**ABSTRACT**

**The Embodiments of Ice and Bone:**

**Ecological Quickening and the Phenomenology of Being in Dolpo, Nepal**

For at least one thousand years, the Dolpo-pa, the people of Dolpo, an enclave of culturally Tibetan transhumant agro-pastoralists dwelling through the high Himalayas of Midwestern Nepal, have caravanned ware-laden yak over the high passes and through the barren valleys of their mountain homeland. Masters of the salt-for-grain circuit of trade between the Tibetan Plateau and the Gangian Plains, in moving through those unforgiving lands Dolpo-pa herders have through the centuries been confronted by a range of natural hazards—landslides, avalanches, flash floods, earthquakes, etc. Yet, as argued in this paper, the Dolpo-a are not ‘vulnerable’. Nor are they ‘resilient’, at ‘risk’, or possessive of ‘adaptive capacity’. These among other buzzwords common in hazard and disaster studies take the individual as an explicit center of consciousness somehow detached from and prior to the embodied experience of being in ‘a’world. In contrast, as data from anthropological research conducted in Dolpo in the fall of 2010 suggests, the Dolpo-pa tend not to see themselves as being so ontologically detached in being the people of Dolpo. Instead, this research suggests that they tend to see themselves in interconnection with their lifeworlds very much as existential phenomenologists have described, as “body-subjects” whose sentient knowledge always precedes conscious knowledge in their being ecologically continuous with yet separate in their own identities from the many other surfaces that compose those processes of flux that ever is the world. This distinction between contiguous and detached identity, drawn from ecofeminist theory, is important. Representing Dolpo-pa identity as being (relish the ambiguity) circumscribed by those analytical buzzwords instead of as being thus embodied belies the ongoing process by which identity is constituted within an appropriative reflexivity between the structural dissipations of the natural organism and the continuity of, as Merleau-Ponty identified, the “historical idea” of semiotic possibilities that are actively emplaced through that process of embodiment. In this way, characterizing the experience of embodiment as a process of being of ‘a’ and not of ‘the’ world is quite significant. It suggests that this process continually constitutes an experience of being “situated” as situated being, a being that emerges so emplaced in being constitutive of ‘a’ world enfolded within that process of identity formation that is ever continuous with the active experience of self-consciousness objectifying itself in becoming aware of (its) being what is known to itself, in being (itself). In this way, identity for the Dolpo-pa can be said to be inadequately represented by the common buzzwords of disaster and hazards studies because Dolpo-pa herders actively embody the semiotic possibilities of culture and history as dynamic body-subjects situated within the karmic tangle in being of (not ‘of being in’) Dolpo. As such, they confront even as they are confronted by that range of hazards that also move—ontologically both as and through—those unforgiving lands that have ever been only illusorily separable from the reflexive continuity of non-reductionist being, at all times ecologically quickened apace with the constitutive embodiment of agencies cast relational over time and space.