Being a female migrant in the Indian Himalayas,

(In)direct discourses of fundamentalism processes

in Jammu & Kashmir.

Case discussed: Zangskar Valley, A Buddhist-Muslim society

In recent years, the debate on the place of women in social dynamics has caught the attention of the public especially in socio-economic research or social-political research. What we now know about the empowerment of women is to a significant extent the result of research programmes shaped within geopolitical dynamics of the 20th century. Since then, few researches have been conducted on the women migrant impact in the religious radicalization process.

The existing anthropological studies (P.Dollfus, I.Riaboff, K.I.Gutschow, H.Osmaston, V.Bhasin, J.Crook, L.Petech, F.Pirie,) have focused on understanding the dynamics and mechanics of the transformation of community identity and which result from internal movement within the community rather than from accepting elements (people) from outside the community. They have either reflected [1st approach] or have been unable to account for its implications in Zanskar or a community or context. New studies have started a reappraisal of historical (J Rizvi, H.K.Franke, J. Bray) and political (M.Van Beek, R.Gupta) survey. We know now how the importance of gender issues impacts the way a community might identify itself, and also as an economical assets (women empowerment building all around Indian restricted areas where women can knights and make carpets to sell on the market).

These studies have helped to unveil many aspects of Buddhists women impact on the local economy network. In my previous studies, I have showed how Buddhists and Muslims who are very aware of their differences manage to remain determined to build together a community in Padum in the context of this border area where religious difference has often been the source of conflict (Moghol-tibetan empire and indo-Pakistani wars). Highlighting the common or shared mechanisms and strategies implemented at community level has become one of the most fundamental issues of this work: How does sharing the same space and way of life take priority over affiliation to a confessional group.

My published work strives to discuss the ideas of reciprocity and exchange and the nature of this reciprocity when it exists (Testard, 2007:31, 48-51). Thus, it is only when exchange exists in the form of indirect reciprocity that each of the transfers is at the same time both cause and effect of the other transfer. Evidence gathered in the field enables us to understand how narratives and religious experience regulates social relationships within the community in Padum.

By basing my analysis on specific examples such the unequal role of women and the distortion between objective history and narratives, I have been able to highlight how violence is subtly managed to regulate exchange (social and political) in this bi-confessional (Buddhist-Muslim) community.

Later, concerning the analysis of word circulation, a vehicle which can be perceived as both violent or peacemaking, I have started a comparative analysis between the institution of the “palabre” (Bidima : 1997) in West Africa (Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Mali) and my investigations in Zanskar. Unsaid words (Deboos: 2010) can lead to suspicion, just as they can be at the origin of slander or malicious gossip. During conversation in Zanskar, as I have analysed it, speech is free and heard by everyone. Grievances are openly expressed and very often humorously. Therefore the unsaid has no place here and traditional doctors or the

possessed are only called upon to predict the future or cure illnesses of the body. Women are at the centre of this exchange, older men are only responsible for political organization. Speech is not only female, but female speech plays a pacifying and cohesive role for the group. This however does not mean that slander and malicious gossip do not exist, they are just very sparse and controlled.

The results of this research have enabled me to conceptualise how Padumpa (inhabitants of Padum) and Zanskarpa (inhabitants of Zanskar) community identity is built up. Moreover, my linguistic skills and the quality of my relationships with members of both confessional groups (Buddhists and Muslims) have enabled me to grasp the unsaid and the parts of language not actually expressed by my contacts which, in turn, has led me to take my research even further.

In September 2012, the Hindustan Times titled on “Curfew in Zanskar continues after communal clashes”: in fact, 28 Buddhists of five families, belonging to low castes among Buddhists, had converted to Islam. Some young Buddhist people attacked these new converted Muslims to force them to return to Buddhist fold. 18 of them did so. Then two years after, a local newspaper “Stawa” addressed in July 2014 an article on “Zangskar, communal tension and dialogues?”. Local youth commented what happened and were talking about new “religious extremism feelings”. What does that mean for them? How do they define “religious extremism feelings”?

Therefore, this paper will address the way how religion revival and female migration are link and how these life experiences may straight influence the community identity.

In the face of the increasing religious issues (Buddhist and Muslim) and economic issues (such as tourism, monetary economy, road-building and administrative jobs) in the Zanskar region, the important factors which define the affiliation to a community are changing. Even if, to date, the situation in Zanskar has remained stable, radical political movements increased between 2009 and 2015.

Young students recently graduated from Srinagar and Jammu universities come home to Zanskar where the policy of keeping jobs ensures a stable income for them. These Zanskarpas are classified as “Scheduled tribe: Bozo/Boto” by the Indian State and which means “Buddhist Tribe”. This designation applies, however, whatever their religious confession may be, Muslims in Zanskar are also described as “Buddhist Tribe”. At the same time the official administrative language is Urdu, a language which Muslims can read from a very young age for confessional reasons.

These generations of 30-year-olds have therefore built up their community identity around their geographical origins and their family relations. During their “expatriation” for further education or their first professional experience, they are confronted, in an India where religious affiliation is of primary importance, with the need to call upon their confessional group for mutual help organizing accommodation and supplies. When they return home as qualified graduates (degree or other diploma) to their village they have a high degree of awareness as to what confessional affiliation really means for them.