

Nepal

Sienna R. Craig, *The Ends of Kinship: Connecting Himalayan Lives between Nepal and New York*

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It is reported that the King of Lo Jigme Dorje Palbar Bista's last words to his family were "never migrate" from Mustang, the Himalayan district and former Kingdom in midwestern Nepal. The fact that an estimated one-quarter of culturally Tibetan people from Mustang now live in New York City confirms the unlikelihood of the late king's

wish. In *The Ends of Kinship: Connecting Himalayan Lives between Nepal and New York*, Sienna Craig experiments with how to express this tension between Mustang and New York, loss and wonder, remaining and leaving. The result is a creative mixture of fictional storytelling and narrative ethnography that evokes the many contradictions, emotions, and flexible identities of living a transnational life.

The book revolves around the central concept of *khora*, which Craig uses to conceptualize diaspora in Tibetan terms. *Khora* synthesizes two words—*kora*, the act of clockwise circumambulation of sacred sites, and *khorwa*, defined as desire, interdependence, and cyclic existence, the Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit term *samsāra*—to doubly articulate the physical mobility of diaspora and transitions of life. What integrates these two different notions of movement are, Craig eloquently shows, the “ends of kinship” referencing both the places we live in/move through as well as the social ties maintained and remade through mobility. Put together to understand how migration has transformed Mustang society, the effect of *khora* leaves the reader with a sense of loss and alienation counter-balanced with the hope of new forms of connection and care.

In the first sense, *khora* refers to the transmigrations between Mustang, New York, and Nepal’s urban centers. The people of Mustang have a long history of mobility as pastoralists crossing into Tibet (until 1959) and traders seasonally entering the Nepali and Indian lowlands. Since the explosion of Nepali out-migration in the 1980s, people from Mustang also started traveling to Southeast and East Asia for temporary labor opportunities. But, travel to New York stands apart, Craig notes. Unlike seasonal trade or temporary labor migration, movement from Mustang to New York (specifically Queens and Brooklyn) has become permanent, leaving an irreversible impact on Mustang. Depopulation in the villages will mean a future of Mustang “*ki rongba ki tongba*” (“inhabited by lowland Nepalis [*rongba*] or . . . empty [*tongba*]”) (221), as most youth and middle-aged have migrated away, leaving elders and recruited laborers to work fields or leave them fallow.

Depopulation in Mustang is coupled with a shift toward a service economy based on guesthouses, which, interestingly, mirrors the service labor of migrants in New York working predominantly in nail salons, child care, and restaurants. Jackson Heights, the Queens neighborhood just south of La Guardia Airport, plays center stage here. Long a symbol of New York’s multiculturalism celebrated in mayoral campaigns and documentary films, it is increasingly recognized for its Himalayan character complete with momo (Nepali dumplings) food trucks representative of a fashionable “boho Himalayan chic” (117). At the same time, Craig emphasizes the invisibility of Himalayan migrants in New York’s exploitable labor pool, rarely noticed (even, I might add, at the tragic epicenter of the initial coronavirus outbreak in spring 2020) as they ride the 7 train to serve the wealthy of Manhattan.

It is the second cyclic definition of *khora* that establishes the organizational structure of the book—pregnancy and birth (part 1), education (part 2), livelihoods (part 3), love and marriage (part 4), land and lineages (part 5), and death (part 6). Each part consists of a complimentary short story and ethnographic chapter, as seen in the following three examples. In part 1, a story about three generations of pregnancy struggles complements ethnographic descriptions of the stigma and silence surrounding women’s reproductive health. In part 3, a fictional account connects a nineteenth-century land conflict with twenty-first-century immigration politics to set up an ethnographic analysis of the

disconnect between immigration status and belonging. Finally, part 5 entails a story of a migrant's mental health crisis abroad, which then serves as a metaphor for Craig's scholarly documentation of Mustang's ecological changes caused by road construction, the 2015 earthquake, and climate change.

Craig's innovative approach to ethnography provides a literary accessibility to discussions of mobility and diaspora. In the introduction, Craig boldly asserts that "it takes imagination and, sometimes, the crafting of fictional accounts to *see* social truths" (11, emphasis original). To this point, the storytelling invites the reader into analysis through the approachability of narrative. For instance, building on the scholarship of refusal, the story "Paper and Being" weaves histories of discrimination and state violence into a critical rethinking of citizenship through a fictionalized account of "making papers." More subtly, phrases like "matter out of place" (129) consistently ground the narratives in anthropological thinking. Other moments sound like juicy pieces of data that did not quite fit into academic publications. For example, when a fictional grandmother compares the U.S. bail system to a bribe in Nepal, or a U.S. embassy officer likens Mustang to "going back to medieval times," one imagines the anthropologist taking note.

While the storytelling plays with anthropological ways of knowing, the ethnographic sections are enthused with literary gusto. To explain a village conflict, Craig writes, "Old scars split open at night, like grain sacks thrown to the ground, and are then sewn up again by morning" (207). The heightened tensions of the Tibetan borderland are expressed through ecological description: "The only points of stillness are found in tussocks of grass and clusters of wildflowers, at once tough and delicate, awaiting the sandpapy tongues of yak" (178). In place of in-text citations, Craig provides an essay on methods and references in the book's appendix, which allows the focus to remain on narrative flow.

The artful language is combined with moments of autoethnography, drawn from Craig's three decades of experience living between Tibet, Nepal, and the U.S., offering an intimate honesty to articulate contradictions of our global condition. For instance, her experience, both "good and bewildering" (64), as a school sponsor calls out the promises and alienation of boarding school. Similarly, a post-earthquake desire to help by sending twenty tents from the U.S. to Nepal expresses both a "cautionary tale against rapid action decoupled from careful thinking" and a testament to what individuals can achieve (192). Finally, in a touching vignette, a friend visiting her family in California is awkwardly asked to give Buddhist rites for a neighbor's just-deceased father. The episode exposes how "Relatively unprepared, how uncomfortable, so many of us remain when faced with the end of life" (219).

There is much to be learned from this book packed full of insights about migration, diaspora, and Mustang history. It is Craig's appeal to the senses and experience that make these lessons known in ways more profound than the typical academic text. While reading, I experienced a personal appreciation of how "*khora* lives in the mind while the body is still" (232)—as certain passages triggered my own mental excursions to Jackson Heights, Kathmandu, and Himalayan villages. For those who have never traveled to Nepal—as my students have attested—the writing evokes an impressionistic understanding of unfamiliar Himalayan practices, such as polyandry and arranged marriage, while also eliciting new interpretations of familiar topics, such as labor exploitation and family detachment. This incredible work contributes much to the

anthropology of diaspora and the Himalaya, but it is even more impressive for how it reimagines what ethnography can be and do.

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