



AUSTRIAN
ACADEMY OF
SCIENCES

AUGUST 4, 2017
START: 4 PM
INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
SEMINAR ROOM
HOLLANDSTRASSE 11-13, 1020 VIENNA

ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

SLOW MEDICINE IN FAST TIMES

TIBETAN MEDICINE AND “ALTERNATIVE HUMANITARIANISM” AFTER NEPAL’S 2015 EARTHQUAKES

SIENNA R. CRAIG

Associate Professor of Anthropology, Dartmouth College (USA)

It is often said that traditional medicine, including Tibetan medicine, succeeds in the treatment of chronic conditions, whereas biomedicine is a better option for acute care. This stereotype is voiced not only by biomedical practitioners and patients but also by Tibetan physicians themselves. Indeed, it is part of how Tibetan medical “neo-traditionalism” (Pordié 2008) operates. Even as this view is embraced and validated by diverse social actors, it remains incomplete. The limitations of this dichotomy become particularly apparent when considering health care needs that are biological, psychological, and social, such as those which emerge during states of emergency, including natural disasters. Even so, determining how – or if – and to what ends traditional medicine should be deployed in such moments remains virtually absent in global health circles and under-represented in scholarship on medical humanitarianism. Meanwhile, Tibetan physicians may be called to action in times of crisis. This lecture focuses on Tibetan medical reactions to the devastating 2015 earthquakes in Nepal, specifically through a series of “amchi camps” that were organized to serve earthquake-affected communities and internally displaced people in Kathmandu. An ethnographic examination of Tibetan medical practitioners’ responses to these seismic events allows for a rethinking of what traditional medicine is “good for,” particularly in relation to that human urge of “the need to help” (cf. Maalki 2015). After providing an anatomy of the amchi camps, I consider how these events – through their provision of therapy, their affect, and their politics – articulate an “alternative humanitarianism” that, by turns, invokes and challenges the moral sentiments and strategies for action that tend to define global health emergency response.



Sienna R. Craig is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Dartmouth College (USA). She received her PhD from Cornell University in 2006. A medical anthropologist whose work focuses on cross-cultural experiences of medicine, health, and illness, global and women’s health, and migration and social change, she is the author of *Horses Like Lightning: A Story of Passage through the Himalayas* (Wisdom Publications, 2008) and *Healing Elements: Efficacy and the Social Ecologies of Tibetan Medicine* (UC Press, 2012), and the co-editor of *Medicine Between Science and Religion: Explorations on Tibetan Grounds* (Berghahn Books, 2010), among other publications. She is co-editor of *HIMALAYA*, Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies.

