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Kathmandu - Autumn 2015

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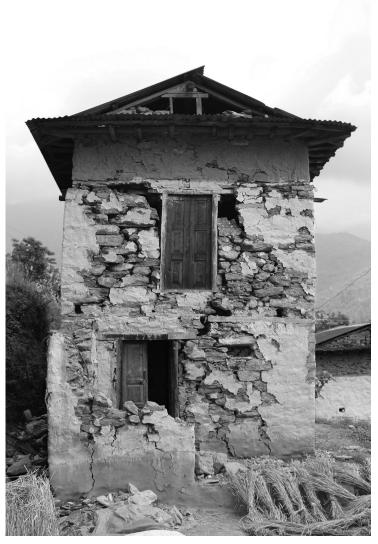


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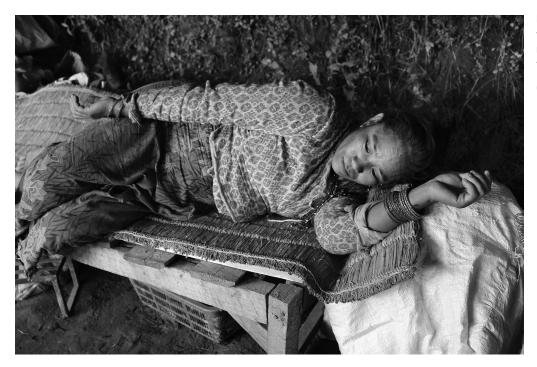
Beyond a sea of tarpaulin I do not know what to expect My landing as tentative as the city's Dust is self-assured -Competing, like the grit of this place does, With mountain air and mongrel howls

For a town under Pangaea's siege The streets of Kathmandu reveal As much continuity as change Dawn comes with knuckles of ginger, Chilies clustered in blooming fists, Limes like mottled marbles: A miniature world of tastes Laid bare by roadside women, Saris frayed, foreheads creased Hands signaling a life close to the earth Even as they paint patterns of spices Across a burlap canvas, on the concrete Edge of life – these familiar Landscapes of possibility and woe



A two-storey stone, mud and wood building that was severely damaged in the May 12 earthquake, Dolakha.

(Mark Turin, May 2015)



Bimaya Thami resting in a temporary shelter after a morning spent excavating her family home, Dolakha.

(Mark Turin, May 2015)

Witness this thing called living
In the color red, in marigolds
And the tarnished sediment of ghee:
Yesterday's butter lamps soften into
Everyday worship, head bowed
For the briefest of moments
Before the return to labor:
Shaking rain from bundled mustard greens
Blowing grime from spark plugs
Sorting soda bottles from scrap metal and onion peels
Sweeping the square meter that marks
A living's domain
Crooning 'bananabanana eggplanteggplant'
With high-pitched resignation

I did not expect her to be broken

But to find the wounds

Is another matter – what can I know

Of terror from simple remainders:

Strawberry blonde bricks scattered
At the skirts of this ancient *stupa*;
Calked 'X' to mark the spots where
This angry earth tore across a wall;
Painters run in short supply these days,
As if the gods refuse to whitewash suffering
With a rainbow of pastels

The Red God¹ navigates his city

Compassion spilling onto cracked streets;

A leaning tower of memory in the bodies

Of men who bear him up;

In the warped flesh of his palanquin;

In all who gather to mark this spectacle

Of resilience –

And this, too, a tired word

When on the southern plains, when across

Fault lines of belonging, people are asking:

What is civility? Where will we live? Whose country is this? When will it stop?

Taxi drivers text this to each other As they lean against endless unmoving Snakes of dented tin and balding tires, waiting For fire – fuel in their bellies: Housewives whisper this to each other As they watch the midmorning meal Simmer on the dregs of gas cylinders; Students shout this to each other from Battered railings of busses, in their Efforts to commute, singing The tune of uncertain futures: Never mind the zones of abandonment Where a nation's pain is barefoot and acrid Like garbage fermenting in the sun

Two hands palm-to-palm do not A homeland make But to meet where nimbleness Brushes up against precarity, where language Bleeds into understanding, where foreheads touch -Aama and me this morning, after prayers And boiled eggs - reminds me Of something beyond good faith, Of something more than duck, cover, and hold Of something more like the pipal's rooted tenacity Living the elements of which it was born

Sienna Craig is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Dartmouth College. She is the co-editor of HIMALAYA and the co-founder of DROKPA (www.drokpa.org), a nonprofit organization dedicated to partnering with pastoral communities in the greater Himalayan region to implement grassroots development and promote social entrepreneurship. The author of several books, including Horses Like Lightning: A Story of Passage through the Himalaya (2008) and Healing Elements: Efficacy and the Social Ecologies of Tibetan Medicine (2012), she enjoys writing across genres, from ethnography to poetry and creative nonfiction.

Endnotes

1. Rato Machhendranath is a deity in Buddhist and Hindu traditions, and is a cornerstone of Newari ritual life in the Kathmandu Valley. Each year the statue of Rato Machhendranath is taken between a temple in Patan and the deity's 'birthplace' of Bungamati village. In 2015, the April 25 earthquake interrupted the movement of this deity, celebrated in part to honor the rain gods at the start of monsoon. The deity completed its journey this year in late September.



Commuters traveling along the Jorpati Road, Kathmandu, October 2015. (Craig, 2015)