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REMEMBERING PLACE: The Temporality of Trauma in Rudraprayag after the 2013 Flash Floods

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Yeh Ukhitmath nahin, yeh abh dukhimath hai (This is no longer Ukhimath, this is now Dukhimath; *dukh* meaning sadness), Jagat Singh, the owner of a chai stall at the Ukhimath market said after a long discussion in the shop on the matter of the compensation issue in the area. Following the initial aftermath and recovery operations of the disaster of June 2013, around six months after the floods and landslides had changed the morphology of the Mandakini Valley, the process of compensation began. It would not end until the time I finished my fieldwork in 2017, four years after the flood, which involved $3.8 billion USD of damage to resources and property. What ensued from the initial verifications of compensation was a series of lists meant to enumerate the damage to property, both land and built structures. However, these lists, disbursed by the local revenue offices rather than the disaster-management framework in the valley, ended up being caste-based, primarily because the demographic and territorial constitution of the valley was also caste-based. What caused further chaos was that the lists were dispensed through Kedarnath,[1] so the "pandit lists"[2] emerged first, and by the time I finished my fieldwork, these were the only completed compensatory amounts distributed. The delay with disbursement had two effects: first, it rendered a large part of the population of at least the Ukhimath area bankrupt and financially vulnerable.[3]

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The longer the delay with the lists, the more the temporality of debt expanded. Second, it also created income gaps in villages that traditionally saw considerable income parity, particularly those constituted by Pandits and Rajputs collectively.[4]

Thus in this case the very mechanisms meant to guarantee financial stability ended up as secondary perils (Dabral and Ewing 2009; Gill 2007).[5] They also ended up producing "secondary trauma" (Erikson 1976; Gill 2007): a subversion of community, deracinating what Kim Fortun (2001) describes as the proclivity of disaster to create "enunciatory community" around the double binds produced by post-disaster governance. Compensation in the Mandakini Valley during this liminal phase produced a period marked by a fragility in economic and societal relations. There is a period of compounding, "cumulative" (Bonilla and LeBrón 2019, 15) vulnerability, marked by insecurity over the future, which remained highly uncertain for many residents of Ukhimath. The sheer devastation produced in just three days rendered the valley morphologically changed, particularly closer to Kedarnath. In the wake of the flood, landslides emerged as one of the major consequences, with nearly 450 cases reported between June 19 and 23 alone (Joshi 2015).

The floods themselves were produced by a complex network of environmental factors that came together to meet particular conditions of historical land use to create these devastating conditions of soil stability. A few days before the June 16, 2013, the Indian Meteorological Department noticed an aberration with the oncoming monsoon that year: the meeting of two areas of low pressure, that of the north-easterly monsoon and the western disturbances over Rajasthan to produce a rapid acceleration of the monsoon. It was predicted that the monsoon would reach Uttarakhand in a week, around a month earlier than its usual onset. Red alerts were issued for the state of Uttarakhand. However, the monsoon arrived even earlier than predicted and caused an unprecedented amount of rain. Six months' worth of rainfall occurred within a day. At the Hindu pilgrimage site of Kedarnath, it had been raining for three days and many pilgrims had been isolated at the site due to the rain. The flash floods themselves unfurled in two major bursts: the first was, as previously mentioned, caused by the sheer severity of rainfall on the June 16, and the second on June 17 was caused by the breaching of a glacial lake (an increasingly common phenomenon in the Himalayas) upstream of Kedarnath.

In a district with barely 3 percent of total land cover inhabitable, the increased numbers of landslides across the valley meant the loss of precious lived space.[6] The so-called undercutting of slopes by mountainous rivers catalyzed the tragic degradation of the landscape of the Mandakini Valley (Rautela 2014), creating a semi-regular phenomenon that some describe as "landslide swarming" (Haigh

and Rawat 2011), with the landscape passing into a highly fragile state. Many found the devastation difficult to reconcile; there was a traumatic kernel, a "not known" (Amy 2010, 46) for many of my respondents in the enormous change that had occurred. Accompanied with increased economic precariousness, this rendered the everyday into something caught in repeated cycles of hope and despair about the future. For many, the flood wiped out an irreplaceable fragmented whole (Benjamin 1968) of environmental memory and culture. This article considers the work of mourning (Freud 1917; Comay 2011), as well as the temporal contours of being confronted intersubjectively (Laplanche 2017) with traumatic circumstances. The intersubjectivity of trauma was a modification made by Jean Laplanche (2017) to the Freudian model of trauma articulated in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (Freud 1920). The retroactivity of trauma induced by a cut to environmental-temporal perception forms part of the picture, but it is accompanied by an explicit connection to the intersubjective conditions of present circumstances. This cut of disaster is produced as a "temporal disjuncture" (Pelling and Norbert 2017), which forms a barricade to passing everyday time and forms a traumatic kernel (Amy 2010), which lasts as durational moment that disjoins itself from the flow of linear time to form a block of memory that perpetually threatens the present with the eruption of its own past-presentness. I argue in this article, however, that precisely this traumatic kernel generates the position of an environmental witness (Vaughn and Fisher 2021).

The compensation lists had created for many a circumstance of compounding economic fragility, and in these cases, I spoke to people across seven villages in the Ukhimath area, including Premnagar and Sirkanda,[7] where I stayed between September 2015 and June 2016. I interned during this period as an administrative assistant to a *patwari*, the ground-level official in charge of a revenue circle (*patti*).[8] Many times I would step out of the *tehsil*, a local unit of administrative division, with a *patwari* on matters related to the compensation lists, and the majority of daily cases dealt with in the *tehsil* concerned the compensation lists. Many of the interlocutors whose confrontations with the post-disaster governance period I describe here are men, since the majority of applicants turning to the *tehsil* office were male. It was the same at the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) office, as well as the various offices we passed through when we made trips through the valley to Kedarnath on various administrative assignments. In the villages I visited or stayed in, however, I interacted equally with men and women. Most of the interlocutors who expressed concerns regarding the drastic environmental change around the Ukhimath area and the psycho-social consequences

thereof were men, who could more freely express psychological concerns with me. Thus while the period of compounding financial instability I describe constituted a large scale comprehensive event that affected the lives of many, both men and women, the cases of recollection or of environmental witnessing I describe here are individualized and specific.

NON-LINEAR PROCESSES IN THE "LINEAR" TIME OF DISASTER

Traditionally disaster recovery operations tend to produce a linear picture of time, with the disaster seen as having past, present and future dimensions, via being imbricated in processes of 'preparation-disaster-recovery' (Michael 2014, 241). In the case of the compensation cases that followed the floods, this framework did not come to bear. Instead of recovery marking an end to the disaster, it ended up being a prolongation of the half-life of the disaster itself: the disaster seemed to stretch on into infinity (Bonilla and LeBrón 2019).

As Sarah Vaughn (2022) describes it, disasters are imbricated in and imbricate social inequalities and hierarchies, such as race, or in the case of the compensation process in the Mandakini Valley, caste. The compensation for the floods of 2013 was broadly divided into two classes, compensation for lodge-owners at the actual site of Kedarnath, and compensation of land and built property downstream from Kedarnath. The former cases received much higher compensation, amounting to between Rs. 700,000–1,500,000 (approximately $8,300–17,800 USD), while owners of businesses further away, at sites like Rambara, received between Rs. 50,000 ($590 USD) to Rs. 500,000 ($5,900 USD). They also received paltry sums for the actual land lost, which often amounted to as little as Rs. 5,000 ($60 USD). Owners at Kedarnath are exclusively Pandit, since only Brahman castes are allowed to trade there. This fact created huge income disparities within villages, since often Pandit castes often cohabit with Rajput castes in the same village. A further problematic that emerged was that the local authorities (the *Tehsil* Revenue Offices) decided to distribute compensatory amounts based on lists founded on places of residence, and since villages are divided by caste, the lists themselves ended up likewise divided and were, called colloquially "Pandits' list" and "Rajputs' list." Finally, whereas residents of Kedarnath received their compensation within three months of the flood, other castes had not received compensation up to even three years after the flood, when I completed my fieldwork in the valley. This created situations of debt and rapid economic deterioration for a number of residents, many of whom moved from owning businesses to relying on government schemes

such as those guaranteed under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) for their livelihoods.

Mahesh Bisht, who lives in Prem Nagar village in the Ukhimath *tehsil* was affected both in 2012 and 2013 by landslides. In the latter case the landslides were triggered by the floods in the valley below. On both occasions the house he and his family were living in was swept away. On the first occasion the Uttarakhand government, through the aegis of the Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre (DMMC), provided a tin shed house. As the tin shed house proved inadequate for a household of six, the family spent the time they could rebuilding a Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) house.[9] This was swept away in a landslide during the 2013 floods. This time the family was placed on the World Bank's Owner-Driven Construction Housing (ODCH) list.[10] The process of the distribution of funds and the construction of houses was overseen by an NGO called SUDHA (Society of Uttaranchal Development and Himalayan Action), based out of the Rudraprayag district offices. However, they had to wait for a long time before the beginning of construction, as the various plots of land suggested for building were found vulnerable to sinking. Bisht, a Pandit, who owned a ritual goods shop just outside the Omkareshwar Temple at Ukhimath, was trying to pull together a sum of money to reopen his shop, which he had been forced to close down since he could not afford fresh supplies while still reconstructing his house. Regarding the money he had loaned for the reconstruction of his house, he said: "Yeh toh hamari biradari hai, aur phir ham paise bhi saal, do saal baad lauta sakte hain"[11] (The money taken from a kindred group is entirely different, we can return it in one or two years' time).

However, as the amount invested in the house ended being much more than the Rs. 500,000 ($5,900 USD) allocated by SUDHA, Bisht found it increasingly difficult to maintain his financial stability. Although the family was grateful to not be living in a tin shed house anymore, the bills from living in a guesthouse awaiting their own house's construction were piling up. The Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) features also meant that certain parts of the house had to be reconstructed in a particular way, further delaying the procedure.[12] This is a critical point about a period of financial instability following disasters. Temporality takes on a crucial form often missed by representations of the event. A slight disturbance in a period of financial disequilibrium can be considerably exacerbated by small delays in bureaucratic procedures. In Bisht's case, this meant an inability to fund the re-opening of his shop, barring him from a stable income. With the burden of financial debt accumulating, Bisht had been forced to take loans from traders located at the

Ukhimath market to stabilize his financial situation. He described how this burden had begun to distract him from his daily activities and that the pressure of living without a stable income made him feel vulnerable.

Psychological studies (Srivastava et al. 2015; Aneelraj et al. 2015) conducted in the aftermath of the floods have noted a strong correlation between cases of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and the lack of reconstruction of habitual zones of inhabitation. In the case of children, the loss of a play space was noted as a stressor, causing the increased prevalence of both depression and PTSD. Malini Srivastava, a psychologist at the Himalayan Institute for Medical Sciences, based in a private university, notes a similar relation to lost land that previously served as a place of residence. This was further emphasized when I spoke to Dr. Dhanya Chandran and Dr. Naveen Kumar, both of whom conducted fieldwork in the aftermath of the floods in 2013, at the Centre for Psycho-Social Support in Disaster Management at National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences in Bangalore (NIMHANS). Kumar argued that one might think of cases of PTSD as dispersed across a spectrum, with particularly onerous symptoms in certain cases, and that tracing this dispersion constitutes a key element to understanding the specificities of the hardships faced in these communities. Kumar suggested these considerations might also feed into how we define memory in relation to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), thus helping us trace emergence in relation to these scales. Trauma and depression were thus seen as tied to processes of rehabilitation during the flood, and in interviews or chance conversations I had with many interlocutors it became apparent that the delayed compensation had caused much psychic distress to residents of towns around the *tehsil* of Ukhimath.

As mentioned, for those living in hamlets on the way to Kedarnath, compensation amounts proved even lower. Speaking to Aakash Rana at Kedarnath, I learned that he had received just around Rs. 250,000 ($2,970 USD) for the damage of his major shop, a sum that proved insufficient for any reinvestment into the valley's economy. Rana worked for the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam because of his inability to return to his shop.[13] As he described it, he was averse to returning to Kedarnath under such circumstances and particularly so close to the flood. He described his aversion to working at Kedarnath despite the overwhelming support authorities had given to the resurrection of Kedarnath. Following the floods, Rana had helped in recovery efforts for those stranded. He said, "Uhne nahin pata na, hamne toh dekha hai, dar lagta hai, mandir ke paas bhi jaane ka ji nahin karta, kyunki vahan se lashein bhi nikal sakte hain" (They [referring to the authorities at

Kedarnath] don't know what we have seen; we feel scared of even going close to the temple. There could still be bodies buried in the rubble around).

As Ramesh Lal, a resident of Dungur Semla, remarked to me on one occasion, "Hamare liye yeh dukan khareedna hi namumkin tha, aur kharidke hum bech bhi nahin sakte" (For me to be able to even get a shop is difficult, then once we have it, we can't even really sell it). He is making reference to the amendment to the Uttarakhand Zamindari Abolishment Act, which prevents the sale of property owned by members of scheduled castes to members of upper castes. He continued, "Aur jab chale jaye humme apne zameen ko apna batane ke liye bheek mangna padta hai" (And then when it's lost, we have to go around begging people to make them believe our land is ours). I met Lal while walking between villages with the *patwari*. He described how he had begun working in Kedarnath as a mule-driver for the owner of a stable closer to Gaurikund, and then through sheer thrift had managed to build a small shop a little further downstream. The shop was destroyed in the floods of 2013. "Pure makan ke liye mujhe bas ek lakh diya hai, aur iske liye bhi bheek mangni padti hai" (They are offering me merely 100,000 for this, and even for that I have to keep begging).

In the cases described above, the temporality of the compensation's delay, an administrative device, feeds into and extends the psychic time of trauma. Temporality thus, far from being a mute spectator to human action, can be seen here as a dense intertwining object. The delay of the compensation and the diminishing of familial monetary networks greatly diminished people's social and psychic capacity to withstand such shocks. As a result, disaster, rather than becoming framed as a linear progression of time, turned into a "chronic disaster syndrome" (Adams, van Hattum, and English 2009). "Environmentality" (Agarwal 1995) in this sense is deeply imbricated into the psychic lives of individuals and communities. Chronic disaster syndrome implies exacerbated and ongoing trauma accompanied by an accelerating depletion of economic circumstances. These circumstances become a way of life (Adams, van Hattum, and English 2009). The disaster is drawn out indefinitely through a series of financial circumstances, through the very bureaucratic mechanisms designed to counter it. The temporality of trauma occupies the place of a "temporal disjuncture" (Pelling and Norbert 2017, 123), which forms a traumatic kernel (Amy 2010), thus intersecting the temporality of the delay with the compensation lists, which themselves end up being an occupation of everyday temporal duration, creating a fissure in time.

LOST ECOLOGIES AND THE FUTURE ANTERIOR

One day, walking with a *patwari*, I reached the village of Nohra, where certain disputes over the compensation lists were to be mediated. As we were sitting in front of one of the applicant's houses, sipping chai on a spring evening, the applicant, Ganesh Sharma, turned his eyes toward the village forest. It was an oak forest, and as often happens with such forests, which absorb and retain a lot of moisture, a cloud of mist hovered above it.

Sharma pointed to the mist and said, "Dekho, prakriti ka chamatkar" (Look, a miracle of nature).[14] We all turned to look at the cloud and marveled at the sight. However, after a while he turned to the *patwari*, Mr. R, and said, "Par inhi badalon ne itna vinash phailaya hai" (And yet this is the very thing that has caused all this destruction). Sharma was arguing that the presence of such moisture-laden forests often precipitated rainfall, and alleging they caused cloudbursts just above villages. In the description of temporal perception after a disaster, in many accounts I heard, it seemed that while the disaster might have changed the way people anticipated the future, it also was re-writing the past: the very presence of the surrounding environment became recoded into the presence of disaster.

Another case was described to me while I was discussing issues related to the flood with Dipesh Benjwal who owned a stationery shop in the town of Agastyamuni and also edited a regional literary and cultural journal, *Dhaad*. Benjwal described migration and disasters as intricately linked. He described his own family history as evidence of this, saying, "Hum pehle Benji se aaye, bhuskalan ke karan. Ab who gaon janshoonya hai. Jab badh ayi, hum bach gaye, par humare neeche ghar sabh beh gaye. Nadi ka pani itna badh gaya ki kheton tak machali aa gaye the . . .abh agar phirse apada aayi hum kahan jayenge?" (We first migrated from the village of Benji, a little uphill from here, because of a landslide. That village now is *janshoonya* [uninhabited]. Now when the flood came, we were just saved, seven houses below ours were washed way, the river waters rose so high that fish were thrown into the fields. . . . Now if another disaster comes, where will we go?).

As Mike Hulme (2017a; 2017b) describes it, climate forms a stable pattern of action in which human culture can place its trust and from which it can derive a foundation for psychic attitudes and moods. The disruption of climate reliability thus also severely affects human perception itself. Here we see that everyday talk about weather that implicates the human imagination (Boia 2005; Strauss and Orlove 2003) is tied to our ability as humans to store copious amounts of information regarding the seasons over a period. Large, devastating changes in the environment thus pose a challenge to how we conceive the weather—but also to

how we conceive ourselves. One of the most drastic changes in perception that took place following the flood concerned the future perfect or future anterior, the capacity of the past to be rewritten by the future.[15] The future anterior connects the environment to human perception, opening people to forms of communication beyond just the human, implying that language is more than just *human* language (Kohn 2013; Helmreich 2023). The psychical is never purely mental in this sense, and the nonhuman is not unthinking substance, but rather, like Eduardo Kohn's (2013) "thinking" forest, the climate and weather around a place also think, also are drawn into a structure of signs used to communicate complex codes. Humans thus never think alone but are always thinking *with* the environment.

In the words of many, the transformation of the morphology of the valley and the irreconcilability of present circumstances with the past created an environmental-personological kernel that remained recalcitrant to the apparatus of future-facing temporal perception within the everyday.[16] The environmental subject (Luis de la Mora 2021) is split from itself by the presence of language, or, in this case, by communication at large.[17] This traumatic kernel produces a thought of its own, a retroactive thought, that folds the environment back into the past, changing its very contours.[18]

Two years after the flood when I was conducting my pilot survey, I met Rajesh Trivedi, a field worker associated with SUDHA, the NGO responsible for rebuilding houses for flood victims. Trivedi eventually introduced me to the village of Sirkanda, where I stayed for the largest part of my field study. Sirkanda had been severely affected by the floods, since most of its inhabitants worked at Kedarnath and Rambara as lodge-owners, shop owners, and mule-drivers. When we first met, Trivedi began telling me about everything that had happened in the immediate aftermath of the flood. It was a harrowing period for all those who were stranded in areas around the valley waiting to be rescued. The national press coverage of the event had focused largely on the effects of the flood on the site of Kedarnath and the regions immediately downstream from it. However, the flood had deleterious effects throughout the valley.

Trivedi noted that during the time of the flood, people had rushed up the slopes of mountains on either side, to find stable land at the top of the mountain. An acquaintance he knew had done the same with his brother's child. There was no food, and when he began to come down, after some time, the child was almost dead from hypothermia. When they arrived at the bottom, he entered a room of a house and saw a group of people who were lying dead there. Then he went to a shed next to that and saw a lot of *atta* (flour) on the ground. He made a roti of *atta*

(wheat flour) and fed the child, then slept, and when he woke up, the child was fine. But on the hilltops many people died in their sleep. He said most of the helicopters came late; the government had failed the people. If they had come in time, if there had been more helicopters for Ukhimath and not just for Kedarnath, they might have been saved. "Joh bhi soh gaye who subah tak mar gaye" (If you went off to sleep in that state you were going to die in your sleep).

In Trivedi's accounts, the past is interwoven into the gestures of the present, but it is not the simple past, but rather the past as such, memory-in-itself, which returns.

DISASTER, TRAUMA, AND TEMPORALITY

Trauma, when exposed to the secondary peril of an unstable financial period, grows into a deeper ontological insecurity, a sense of precarity.[19] What many residents faced was a compounding period of loss. While agreeing with the psychoanalytic position (Amy 2010; Freud 1920) that maintains that traumatic loss remains recalcitrant, I argue also that that very recalcitrance is what creates the position of an environmental witness (Vaughn and Fisher 2021), a witness to the sheer change in the environment over a very short period of time. These two durations, that of a compounding unstable financial situation and the recalcitrant, retroactive core of an environmental-personological mutation, almost compel the witness toward the work of mourning.[20]

Trauma in the Lacanian schema can be read as the sense produced by an event, one that impels a self-referential cycle where the presentness of a past (P1) relates to the present (P2), in relation to which the past is past through a synchronic fragment of sense that is produced at P2, from the point of view of a future, which in the instance of trauma is foreclosed (Gell 1992; Husserl [1905] 1964). The ontology of trauma described in this essay is thus precisely of such a recursive point of experience, which is fundamentally incomplete, in the sense of a broken vessel whose shards must now reconstitute a meaning that is not that of the original (Benjamin 1968).

I argue in this article that trauma describes such a fragmented ontology. However, this does not underlie an attempt to define trauma within a restricted discursive space as a thing-in-itself. Several investigations of trauma move away from the tendency to consider it psychologically as an imperative in itself (Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Young 1995; Gupta, Bhattachraya, and Priya 2019; Das 2007). The problem they argue is that psychological characterizations like PTSD tend to individualize trauma, locating it in a truth procedure based on an

intra-individual reality, rather than locating the conditions of trauma in social realities that condition these individual perspectives. Here I retain this crucial intervention into trauma studies, looking to move past the specifically psychological characterization of trauma, while at the same time retaining the suture with the cause of actual suffering (Lester 2013). While certain psychological characterizations like PTSD do box trauma into a particular discursive grid, what I describe here pays attention to specifically how trauma becomes a lived experience beyond the moment of injury (Adams, van Hattum, and English 2009; Lester 2013). In the accounts of trauma shared here it is the lived space around that becomes radically other in the face of an economically uncertain future. The return of trauma as I describe it here is not merely the return of a specific moment of injury that repeats itself, but, rather, the repetition itself as conditioned retroactively, the past drawn into existence by the future, which by a certain point in the present *will have* taken place—or conditioned as in trauma by a *will not have*, the sign of *an* absent future (Lacan 1966a).

Afterwardsness and the Temporal Space of Trauma

In the hills, as anywhere, we are tied to the specificities of an ecology, and these retain their ability to draw certain dispositions toward them even in absentia. The subecology of a house, for example, contains a series of regular paths in space and time, tied together by a sensorium, sounds, smells, and sights that are all retained both as part of the sensorium but also contain within themselves subecologies, where often the specific traces of orographic retention can be distinguished.

The disaster of the flash floods was enfolded into the everyday, into gestures and sounds. On different occasions I talked to Pratap Singh, an interlocutor who had survived the 2013 floods. Singh and his family lived at a slight remove from the village of Sirkanda, where I was staying close to a temple dedicated to the village goddess. Singh's father had worked for the Kedarnath Mandir Samiti.[21] On June 16, in the early hours of the morning, Singh heard a loud explosion from the forest above. He is still unsure whether this was the sound of a cloudburst or boulders tumbling. Immediately after this, the house he was living in slipped away, with his father and brother inside and unable to escape. But Singh, whose room was right next to the balcony, had a few seconds to jump out. The river cutting the base of the mountain from underneath had loosened the structure of the topsoil and had caused the entire structure to collapse into the river. Over the time I spent around the village, Singh got married and also reconstructed his house. He was given a job at the Kedarnath Mandir Samiti as well. However, on several

occasions he described how he could still feel the land slipping away. He said he could feel the weight, *bhar*, of the land still tugging (*kheenchav*) at his soles. Here the present of the past is vividly alive in the body, embedded in a gesture that continues to haunt, to continue to draw the present of the person toward the gripping past of the disaster. In conversations with Singh, he also described how certain habitual dispositions from his earlier place of living would allow him a descent to the ordinary, the sensorium of the house itself remaining as a lost fragment still contained in the lived present of Singh's memory.

The highly traumatic kernel that repeats the presentness of the past also produces the subject as witness of the environment (Vaughn and Fisher 2021), as a monument to place. The interface of the past and the present is laden with accumulations from the cultural past, from bodily dispositions relating to this past, that make the work of everyday perception within a particular milieu, such as an environment scarred by flash floods, possible. I would sense this often in conversations as the sheer weight of the absence of a space, the dense network of bodily connections associated with it, became suddenly absented. The shock of the environmental loss would suddenly possess language, contouring and fragmenting a statement.

Kedarnath, apart from being a meshwork of intra- and inter-caste relations, also constitutes a rare ecosystem, until the floods preserving a dense and rich alpine meadow (*bhugyal*) ecology. Prior to the floods, the route to the site snaked along the left bank of the river, and the vicinity of the temple as well as certain sites along this route were dotted with subecological zones, seen as mythological markers (or referents working across time) for the sacred space of Kedarnath.

Harish Rawat, my landlord in Sirkanda, worked for many years at Kedarnath as a mule-driver, along with co-owning a stall at Rambara with his uncle, before taking up a semiformal job as an architect in Delhi for a few years and then returning to his village to take over his father's shop. As we were discussing Kedarnath one day, Rawat and his wife pulled out a photo album. The album constituted a string of memories that Harishji reflected on as he passed through them. He described the contexts of the various photographs to me as he looked through the album. We happened on a photo of Kedarnath before the 2013 floods. The landscape was unrecognizable: the photographs showed a lush green meadow covered in flowers, with two streams running gently through a far cry from the stony outcrop that currently marks the environment of Kedarnath. Harishji described how he had worked at Kedarnath for his uncle, who owned a set of mules at a way station in Rambara. He would take the mules out and guide them as they

carried pilgrims all the way to the temple. It was hard work, particularly for a boy of around fifteen. He began describing how crowded Kedarnath would be while he was working there, in the late 1980s. He said the old trekking route to the temple would be crowded and the stalls near the temple charged for seating space.

"Wahan pe aise baithne ke liye alag paise lete the" (At that time, we used to have to pay a different amount of money to sit like this) he said, demonstrating with his knees hunched up to his chest, "aur aise baithne ke liye alag" (and a different amount to sit like this), with his legs resting straight, parallel to the ground. "Us time pe yatri bhi alag the" (At that time the pilgrim was also of a different mettle), he insisted. In his description Rawat emphasized two major notions: on the one hand, he was pointing to bodily discipline, a theme he often touched on in our conversations. In his estimation, in earlier times the devotees held a greater sense of control and veneration in their bodies toward the deity at Kedarnath. On the other hand, he was also pointing to the sheer volume of pilgrimage traffic at the shrine in the past. On another occasion Rawat described how Kedarnath was not really a place meant for people to reside. As he described it, the water that flows from the glaciers is hard and impossible to drink. He added that trekking upward from Vasuki Tal, an eco-mythical spot on the temple's west side, pilgrims got drugged into sleep by the miasma of the Brahma Kamal flower found at these altitudes.

Rawat also spoke often about how he enjoyed working, despite the physically challenging nature of his labor. He emphasized the pride in relation to working at Kedarnath. However, since the flood he felt an aversion to the idea of returning there, despite it being a viable economic option at a time when his family and he desperately needed it; a series of economic shocks following the floods had left them in dire financial need. Rawat claimed he could no longer go there because the place was not the one he remembered from his childhood: an open meadow, without the scars of the flood. Rawat, too, had been on the receiving end of the delay in the compensation process: as a member of the Rajput caste, he had not received any compensation well after two years, which meant he could not restart either of his previous two businesses.

In the case of Rawat's recollections, the environment had become radically other, and his life in the wake of economic collapse had become one of confronting this otherness daily. What returned in his account was not a reproduction (Gell 1992; Husserl [1905] 1964) of Kedarnath, not the recollection of a space, but a series of rhythms and refrains that were the place itself, the place as an excess, as a traumatic core that eclipsed the present. It is in this sense precisely the

environment itself that thinks, that returns in itself, producing a language within language that falls outside the bounds of the purely symbolic (Kohn 2013).

Khud *and the Interstices of the Environment*

The presence of various lacunae and disjunctures related to temporal cognition taking on the form of an active presence were also tangible in other signs in Sirkanda. After a few months spent in the house recommended to me by Madan Rawat, I had to move out of the place because my landlords, who had been living in the family home, had to move out as Rawat's brother was to return to that house. I thus moved into a new house a little further away from the road, to live with Harish and Meenakshi Rawat. I lived nearly six months with them and thus got to know the family well. It was when I was about to leave for the city of Dehradun, where I was planning to attempt some archival work relating to a history of disasters in Garhwal, that my landlady turned to me and said, "Tu hamse mil chuka hai, teri khud lag gayi" (You have become one with us, your *khud* is attached to us). I had heard the word *khud* before as a term of endearment, implying an particular connection to another person who is missing at that point and who one happens to think about or wish to meet. However, my landlady used the term for me while I was still present, implying that the connection between us was already forged even in my presence: I was now someone who would be remembered by her. The term implies a virtual and provisional exchange of substance. In the past, I had usually heard the term used because a particular object reminded a person of another's presence in their absence. The term *khuded* is also used prominently in Garhwali folk music and poetry to indicate a composition of songs of loss sung on being separated from a relative or a spouse. However, in prevalent usage the term often occurs more as a marker of both joy at being united (in memory) with someone and a sorrow at their absence.

Crucially, *khud* is a deeply environmental concept, since it is not just the person that is remembered, but the person at a particular moment in time, shrouded by the ecology that surrounding them. In this way the concept clearly points to a sense of a thinking environment (Kohn 2013; Deleuze 1968), an environment recursively involved with the person.

On one occasion speaking to Aakash Rana, an attendant working at the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam in Kedarnath, he described how a few years back he had lost his fiancée to a tragic accident and how he would listen to popular *khuded* songs, particularly by the grand poet of Garhwali music, Narendra Singh Negi, and would remember in the lyrics of the song particular moments of togetherness with

her. In his description, something about the structure of the music and the lyrics themselves caused a return to the past. He said that he listened to the music not to open up the old wound (*ghav*), but because he had to live with the wound for the rest of his life. Here we see that the wound is a thinking substance (a self-referential cycle) with its own temporal dynamics, its own fragmentary ontology (Benjamin 1968).

The Collective Witnessing of the Pure Past

It was June of 2015 and rains had been causing landslides along major pilgrimage routes in the state. Throughout the day in the DDMA control room at the town of Rudraprayag, messages would come in about the happenings at Kedarnath. The whole room was festooned with documents relating to the pilgrimage. One of the walls of the small room, which could barely fit four people, featured a bulletin board with pictures from the rescue operations during the floods. A day or two after I first entered the office, the same bulletin board created a return to the flood. It was in the afternoon, and a truck arrived at the DDMA office to take equipment to Sonprayag and Gaurikund (on the route to Kedarnath). It was driven there by Rakesh Singh. Singh hailed from Delhi, making him the only person present who did not come from Uttarakhand. Amit and Piyoosh, two wireless radio operators, were both sitting in the control room, the first room in the DDMA office, which is three rooms arranged horizontally as in a bungalow. Singh was accompanied by a teenage boy, Puran, who assisted him with carrying the items and a number of other small chores. After an initial round of greetings, Singh turned his attention to me, seeming to pause at my strange and apparently unfitting presence in the office. But his attention was quickly drawn to the clipboard in front of me. His eyes seemed fixed on an image of a member of the armed forces rescuing a group of pilgrims a little downstream from Kedarnath. Glancing occasionally at the picture, Singh discussed the it with Amit, trying to guess the exact location of the rescue. He then turned to me, glancing over the table I was sitting at, which had a small pile of files on it, and asked: “Ukhimath ke as-pass dikat ki sanbhavna hai kya?” (Are there chances of trouble in Ukhimath?) I attempted to respond, but without any recent information on the place, I could only murmur a halfhearted reassurance.

He then turned to Amit, who did reassure him. It later turned out that Singh had heard about the landslide that had hit the road a little ahead of Badrinath a few days earlier, and was worried about driving to a dangerous place (he was headed to Ukhimath that day). He had been driving in Uttarakhand for only around six

months, and felt unsure about the general safety of this. The conversation then drifted to the flood, and to the degree of destruction caused. Somewhere in the middle of this, Piyoosh turned to the boy and asked him

> "Bula, tumhara gaon kahan hai?" (*Bula* [younger brother], where is your house?)
>
> The young boy answered, "Uttarkhashi mein" (In Uttarkashi).
>
> "Uttarkashi mein kahan?" (Where in Uttarkashi?)
>
> "Harsil."

After some discussion involving the town and the DDMA there, Piyoosh inquired,

> "Apada ke time kahan pe the?" (Were you there during the floods?)

Puran, who seemed unfazed by the question, replied

> "Haan, main Pitaji ke saath gadi mein ghar jar aha tha" (Yes, I was driving back home with my father on the evening of the 16th).

To which Piyoosh responded equally unfazed

> "Toh tum bache kaise?" (So how did you escape?)

Puran then narrated briefly what had happened that night: It had been raining heavily through the morning and afternoon, and they had heard reports of possible problems along the river. They decided to go back home because of this, rather than in spite this. On the way, close to Uttarkashi town, they heard a surge in the distance. They were on a portion of the road that was rather high. But as a barrage of water passed by underneath, portions of the road ahead began to slip away. They decided to foot it, abandoning the car and climbing to a higher point on the mountain. They stayed on top for the night, not daring to go down. That night, (Puran had guessed June 16), the skies were completely clouded, making it extremely dark. Later that night, another wall of water burst through the river and Puran remembered seeing through the small gaps in the forest sparks ignited

in the river water, probably from heavy boulders colliding. In the morning, when the light of day finally shone weakly through the clouds, they went down to Uttarkashi, to find their house destroyed. A few hours later they managed to locate all the members of the family living in the house, all of which had escaped in time.

Piyoosh stayed silent through the description, staring at the radio in front of him, pausing in his listening only once to receive a message. Then he asked Puran if they had rebuilt their house. Puran said they had just bought back land that year, and were living with their relatives while their house was being reconstructed under the aegis of an NGO in Uttarkashi. Having finished his story, Puran was prodded by Amit and Piyoosh to tell them how much he earned. When he told them he earned Rs 3000, they teased him and asked him what he was going to do with it. Business-like, Puran answered, "It goes into paying for rent and food."

Here an act of collective witnessing again produced the fissure, or cut, of environmental perception, when what is in excess of the everyday environmental-temporal paradigms overflows into speech. The traumatic kernel of the excess of the disaster produces a fragment of memory, but more than memory, a sense of the presentness of the past, within community.

CONCLUSION: Secondary Trauma and Collective Witnessing

Within the Lacanian scheme it is not so much that trauma fragments reality, but rather that trauma reveals reality as inherently fragmented. The very basis of temporal perception which is supposed to run teleologically ends up producing a *chairos*, or a counter-current to the passage of time (Wright 2021). The notion of Kant's ([1781] 1998) causality implied by the Kantian transcendental aesthetic is reversed. This seems to be a crucial point of borrowing for the anthropology of disaster. The task of remembering or re-witnessing the event thus becomes crucial. In the case of the flood in the Mandakini Valley, it wasn't just the sheer scale of destruction but the narrow period of time in which it occurred, just three days, that produced a disaffection from the environment, a temporal dis-jointedness (Pelling and Norbert 2017) permeating temporal perception, which renders it linked to the past and the constant rearranging of the relevance of the past. In his theory on trauma, Laplanche (2017) suggests that the function of retroactivity in trauma is inter-subjective rather than intra-subjective. This constituted a major advancement in the theory of trauma. Trauma thus becomes the collective articulation of a social assemblage, a particular configuration of society in space and time, rather than a purely subjective experience. It thereby also becomes temporal, something exchanged within the community, which emphasizes the forward movement of

retroactivity along with the actual return to the past, that is, the relevant past is regularly reconfigured in relation to the emotional reality of the present.

In the account I have presented above, the past also becomes a subject of exchange, a means of collective witnessing. This is not to suggest that collective witnessing alleviates or helps master secondary trauma, the dissolution of the community that exacerbates trauma. Rather, it suggests the assumption of a position that is precisely contrary to mastery: the position of the witness. Witnessing the transformation of the environmental-personological interface becomes crucial also in drawing attention to the sheer damage unfurled by what is inscribed in the disaster-management literature under the term "secondary peril." Trauma itself compounds in the face of this secondary economic peril and ends up becoming deeply tied to the life of the community itself, turning into a way of life for many individuals.

ABSTRACT

The 2013 flash floods reproduced an everyday that was textural, the returning past of the event combined with gestures from within the everyday, to disorient survivors of the event. I attempt in this essay to analyze the return of the event as producing psycho-spatial affects, drawn from the psyche's own propensity to return while repressing the event that causes the return, described within psycho-analytic literature as "afterwardsness." Such afterwardsness is conditioned by the sheer incomprehensibility of environmental change that took place in just three days in the Mandakini Valley between June 15 and June 17, 2013. Following the flood, delays with the recovery process, and particularly with the process of compensation, exacerbate this trauma, leading to an extension of the temporality of trauma infinitely forward. [disaster; trauma; temporality; afterwardsness; compensation]

NOTES

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1. Kedarnath is a node in two different pilgrimage routes, the Panch Kedar and the Char Dham Pilgrimage; the latter including the sites of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri, each again representing the larger confluence of river valleys that extends into the Gangetic Plains with each of these sites being divided between Saivite and Vaisnavite allegiances. The site of Badrinath, moreover, is also directly related to the former throne of the kingdom of Tehri Garhwal, which remained a princely state until two years after independence, with the king considered to be a living embodiment of the Vaisnavite deity in Badrinath. These feudal relations, however, do not affect caste directly in the other river valleys since it is each of the valley's central (Vedic) deities that determine ritual closeness, rather than the administrative structure of kingship. At the same time both kingship and divinity did play a part in the initial construction of

bureaucratic revenue extraction structures that were later modified during the period of colonial rule and formed the basis for the current caste structure. The division of these sites is also recursively segmentary, in that in each valley collections of villages (divine *pattis*/revenue circles) also worship deities that are then related hierarchically to the central deity in each valley. Caste identities in these valleys are thus primarily divided on the basis of ritual closeness of the village to the deity at Kedarnath and of the resident in the village to each deity; although as I attempt to show in my work, caste is also simultaneously shaped via bureaucratic artifacts like the compensation list (Mathson 2024).

2. Pandits refer to a local caste group derived from the Brahmin caste within the four-fold varna (caste) system described both in certain Hindu scripture and colonial law, as well as modern anthropological and legal discourse, all of which draw on a small set of scriptural sources (Dirks 1989, Cohn 1987). Although the history of the development of a modern caste system in Uttarakhand has been particular in many ways (Pant 2011, Pathak 1981). Since the lists were designed for each village and since villages are segregated on the basis of caste, the administration of Rudraprayag saw it fit to distribute money on the basis of "caste lists" like the "pandit list."
3. The Omkareshvar Temple located at the center of the actual Ukhimath township was the winter seat of the deity at Kedarnath, and housed the idol after its peregrination from the Kedarnath Temple, located twenty-five kilometers upstream from the Ukhimath block area.
4. Pandits and Rajputs correspond broadly to the positions of Brahmin and Kshatriya the four-fold varna system, within which castes are divided on the basis of purity and pollution in a hierarchy. However, it should be noted that arguments regarding the timelessness of this tradition have been historically rebutted, showing that the interpretation of the four-fold varna system from a very small selection of Hindu scripture were mostly made by colonial courts in reference to specific caste group that they designated as being worthy of knowledge of the country and interpreted into civil law across the country (Dirks 1989, Cohn 1987).
5. A paradigmatic case of a secondary peril is the flooding that followed the breeching of the levees after Hurricane Katrina. Close to 1,800 people died, with nearly $186 billion USD worth of property damage. The breaching of the levees led to major civil litigation. The first concerned whether insurance companies were liable for the breach of the levees to compensate for the resultant damage. This suit was settled in August 2007 in favor of the insurance companies by a U.S. appeals court arguing that the insurers were not liable for payment even in the case of negligence found in the construction of the levee. In the other case, a U.S. federal judge in November 2009 found the Army Corps of Engineers responsible for negligence in the construction of the levees and ruled for major compensations for a large section of the affected populace, going into billions of dollars.
6. The 2022 Rudraprayag Agricultural Contingency Plan (ACP) is available at https://agriwelfare.gov.in/sites/default/files/UKD10-Rudraprayag-10.07.14_0.pdf (Last accessed September 2024).
7. Throughout this essay, the names of places have been altered, the name of the village where I resided a large part of fieldwork changed, and sobriquets used for interlocutors to protect their privacy, since many of the matters discussed were of a sensitive nature.
8. A revenue circle is a government administrative unit consisting of a number of villages historically created within colonial rule to be administered by a circle officer (called a *patwari* in most parts of northern India). The historical purpose of the revenue officer during colonial times was the collection of agricultural tax, which has been excluded from the ambit of tax collection in modern India. The other function of the patwari, particularly in a colonial non-regulated province (divested of a governor and a localized judiciary) like the former Garhwal division of which Rudraprayag was a part, was actually administering and discursively producing the disciplinary conditions for land-ownership in these parts (for more on this see Mathson 2024).

9. RCC houses are quite simply concrete houses. They are usually called "RCC houses" locally referring to the technical term. RCC is distinguished from Plain Cement Concrete (PCC) and tends to be more durable.
10. The ODCH lists were created by an NGO based out of the DDMA offices in Rudraprayag and funded by the World Bank's Uttarakhand Disaster Recovery Project. The ODCH project looked to rebuild houses in consultation with owners also keeping in mind the necessity of proofing these houses against earthquakes and locating them in areas apparently secure from landslides. The lists contained the names of owners who had been seen as being most in need of houses, in some cases those who had been affected by landslides form the previous year as well.
11. It is critical to note here that the depletion of such kindred networks (which I have analyzed elsewhere, Mathson 2024) contributes considerably to escalating "relative depravation" in relation to each individual's ownership bundle (Sen 1981).
12. The Disaster Risk Reduction features included earthquake proofing the houses and Geological Survey of India land surveys that isolated portions of land that were seen as being fit to inhabit.
13. A state government run organization that promotes tourism in Uttarakhand. The organization was considerably involved with running temporary facilities for the inhabitation of pilgrims in the years immediately after the floods.
14. Such articulations were quite common among the residents of the Mandakini Valley and formed part of a rich glossary of Garhwali terms that would often pepper conversations in Hindi. Terms like *rumuk* (the fading yellow light of dusk) and *swisahat* (the sound of a brook) describe immanent particularities in nature. Garhwali also has a vast glossary of terms describing particular smells and sounds. Terms like *swisahat* carry Eduardo Kohn's (2013) sense of iconicity, where the sound of the word replicates the real, a thing out there in the world. Here we have an example of what Jacques Lacan (1959) describes as the "thingness" of the world as a never-ending, self-referential loop around the drive. Iconicity in this case also describes such a self-referential loop, tying two presents via an emerging sense.
15. The future anterior is defined by Lacan (1966a) as "a past which manifests itself in an inverted form of repetition," that is, it is precisely the original traumatic cause that manifests itself as a repetition of a later event. The traumatic recurrence is thus defined not just by an anticipation but by an inverted form of repetition. In this article, however, I move away from the notion of "trauma as moment of injury" to the notion of "trauma as ongoing lived experience" (Lester 2013, 755). This form of retroactivity has a lineage in Lacan that goes back to his training as a student of Hegel via Kojeve. In G. W. F. Hegel ([1820] 1979), too, historical events are shaped and re-shaped by the future perfect, encapsulated in his aphorism, "The owl of Minerva flies only at dusk." This sense of the future anterior is captured vividly in the workings of afterwardsness, described later in this essay.
16. Here I am considerably influenced by Mauss's (1985) suggestion that personhood rather than being defined/definable (being a question of applying the correct definition to empirical reality) is perpetually changing. Within the bounds of the social anthropology of India there has been a tendency to explain "Indian personhood" in terms of the Dividual (a relational person rather than a self-sufficient person which would be the Individual) which often exacerbates the idea of an insurmountable East-West division. Over time there have been global shifts through theories that describe personhood recursively rather than either singular or plural (Wagner 1991, Strathern 1991). Here I suggest that we might also think of personhood psychoanalytically (which does not mean mentally) but rather through the notion that the person is split within it-*self*. This is expressed well by Lacan's (1966b, 430) reconstruction of the well-known Cartesian formulation as "I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking." I understand this split self as not being just relational with the environment, but entirely immanent with it.

17. While most postmodern critiques of the Kantian/Cartesian subject position insist on the subject being absent entirely, a more detailed reading of such critiques often returns to the Lacanian conception of split subjectivity. For example, see Gilles Deleuze (1968) on the third synthesis of time, and Michel Foucault (1971) on the birth of modern subjectivity as "man."
18. Here I explicitly steer clear of the relation of trauma to childhood neurosis, a staple in Freudian and Lacanian psychology, and instead move to an interpretation of the drive (Copjec 2002) that centers more on Freud's (1920) reading of war neurosis following World War I, where he places the focus on the fact of the contemporaneousness or the presentness of the past. The dreams of soldiers that repeat the war, as Freud points out, constitute not fragments of memory but actual repetitions of the traumatic event. For a deeper investigation of the concept of trauma as in fact related to the moment of injury, rather than to a biographical past, see Malabou (2015).
19. Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón (2019) claim in the case of Hurricane Maria, which hit the coast of Puerto Rico in 2017, that the historically tragic economic and weak governmental circumstances, which meant a total collapse of post-disaster governance, in themselves created a secondary peril that lead many residents toward a compounding trauma, as well as a greater distance from the tragic reality of their circumstances.
20. Freud (1996) insists that traumatic neurosis maintains the form of a ritual, or, we might say, that of a speech act (Austin 1962; Butler 1990), a particular performativity in language.
21. This is a trust in charge of the financial and secular aspects of temple maintenance.

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