

## Mélanie Vandenhelsken

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### Current position

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

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

### Main areas of research

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

### Academic career

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Conferences and workshops

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Publications**

### **Edited book**

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

### **Edited special issues**

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

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

### **Peer-reviewed journal articles**

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

[www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/bot](http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/bot)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Book chapters**

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

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