village nobles. This system has suffered largely in recent years due to political changes.

The book is a very good model for inter- and multidisciplinary studies between society and agronomy and can be used as a reference for these studies by scholars of different subjects. It looks at aspects of irrigation from a completely different angle and combines the findings to tell a very interesting story, clearly based on a vast knowledge of the village and the local conditions. It provides insights not only into the management of an irrigation system but also into the organization of the local inhabitants' lives.

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High Frontiers: Dolpo and the Changing World of Himalayan Pastoralists

By Kenneth M. Bauer. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. xiii + 270 pp. US$37.50. ISBN 0-231-12391-4.

The 5000 or so Dolpo-pa inhabit one of the most isolated regions of the trans-Himalaya in Dolpa District, northwest Nepal. Kenneth Bauer's book is based on research between 1995 and 2002, including an extended spell of fieldwork in Dolpo in 1996–7 when he held a Fulbright fellowship. Initially envisaged as an attempt "to explicate local resource management techniques and practices" (p 204), the research evolved into a more ambitious examination of the dramatic changes that have occurred in Dolpo's pastoral and trading way of life, reflecting what I take to be the author's own shift from a background in ecology towards anthropology. He is not the first to write about Dolpo as an ethnographer, and draws on earlier research, notably by Jest and Fürer-Haimendorf.

The book moves uneasily (more on that later) between a narrative focused on Dolpo and more general reflections on the geopolitics of the region. At the heart of the account is the question of how "patterns of trade and seasonal migration changed in Dolpo (and the trans-Himalaya)" (p 3) since the late 1950s, when after the overthrow of the old regime in Tibet the Chinese closed its borders. Pastoral production in Dolpo has involved yak, cattle, yak–cattle crossbreeds, goats, and sheep: what have been the local consequences of events along the Nepal–Tibet border 40 years ago?

Space does not permit more than a cursory illustration of some of the changes brought about (and distilling these is not made easier by Bauer's presentation). Before clo-

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sure of the Tibet border, Dolpo herders spent the summer months grazing their herds in Dolpo while, in winter, they drove them north and handed them over to Tibetan *netsang* (business partners counted as fictive kin) who incorporated them with their own animals till reclaimed the following spring. In parallel, Tibetans and Nepalese from the middle ranges also converged on Dolpo in summer, making Dolpo a seasonal fulcrum of trading networks and a magnet for grazing from north and south. After closure of the Tibet border, as old *netsang* ties withered, the 3 less densely populated valleys in Dolpo adapted by contracting their herds and keeping them close to their villages through the winter. The 4th and more populated valley, with larger herds but poorer grazing, responded by collapsing their herds and heading south in a communal winter exodus that has had considerable local repercussions. Where, before 1960, the people of Dolpo were able to use to advantage their strategic position along the border with Tibet, orchestrating trade and herding, the initial closure of Tibet and the subsequent restricted access undermined this position within a generation.

Despite reference to a wide literature on pastoralism, it is hard to discern a theoretical thread running through this book. Moreover, in many ways it has a curiously old-fashioned tone, as if the methodological and epistemological debates of the last 20 years in anthropology and the social sciences generally had largely passed it by. Some readers may regard that as a blessing. But there is a surprising absence of reflection about the nature of ethnography and the evidence being presented; and it is unusual nowadays to hear so little the words of those individuals whom the author knew well. Even in the best of the book—and Chapter 6 is the core of the analysis—Bauer does not convey as much of a sense of Dolpo individuals as his long association would surely have enabled him to do. He speaks of the importance of human agency, but gives us almost no glimpses of agency in case studies or individual portraits. And if men are a shadowy presence, women do not feature at all.

However, there is one important argument in the later part of the book, and that is directed against the filmmaker Eric Valli, whose highly successful film *Himalaya* (or *Caravan* in Nepal and France) brought Dolpo into the international limelight when it came out in 1999. Bauer is critical of Valli's romanticizing depiction of a timeless way of life, portraying Dolpo as if it were untouched by modernity and the political upheavals of Nepal's recent history. As he says: "Today, the average man of Dolpo may find himself in vastly different places—trading between his mountain home and Tibet, selling Tibetan trinkets to tourists at the steps of a Buddhist pilgrimage site in Kathmandu, or traveling abroad to serve as an underground laborer in a toxic factory in Taiwan or Chinese restaurant in New York" (p 200). Bauer also casts a skeptical eye on the legacy of Valli's film for Dolpo ("economic inflation and social tensions" [p 186]). Here, at least, Bauer links his critique to wider debates about the pitfalls of cross-cultural representation, and indeed acknowledges how he had initially viewed his own project through a lens of nostalgia, seeing his task as "salvage anthropology" (p 192), only to grasp instead the momentousness of the history and change with which the people of Dolpo have had to grapple.

As Owen Lattimore remarked many years ago, a pure pastoralist is a poor pastoralist; and in the changes to a complex agropastoral and trading economy in which risks in this harsh environment have always been spread through a careful balancing of options, Bauer has a fascinating story to tell. Yet he chooses to tell it in a way that I found puzzling and frustrating. Much the best of the book is in 3 late chapters (6–8), in which he examines, first, the changes in the transhumant cycle after 1960; second, the impact of successive conservation and development strategies and the role of the Nepalese state; and third, the impact and significance of Valli's film. A strength of these very interesting chapters is the consistent focus they keep on Dolpo, allowing general issues to emerge from the local detail. Indeed I would like to have seen considerably greater detail in Chapter 6. But at least in this part of the book Bauer plays to his strengths. This cannot be said of the three preceding chapters (3–5). The problem here is that, while these earlier chapters have the laudable aim of placing Dolpo in a larger geopolitical and historical context, one result is that Dolpo itself largely disappears from view. Whatever the intention, this earlier part of the book is needlessly long and derivative, reliant on a rather unconvincing rehash of secondary sources. Sadly it is only later that the author seems to find his own voice.

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