

Isabelle Sacareau, *Porteurs de l'Himalaya. Le trekking au Népal*. Berlin, coll. Mappemonde, 271 p., maps, fig., photographs.

Review by Monique Fort

Isabelle Sacareau presents the first comprehensive study on the porters of Nepal in relation to the development of trekking activities. After a concise, yet enlightening introduction, the author begins by discussing the conditions of the development of mountain tourism in Nepal. The originality of the Himalayan environment of Nepal, with its eight ">8000m" peaks and of its mosaic of populations, is first evoked. Then, the author emphasizes that Nepal has benefited from the mythic constructions generated in the minds of Westerners around the magic words "Himalaya" and "Tibet" and on the semantic confusion raised by the word "Sherpa". Both these aspects explain why Nepal Himalaya appears for those living in a materially-oriented society as an appealing, new territory for "wild" and/or mystic adventure. The economic and political contexts of Nepal are also important for tourism development since this activity is the primary source of foreign currency and thus generates new sources of income that the government of Nepal wants to control inasmuch as tourism may indirectly play an important role in the development of peripheral areas of the country.

The second part of the book deals with the specificity of mountain tourism and with its consequence on the Nepalese involved: porters, Sherpas and the managers of trekking agencies. Mountain tourism (in contrast to religious or cultural tourism) is rather recent (the last 20 years) and has progressively spread over most of the country. As a consequence, revenue from trekking has economically benefited, to a significant extent, the villages located along the major trekking trails. The trekking boom during the last 15 years has also stimulated entrepreneurial attitudes, thus resulting in the creation of many new trekking agencies. The author analyses the social impact of this expansion, as expressed by the progressive integration of tribal populations (Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Gurung, etc., natives from the areas of trekking destinations) into the group of tourism business people, initially composed of both literate Indo-Nepalese and physically skilled Sherpas. Internal social and economic segregation/hierarchy among the different groups are also analysed in detail and illustrated with several examples—from real success stories to the marginalization and impoverishment of those who have lost their roots

in breaking definitely with the traditional agro-pastoral activities of their ethnic group. Sacareau shows how tourism has generated among the Nepalese populations involved in trekking new lifestyles, complex forms of migration (from temporary to permanent emigration from the native village), and multiple activities in the villages. More generally, tourism has stimulated the emergence of a new middle class based on economic status rather than on birth or caste conditions. Trekking development and its spatial expansion have also established a new geography of Nepal, with the supremacy of the capital city, Kathmandu, and the secondary centre, Pokhara—the starting point for treks around the Annapurna range and further north and west. The redistribution of trekking benefits is, however, unequal in the country. The regions which are the most visited receive a great portion of this income (i.e., through lodging, food, gardening activities), whereas the regions providing porters have also been progressively included in the market economy. In some cases agricultural activities are becoming outpaced by jobs provided by tourism. However, it is clear that some other parts of the country, either too remote or still considered as "unattractive", receive little or no feedback, a situation which, at term, might generate socio-political instability. Enlarging the scope of her study, the author shows how this form of mountain tourism, as analysed in Nepal, appears as a good model for other developing mountainous countries where tourism also plays a growing part in the economy (e.g., Morocco, Turkey and the South America Andean countries). Tourism provides a positive impact on the economy, on the diversification of activities (off-farm jobs) for countries still relying chiefly on agricultural products; it also provides a means to rise in the social hierarchy for individuals or some specific ethnic groups; and it favours the development of a national identity among multi-ethnic countries. However, Sacareau reminds us that the economic benefits may remain fragile, since they are very dependent upon the "moody" behaviour of tourists, upon the regional and international economic situation, and above all, on the political stability of the welcoming countries.

Clearly illustrated with well-conceived diagrams and maps, this book is a pleasure to read. It should be warmly recommended, not only to scientists but also to all lovers of Nepal and the Himalaya, to those who like trekking not only for the discovery of magnificent landscapes but also for a better understanding of the mountain people, their conditions of life and work, and the mutations affecting their society under the influence of tourism as part of the "mondialization" of our world.