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**Reigning the River: Urban Ecologies and Political Transformation
in Kathmandu by Anne M. Rademacher; Reviewed by Kelly D. Alley**

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agreement system” (36 pp.); Khawaja A. Rehman, “Ergativity in Kundal Shahi, Kashmiri and Hindko” (15 pp.), and Bettina Zeisler, “Kenhat, the dialects of Upper Ladakh and Zaskar” (67 pp.). Barte’s paper is “the first report in which an animacy split and conjunct/disjunct patternings co-occur in the verbal morphology of a language” (p. 133). After describing the conjunct/disjunct systems in Standard Tibetan and Dongwang Tibetan, Barte presents a detailed discussion of existentials in Dongwang, where existential verbs show an animacy split which extends to situations when these existential verbs are used as auxiliaries, and is also found in other areas of the grammar. While Standard Tibetan has two existential verbs, in Dongwang there are four: *ndo* (conjunct, animate), *zɛ* (conjunct, inanimate), *ndo dz̥ iʔ* (disjunct, animate), and *zɛ dz̥ iʔ* (disjunct, inanimate). Barte argues that this animacy split is an innovation, most likely due to language contact, and that it is likely to be an areal phenomenon.

Huysmans describes the verbal templates of Sampang, a Kiranti language of the “complex pronominalizing” type, in which transitive verbs agree with both the agent and the patient. The various verbal agreement affixes derive from ancient independent pronouns. After presenting the conjugations of Sampang simplicia, involving eleven pronominal characteristics, Huysmans discusses two alternate analyses of the morpheme <*i*>: that it is (i) a non-preterite tense marker, or (ii) a marker of singular number of second or third person actants. The Sampang morphological template consists of one prefixal slot and ten suffixal slots, each of which is discussed in detail in the third section of the paper. The article concludes with a comparison of the Sampang system with those of other Kiranti languages, finding that it is especially similar to the systems of Kulung, Limbu and Lohorong.

Rehman’s paper provides a first look at the endangered Indo-Aryan language Kundal Shahi, spoken by 3,371 people in the Neelum Valley in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. In particular, the paper compares its split-ergativity with that of the Kashmiri and Hindko of the same region. This early research finds that Kundal Shahi split-ergativity is highly similar to that of most of the Indo-Aryan languages of the subcontinent. Regarding Kashmiri, Rehman notes that it does not display a DATIVE-ERGATIVE alternation correlating with volitionality contrasts, as does Hindko.

Zeisler’s article begins with suggesting a revised classification of Ladakhi dialects into historically younger but lexico-phonetically conservative Shamskat dialects and historically older but lexico-phonetically partly conservative and partly innovative Kenhat dialects. The features distinguishing the Kenhat from the Shamskat dialects are described, first situating them in their geographical settings, then turning to phonetic and morphological features, an interesting discussion of tonogenesis, and discussions of the historical fate of several morphological and case-marking features. These two dialect groups, Zeisler concludes,

reflect separate historical developments as well as different linguistic sub- and adstrates.

As with any conference proceedings volume, this book discusses a potpourri of topics. The bulk of the book consists of several specialized articles on T-B languages. The introduction, Part I, has a wider scope; and Rehman’s article will be of special interest to people interested in the Indo-Aryan, especially Dardic, languages.

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REIGNING THE RIVER: URBAN ECOLOGIES AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION IN KATHMANDU

BY ANNE M. RADEMACHER

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. 264 p. Ill., maps. ISBN 978-0-8223-5062-0.

REVIEWED BY KELLY D. ALLEY

What resonates after reading Anne Rademacher’s new book, *Reigning the River*, about the troubled Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers of Kathmandu is its opening story. In this, members of a local rally are walking along the banks of an urban rivulet, reflecting on the modern history of this city and its lack of good governance and river ecology. To investigate the problem of river decline from a number of perspectives, the author sets out to explore what she calls *urban ecologies* as they are played out in the capital of Kathmandu. The book walks through a turbulent twenty years of Kathmandu’s history and outlines the political crises, human settlements and resettlements, and global reaches of river restoration discourses. She orients and frames this journey by identifying three narratives of urban ecology.

Rademacher traces out the political and environmental transformations that together impact and create the degraded reaches of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers. The book highlights the networks of professional activists and bureaucrats that are involved in talking about river

restoration and sketches the practices that create a lively but ultimately ineffective engagement with these rivers. Rademacher portrays a fascinating but depressing view of a country frustrated by the hubris of international development and an unstable and visionless leadership; in this the population progressively loses its cultural lifeline to important water resources. She explains how urban ecology must be defined against the stresses of a population that has been destabilized by violence and the vagaries of power. She convincingly shows that top-down development projects, employing an army of foreign consultants and well-wishers, ends up doing very little to keep a sacred river alive. The book is eloquently argued with substantial references to theoretical sources and connections. But in some places, the ethnography presents its data only loosely and leaves the reader frustrated by a lack of additional information.

In the book, Rademacher elaborates three frames for knowing river decline as a problem and for thinking about solutions (p.59). These are: 1) the official frame based on studies, policy and development plans; 2) the frame focused on human rights and foregrounding the needs of landless urban settlers and 3) the frame that emphasizes the loss of culture and ecology. In short these are: the state-development narrative; the housing-focused narrative; and the culturally focused narrative (p.59), and each produce collaborations and oppositions. The author approaches this case of river decline to study how urban nature and social life are mutually produced, reinforced and changed by state and development experts, cultural heritage activists, and housing advocates for poor migrants.

Rademacher explains that the official frame uses river basin reports, water quality studies, geomorphological analysis, and wastewater impact assessments to define the river's biophysical degradation. These documents note the cultural loss that follows biophysical degradation, and recognize that religious uses of river water are now only a shadow of their former appeal (p.74). She shows convincingly that such reports, produced for those with the presumed authority to solve the river's problems, belie a political stability and vision that is never achieved.

In the second narrative, housing advocates put inadequate shelter at the core of the river problem and consider environmental stresses an unfortunate consequence. Growing squatter settlements represent a lack of housing rights, an economic periphery surviving on the last bit of untitled land along the unstable riverbank. Rademacher notes that the simultaneous growth of urban *sukumbasi* (landless poor) settlements and urban river degradation facilitated the urban (elite? middle class?) belief of a causal link between the two (p.79). This obviously obscures an array of drivers of river decline. Housing advocates called for upgrading *sukumbasi* settlements and improving public health, education and sanitation, foregrounding housing rights in the discussion of river restoration.

The third frame, the cultural restorationist narrative,

presents a few established public voices that eschew the development paradigm and valorize a lost Bagmati civilization (p. 84). For one resident, this loss is a cultural and political problem of forgetting the river's divine origins. However, in this portrayal of several residents' views and positions, there is no substantive description of the former Bagmati complex in myth or geography, and the reader misses a fuller understanding of the religious occupations once connected to temples and ghats or their changes over the last twenty years. Unfortunately what survives of this group today is not heard in this account, nor are the views of other kinds of "nature-loving" populations such as trekkers and tour agents.

After outlining these frames, Rademacher proceeds to outline Nepal's turbulent political history from the massacre of the royal family and subsequent political jockeying to the emergency impasse. In the midst of the emergency the miracle of river cleanliness appears. A wastewater channel creates the illusion of ecological improvement and beautification but represents only the feeble reach of state control. The so-called miracle at Pashupatinath was an engineering trick giving the appearance of cleaning but only diverting wastewater to a downstream re-entry point.

In following, the author details 'emergency ecology' as a time of monarchical and state crises. After the massacre of the royal family and during the ongoing war against the Maoist insurgency, the city landscape underwent further transformation. City spaces were demolished and in some places rebuilt as symbols of state control. This was accomplished in conjunction with crisis events or in preparation for conferences of global or regional importance. In the name of preparing for the SAARC conference, several squatter (*sukumbasi*) settlements were demolished along the riverbank. Rademacher notes the program of making the city "clean for guests" as an important pretense of power and it would be interesting to note the history and frequency of this government strategy. Major crises and international events function as justifications for rapid urban change ("renewal"). As she puts it, the state is "freed to act" by the emergency. This is a reminder of Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine* and Gregory Button's *Disaster Culture*, two books that lay out rapid structural changes at moments of destabilization and disorder. In this case, the ongoing emergency provided an opportunity for demolitions along the riverbank. After a long period of ineffectual notices, the *sukumbasi* settlements were removed "all of a sudden," startling even the anthropologist. Shortly after the demolitions, the state and urban elite could claim cleanup success (p.123).

The author refers to these rapid changes as *ecologies of invasion* and offers official and popular representations of Kathmandu's *sukumbasi* as they lived amidst political instability. The migrants' proximity to the river naturalized them as a cause and aspect of river degradation. Although the river squatters are introduced as victims of marginalization in this disturbing puzzle of neglect, the reader does not

learn much about them or get to know their stories and predicaments in this book. Moreover, the particular examples of invasion are not linked or compared in any way to the many cases of riverbank demolition across Asia and especially in India and Bangladesh.

The final chapter returns to the cultural narrative and provides a disappointing discussion of several topics of interest among the resident non-governmental organizations. Although the chapter makes clear that the global reach of the riverscape is twisted and tangled in politics and the hubris of development communities, in several places the discussion appears weak in supporting evidence and the ethnographic journey seems rather pointless. The discussion of visions of pillars appears trivial even though it was an important part of the cultural narrative. On p. 167 for example, the discussion of the river rafting awareness event ended without understanding what citizens think about using the river as a dumpsite. The statements of residents and primary data on their discussions and stewardship activities are thinly applied in the writing and in some places bogged down by repetitions of summary and theoretical statements.

I finish the book without a clear sense of what urban ecology means apart from the position points of several key actors. While the author points attention to the way river degradation is framed, debated and made meaningful, to the range of processes through which degradation is engaged as an ecological problem in time and space, the book ends up overusing the notion of urban ecology. After reading about so many ecologies I just want to get away from the term altogether. This is unfortunate, for these rivers are directly in the interests of human communities, and the broader phenomenon of water stress will impact the provisioning of water for fundamental needs. In this way the book could end on that vital note, since it leaves the reader with unanswered questions that are indeed important. Can an urban river be anything more than a wastewater drain? Should those water supplies be rendered completely unusable for clean water needs? Since restoration is only anticipated at this ending, and not guided in any emancipatory way by another vision, we can only assume that such a possibility is not yet seen. And in the absence of such we carry along with the despair and anxiety of that first riverbank tour.

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UNDERSTANDING MOUNTAIN POVERTY IN THE HINDU KUSH-HIMALAYAS: REGIONAL REPORT FOR AFGHANISTAN, BANGLADESH, BHUTAN, CHINA, INDIA, MYANMAR, NEPAL, AND PAKISTAN

KIRAN HUNZAI, JEAN-YVES GERLITZ,
AND BRIGITTE HOERMANN

Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 2011. 68 pages.

REVIEWED BY JOHN METZ

This is an ambitious and beautifully presented report which seeks to define and explain poverty in the mountainous parts of the countries of the broadly defined Hindu Kush Himalaya region. The study's challenge is, first, to obtain realistic data; second, to organize it in ways that are reasonably similar across the different countries, and; third, to analyze it in meaningful ways. Obtaining good data is a persistent problem, but the authors have assembled and analyzed information from parallel national surveys in all these countries, except China and Myanmar, and have presented it in a clear and attractive way. I suspect this will be the standard reference on Himalayan poverty for the foreseeable future.

The first chapter, the Introduction, quickly reviews how mountain poverty is considered to be unique and then briefly explains the methodology of the study. The subsequent eight chapters each summarize the results for one of the countries. Chapter 10 provides a regional overview. Chapter 11 presents the main conclusions.

The analysis is an advance on previous studies because it assembles comparable data from the mountainous parts of the countries of the region and incorporates into the analysis community infrastructure and accessibility information. The main problem I encountered is in understanding the methods as they are presented in the document, especially the sources of the raw data. Since outcomes depend on methodology, I will spend some time reviewing it.