

Safe and Secure? Or Stressed and Scared?

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"Why don't you just report it to the town council, with a photo of that cluttered yard," I suggested to a neighbor complaining of piles of junk abandoned on an incomplete construction site beside her house.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that", she swiftly counters; "They might become angry."

I've encountered this kind of fear repeatedly – fear of any personal confrontation.

Neighbors prefer to put up with excessive noise, disrespect and other aggravations rather than approach a neighbor, or report their concern to the municipality. It speaks to lack of confidence between neighbors and to misgivings about elected officials.

I wonder if, like me, you detect a wariness and unease – fear, actually- not known here 15, 25, 50 years ago.

We all know our region is undergoing a huge amount of change. Transformation, really. Yet, The Catskills has never been a static, forgotten part of New York. Here's not unlike many semi-rural areas experiencing surges and slumps.

People are more apprehensive than in the past, it seems. Our schools, hospitals and clinics need more guards, as if businesses and public places are not already engulfed by cameras. If you're nervous about your home the answer comes back: "Install cameras; activate it while away and you can get alerts anywhere, through your phone." Is this really a solution? We end up anxiously checking our phones for warnings.

Certainly, in my village, the number of surveillance cameras through the woods and along country roads is unprecedented. Earlier we had only tree-mounted cameras in nearby woods to view baby bears in season, or check the clattering in our refuse bins for bothersome raccoons and porcupines. Now, innocent walkers, perhaps, new homeowners, are caught unaware, like a one couple on a stroll in the woods above their property. They were filmed! And the property owner, far away in another state, filed a trespassing suit that cost the

couple several hundred dollars, another villager reports. That can certainly curb one's enthusiasm for hiking on our abundant green hills.

One homeowner, who visits her riverside house once a year, if that often, has cameras all around her place—to ensure that her teenage grandchildren don't use the house without her supervision. Her own grandchildren! At a hardly-used residence! When I pass the place during my evening walk, a spotlight flashes on me, alerting her on her phone, somewhere. I wave cynically at the light, mumbling something unrepeatable.

'No Trespassing' signs now mark the landscape in all directions. I wonder, should we leave behind our bird-watching binoculars for fear of being suspected of peeping?

Notwithstanding surveillance technology available to homeowners, something else—something discomfoting— is going on.

There's rising fear and unease about our surroundings, our neighborhoods.

Yes, a lot of changes. New people moving in do not feel like real neighbors. Appearing on weekends only, they rush out of their \$500,000+ homes to socialize at one of the new upscale restaurants. Regulars can't even accidentally meet them at our local eateries. Then there's the Airbnb crowd. They may walk past our house - with their indispensable dog - pausing to peer at our flowerbed. Anyway, they're soon gone. Can't make a neighborhood from that.

I'm thankful my house is not near the town's craft-beer circus, or the extended vodka bar that's usurped an entire village street.

That raises another issue—more drinking holes. Most new businesses are high-end eateries and bars. Frankly, I'd rather have our recently shuttered pharmacy or a handy late-night Chinese takeout.

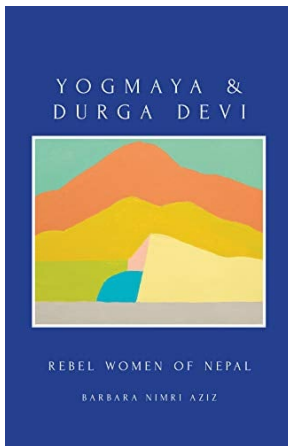
It's not change; it's not newcomers. For more than two centuries, people arrived here from elsewhere and became part of today's solid social fabric. This change underway today is aggravated by something beyond the Catskills; bad news and threats are descending from all sides. Frightening news used to be confined abroad. Now it's homemade -within our borders. If it's not fires, it's fentanyl; if it's not floods, it's scamming seniors' savings; if it's not fights about books, it's new laws over gender identity; if it's not the roar of trucks up Highway 17, it's the price of bread. Shootings and economizing on food had belonged in distant places; now, they are around the corner and up the road.

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Barbara Nimri Aziz whose anthropological research has focused on the peoples of the Himalayas is the author of the newly published ["Yogmaya and Durga Devi: Rebel Women of Nepal"](#), available on Amazon.

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“Yogmaya and Durga Devi: Rebel Women of Nepal”

By Barbara Nimri Aziz

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After Nepal moved from absolute monarchy to a fledgling democracy and history re-evaluated these pioneers, Dr. Aziz explores their legacies in this book.

Psychologically provocative and astonishingly moving, “Yogmaya and Durga Devi” is a seminal contribution to women’s history.

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