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Introduction

An older Brahmin woman sets down her brush and draws you over with a serious look and a commanding flourish of her tattooed arm, jangling with bangles.[1] "Listen," she says:

1   Portions of this article were previously published as "Strategies of 'Sisterhood' and Questions of Solidarity at a Women's Development Project in Nepal" (Davis 1997, used with permission.)

bespeaks a larger movement, a connection with 'sisters' of future times and other places. The particular 'sister' to whom she refers in her speech is Claire Burkert, the founding coordinator of the Janakpur Women's Development Center (JWDC), an American woman who dedicated more than a decade of her life to this development project. While Anuragi is speaking in the Maithili vernacular, she says the word 'sister' in English.

In this essay, I examine deployments of tropes of sisterhood as they collided, just as do the lives of multiply positioned women, at JWDC. Sisterhood acts for my purposes as a focal point to examine the relational politics of what has become known as 'women's develop-ment.' A focus on discursive uses of sisterhood provides a window into disparate understandings of relationality among virtual and actual interlocutors across vectors of caste, class, ethnicity and nationality. I demonstrate that the use of a common signifier of kinship—sisterhood—with culturally disparate 'signifieds' creates a confusion of meaning, and differential readings of the politics of relationality.

I begin this essay with a history of the creation and evolution of the Janakpur Women's Development Center, as well as an overview of my research methods and trajectory. Following this methodological overview, I provide a brief discussion of the discourse of development generally and women's development in particular as it was enacted ideologically and materially in Nepal in the 1990s. JWDC is treated as a case in point, and here I focus on the multifarious ways its founder, craft producers and consumers viewed its purposes and functions especially in light of understandings of and experiences with Maithil gender norms. This necessarily detailed contextualization brings us finally to questions of sororal (dis)identification, which I examine institutionally, ethnographically, and linguistically, drawing especially on my analysis of the portrayal of sisterly relations in Maithil women's folk narratives.

In 1989, with a small grant from a U.S. foundation, Claire Burkert founded JWDC (then the Janakpur Women's Art Project)

in order to help preserve the artistic tradition and empower its producers.[3] In the decade that followed, the project provided a group of Maithil women living in the vicinity of the town of Janakpur in Nepal's eastern Tarai region with the resources and the space to make paintings on paper and other media for sale. In doing so, they drew on some of the same skills and aesthetics Maithil women use to make temporary paintings of Hindu religious and other subjects on the walls of their homes. International devel-opment grants and profits from the sale of these craft items in tourist and export markets supported the project over the years.[4] In the early 1990s, JWDC funders financed the building of an impressive production center located in a village on the outskirts of Janakpur. At this location, it became possible for visi-tors to see the women painting and making crafts, and to buy what they produced.

In 1993, I received permission from Burkert to undertake an ethnographic study of the Janakpur Women's Development Center. While I was in pursuit of a doctoral degree in anthro-pology, Burkert hoped that my research might prove useful to the success of the development project.[5] The research was conducted

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3   The official JWDC website <http://jwdconline.com/>, accessed in July 2007, stated that its mission was to preserve "the rich artistic heritage of women of the Mithila culture" and to help them "to earn income by utilizing their skills in making fine traditional art and crafts." Further, it was formed in 1992 "with the dual aim of preserving/promoting traditional Mithila art and working to empower local women." Elsewhere on the website, the word 'upliftment' was used rather than 'empowerment' and the Center's production of "traditional folk art" was said to be "an important vehicle for women's development."

4   For the purposes of this essay, I have used 'craft' because it is the term most often used to describe JWDC artifacts. In doing so, I recognize that such labeling takes part in a dominating discourse of aesthetic value. The artifacts might also be called art, primitive art, tourist art, handicrafts—all of which resonate somewhat differently in aesthetic discourse.

5   I owe a great debt to Claire Burkert for allowing me to conduct ethnographic research at JWDC and to everyone there for being so welcoming and open with me. None of my analysis in this article should be construed as a criticism of the intentions of any individuals associated with JWDC or of the quality of its

over several months in 1994 and 1995. At JWDC, I conducted semi-formal interviews with all of the women then participating in the project, from Burkert herself to the ethnically non-Maithil Nepali managers, to the approximately 50 craft-producers considered to be the beneficiaries of the project. I accumulated field notes from months spent at the Center informally engaged in conversation, observation, and assistance.[6] I was given access to all of the project's files and documents. In addition, I spent several weeks living and conducting socially stratified interviews in one of the villages near Janakpur, a community that is home to a number of the Maithil women participants. During that 15-month stay in Nepal, I also spent a few months in the capital city of Kathmandu, interviewing development functionaries and volunteering at a national level Nepali women's organization. In Kathmandu, I also conducted a written survey of consumers of Janakpur Art at a number of tourist shops. In 2003-2004, I returned to Janakpur for an extended period to conduct research on Maithil women's story-telling practices. During that period, I audio-recorded approximately 140 stories, primarily 'folktales' but also life stories from each of the storytellers with whom I worked. This essay allows me to draw on the material and insights from both periods of research.

On the fall day in 1994 that I arrived at the Janakpur Women's Development Center, a film team was setting up its equipment in the facility. A documentary was to be made about the Center; it would tell a story of how the development project housed there, which had been underwritten by USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund

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material and less tangible impacts.

6   Whenever the opportunity arose, I attempted to help out informally at the Center, by providing verbal and written English translations, by packing items for shipping to Kathmandu, and by undertaking myriad other small tasks. I was not, of course, employed by the Center; and I am quite sure that I have benefited personally and professionally to a much great extent than the Center gained from my presence there.

for Women), served at once to empower its members and to preserve and promote the otherwise dwindling traditional practice of 'Janakpur Art.'[7] At the Center, Maithil women were earning a living making paintings and other items to be sold as tourist art by drawing on skills, aesthetics, and images traditionally used in their homes for occasions of ceremony and festival. On that first day in October, I watched as large microphones and lights were maneuvered by the film crew around the facility. And I observed the women who worked there as they were transformed into character actors, en-actors of their own lives. They performed words and actions that would be sown together in a visual and auditory narrative in which (I would later learn when I viewed the completed film) what was deemed good in their lives (family, ritual, art) was preserved while what was deemed bad (women's subjugation, insularity, poverty) was transformed through what was portrayed as appropriate development and women's empowerment. It was in the course of this filming that Anuragi held forth with her narrative of unveiling, consciousness raising, and sisters. Perhaps not surprisingly, over the course of my study, I became increasingly interested in processes of objectification whereby the women who worked at JWDC learned to negotiate discourses of development, tourism, and feminism, as they and their families

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7   'Janakpur Art' became the term most commonly used by consumers, promoters, and retailers of the objects (most especially paintings on paper) produced for sale at the Janakpur Women's Development Center. These objects were understood to be a localized form of 'Mithila Art.' While the term 'Janakpur Art' was used to indicate objects made by Maithil women in the Nepal town of Janakpur and especially at the first development project designed for that purpose in that town, the term 'Mithila Art' came into wide circulation following the earlier (mid 20th century) development of a domestic and international market for such paintings originating in the area of Madhubani in the Indian state of Bihar (the same cultural-geographic region in which Janakpur falls) by the Indian government, non-governmental organizations and private parties. The creation and circulation in the early 1990s of the term 'Janakpur Art' signaled to potential consumers of handicrafts that the items were made in Nepal and therefore an appropriate souvenir from there.

and communities sought to pursue their interests and livelihoods via employment in the project.

Women's Development in Nepal

The historical insertion of women into development rhetoric and practice represented a proliferation of development discourse that contributed to the discourse's "self-creation and autoreferentiality" (Escobar 1995: 210), with an attendant extension of control over knowledge and bodies. At the same time, developers' increased interest in women constituted a reform. The governments of developing countries were pushed by international organizations and donor governments to formulate official policies on women as a deprived class, and such governments thereby sought legitimacy both domestically and in the international sphere. In Nepal, as elsewhere, the governmental and non-governmental agencies created in response to foreign aid for 'women's development' have provided certain kinds of education, employment, health care and other services and opportunities to many women. Even so, they have functioned, in part, to consolidate class-based interests (Tamang 1997) and limit agendas to the level of reform, as opposed to more radical transformation or liberation (Phnuyal 1997).[8] Institutional emphases regarding women and development have shifted from the enhancement of women's domestic skills and technologies, to the integration of women into 'mainstream' development schemes, to 'empowerment' perspectives (including by the mid-1990s an emphasis on micro-credit and later environmental concerns). Yet, even across this range of orientations, development efforts aimed at women have remained largely within an economistically deterministic, capitalist logic.[9]

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8   For an early criticism by Nepali scholars of foreign aid approaches to women and development, see Pradhan and Shrestha (1983).

9   For more on the trajectory of feminist critiques of development, see, for instance, Charlton (1984); Mueller (1987); Sen and Grown (1987); Beneria and Feldman (1992); Moser (1993); Escobar (1995); Marchand and Parpart (1995); Scott (1995).

Just as scholarly critics in the last decade have pointed to the ways that international development has operated as a discourse sanctioning or prescribing oppressive economic, political and epistemological relations on international and sub-international scales (Mueller 1987; Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995; Des Chene 1996), transnational feminist scholars have examined how these relations have often been mirrored unreflectively in the discourses of some Western-centered international or global feminist orientations (Mohanty 1988; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Alexander and Mohanty 1997). For instance, Chandra Mohanty argued that Western feminist scholars have constructed a 'Third World woman' Other to a Western white woman 'norm,' whereby ideas of backwardness and tradition (underdevelopment, oppression...) are mapped onto the former, and progressiveness and modernity onto the latter (Mohanty 1988). Such discursive dichotomizations, as Grewal and Kaplan point out, render deeply problematic any effort to do feminist work across cultural divides (1994: 2). In contrast, transnational feminist efforts require serious attention to historical trajectories, as well as local manifestations of and resistances to global forces (Alexander and Mohanty 1997). Much of the Western writing on women in Nepal prior to the 1990s showed a tendency toward what Alexander and Mohanty designate as a "liberal-pluralist understanding of feminism" (1997: xvi), which prioritized gender over other axes of identity and power. This writing emphasizes 'status' comparisons between genders based on notions of individualism and citizenship.[10]

In Nepal in the early and mid-1990s, aid for the development of women through the creation of women-run enterprises was in particular abundance. This corresponded at once with

10 Western feminist anthropology in Nepal in the 1990s compared to earlier such scholarship showed greater sensitivity to and theoretical sophistication concerning supra-local contexts, issues of agency, and intersecting discourses. In the new millennium to date, a diversifying cadre of Nepali activists, lawyers and journalists have been engaged in questions of women and development, women's rights and gender justice.

the expansion in large development agencies of departments that specialized in women's and gender issues, and also with the banners of privatization and structural adjustment then in ascendency among financially controlling agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the US Agency for International Development. At that time, Nepal also saw a boom in cultural preservation efforts, prominent examples of which included support by multiple INGOs and IGOs of the preservation and rehabilitation of Newar architecture and wood carving in the Kathmandu Valley. This support of cultural preservation was part of a global trend corresponding at once to the destruction of cultures through modernization and development and also to the development of international tourism as a major national income-generating activity. It is no wonder, then, that a project bent on empowering women, generating income through tourist market activity, *and* preserving cultural material and practice excited the imaginations of primary and secondary development aid institutions, not to mention international tourists.

JWDC followed a women-in-development strategy common in the 1990s, in that it was both economically productivist and oriented toward social empowerment. In the first instance, this means mainstreaming women into national economic development plans while recognizing differences between men and women as social subjects. In the second instance, this entails seeking to transform the way women are linked to 'productive' activities, so that the equality of their participation is secured. Project planners and managers at JWDC attempted to effect this second gender intervention by: providing women with income for work; getting women out of the house and village; including women in decision-making; providing a forum for women to share experiences; and providing training in literacy, health, management, leadership, and gender awareness.

In the survey conducted in Kathmandu of people who purchased wares made at JWDC, respondents indicated that they

envisioned women's development as a problem characterized by a *lack*—of opportunities, resources, skills, and/or self-esteem/confidence. Such a lack was understood to be remedied by educational progress, development projects, and trainings offered under the auspices of development agencies. Respondents also indicated that they thought the producers had low status vis-à-vis their men folk. In other words, the respondents perceived women's development as a matter of sexual inequality in a culturally homogenous society the status of whose members are unaffected by the (equally distinct) society of the consumers themselves. I designated consumers of JWDC products as 'feminist' insofar as their purchasing was motivated in part by a desire to reduce perceived sexual inequality faced by the producers.

Purchase of the items made at JWDC appeared to be meaningful for consumers in part because they could demonstrate their ideological commitment to development, and women's development in particular, through their purchasing. One respondent called this act 'PC shopping.' Thus, survey respondents forged relations with perceived disempowered 'Others' through the activity of an alienated market transaction. The consumers positioned *themselves* as already empowered and enlightened, ready to help out— through their purchase—women they viewed as oppressed. Ideologically and rhetorically, they located themselves *outside* oppressive structures and cultural formations affecting their third world 'sisters.' They indicated no sense of differential location *within* oppressive systems, failing to examine or articulate the global link between their own purchasing power and desire, on the one hand, and local living conditions of Maithil women, on the other.

As for the craft producers at JWDC, they identified a range of motives for and gains from working at the Center. In addition to the income, participants cited as benefits getting away from more arduous work or conflicts at home, as well as meeting people of many different types (*rang*, literally colors, and *jāt*, caste or race)— referring both to their coworkers from nearby villages and also

to people from other regions and countries. It is evident from my research that JWDC had served the Maithil women who work there in a number of ways. They had expanded their social networks and forged supportive (and sometimes not so supportive) relations with women from different households and different villages. Also, JWDC proved an emboldening instrument for some of the women, particularly for those who had worked there the longest. With one another's encouragement and modeling, the women at JWDC spoke out and spoke up in reaction to old and new injustices. Thus, it would certainly be a mistake to think of these women as actors with purely economic motives or as passive cogs in their households' economic wheels. But it would also be incorrect to identify as a primary motive the forming of a movement of women to change their society or link arms with women across households, villages, or nations. Certainly, the leap of faith with which consumers of JWDC wares conjured images of sororal support was not mirrored in Maithil craft producers' stated motivations for their participa-tion in the project.

JWDC: A Women's Development Project

In her first visit to the Janakpur area in the mid-1980s, Burkert was struck at once by the beauty of the artwork displayed in village homes and by the reticence, gendered oppression, and poverty of its producers: women of the conservative Hindu Maithil ethnic group which dominates the region in terms of population and culture. A nationwide study of women's status in Nepal conducted in the 1970s had suggested Maithil women's art in particular as ripe for commercialization (Acharya 1981). This recommenda-tion fit with the global trend wherein 'ethnic' or 'fourth world' groups make themselves, or symbols of themselves, available for consumption in myriad ways, including through objects indexed to their culture, which they produce as souvenirs specifically for sale by street vendors and in craft shops targeting outsiders.

The creation of a craft production center in Janakpur for

JWDC participants posed a challenge to the hegemonic Maithil gender system—a system characterized by norms and practices promoting the paramount value of the patriline. The core of the Maithil kinship structure, common to much of the region (Jeffery and Jeffery 1996), is patrilineage, with alliances formed through arranged patrilocal marriages endogamous to caste and exogamous to village. In Mithila, high-caste Hindu males are privileged over others by formal and informal means that are structured through patriarchal and patrilineal relations and values, as well as through gendered and caste-based discourses of pollution. In essence, Maithil women marry into their husbands' households, which are, ideally, multigenerational units consisting (minimally) of parents, their unmarried children, their married sons, and the wives and children of those sons. Property is held by men in lineages. Women are dependent on men: first on fathers, then on husbands, and finally on grown sons.

Of particular importance to these constructions is the Maithil practice of *pardā* (purdah). As I have noted elsewhere (Davis 2005, 2008), the purdah system in Mithila affects behavior of and toward recently married women and is meant to assure the appropriation of these women's procreative capacities for their husbands' patrilines. In its ideal form, purdah entails the social, spatial, visual, and verbal isolation of in-married women from non-household males who are neither natal nor affinal kin and from men senior in kinship status to the husbands of those women (e.g., husband's elder brother, father or uncle). For young wives, sanctions against tactile and verbal contact with husbands, except in the privacy of their shared room, also apply.

Maithil society, as a patriarchal, socially stratified system, pits married women against each other in particular, structural ways that require one woman to 'lose' when another 'wins.' This is, not surprisingly, a common theme in Maithil women's folktales. In such women's narratives, when one woman loses to another, she loses big: the man on whom both women depend, once enlightened

to the mistreatment of one at the hands of the other, frequently ends up slaying the one (most proximately) causing the suffering of the other. For instance, in one tale, a man's mother starves and abuses his young wife, falsely accusing her of adultery. At first the man is convinced of his mother's lies and sets about to kill his wife for her alleged trespasses, but he rather accidentally learns of his mother's misbehavior and his wife's innocence, and subsequently chooses to kill his mother instead (Davis 2008, 2009). Such an eventuality in women's tales points to the perceived stakes for women of successfully negotiating the stratified social system in which they are differentially positioned. When visiting her natal home and village, a married Maithil woman generally experiences greater freedom of movement and speech, and she need not cover her head or face (except when, by chance, a male individual defined as affinal to her appears). As daughters and sisters, Maithil women returning to their natal homes are considered beloved guests. Their brothers' wives are expected to feed and otherwise treat them with deference, and their mothers may dote on them while serving as sympathetic sounding boards for stories of the trials they may have encountered as wives and daughters-in-law in their marital households. Indeed, the desire of a woman to return to her mother's hearth is highlighted not only in folktales, but in festival stories and song, as well (Davis 2005, 2014).women's story and song, when, on rare occasion, women of differing statuses do choose solidarity with each other—as opposed to staking all their solidarity with the men upon whom they are dependent—their suffering may be relieved without full capitulation to the structures that pit them against each other in the first place. Actual Maithil women *do* enact such solidarities frequently and in numerous mundane ways, as when the wives of brothers in one household combine their resources, when co-wives amicably share tasks, or when a mother-in-law loves her daughter-in-law like she would her own daughter. But these are sister-in-laws, co-wives and mothers/daughters-in-law; not sisters.

Questions of Solidarity

Project planners, management personnel, trainers and funders expected that the women of the Center would bond together in solidarity as women. They hoped that through participating in workshops, as well as laboring together, the craft producers would learn to put aside their quarrels, to work cooperatively and to care for the JWDC facility as they would their own home. "After all," said the Nepali managers and trainers, "we are all sisters [*dīdī bahini*] here." Yet, during the time I spent at JWDC in 1994 and 1995, complaints by producers over salary levels, child-care quality, and limited opportunities for training escalated, significantly impeding production and affecting morale. Some women started talking about leaving the Center to establish their own businesses, where they expected to be able to make more money. A few did leave. Of course, this kind of disruption, which after all required self-assertion, can itself be interpreted as a sign of the craft women's empowerment.

One particularly salient complaint voiced by JWDC producers in those days had to do with the perceived unfair distribution of opportunities to engage in commissioned painting projects, sales-and-supplies-related work, and training outside the Center, particularly in Kathmandu. These activities, which sometimes involved extra pay, maintenance allowance, and travel, were viewed as perks or 'prizes' (as they called them, employing the English term) by many of the painting and craft producers at the Center. From their point of view, these prizes were scarce resources that might improve an individual's (and her household's) chances for economic and social advancement; thus prizes became catalysts for competition and jealousy among the craft-producers. From the management's point of view, in contrast, the outside work was seen as a means to give women opportunities for greater responsibility and independence, for skill- and knowledge-building, and for enhancing the viability of JWDC. The management staff, therefore, usually viewed worker complaints and arguments over these activities as childish and

self-centered disruptions to work and peace, an indication of failure to understand their collective interest and a lack of community-mindedness.

I must admit that I myself first viewed such complaints in the same light as did members of the management team. After all that the Center had done for them, I wondered, how could these women be so self-serving, so lacking in loyalty to JWDC and solidarity with one another? As an outsider steeped in Western feminist ideals, the producers' lack of 'sisterhood' was at first encounter shocking and disheartening. I wondered what might be the barriers to unity for these women. More broadly, was there any cultural basis for solidarity among Maithil women, in particular a solidarity based on equality, similarity and warmth implied in the Western feminist notion of 'sisterhood?'

The craftswomen at the Center were all Maithil and married, and belonged to a variety of castes, mostly Brahmin, Kayastha, and farming castes. When I was there, the salaries for craft producers were approximately half of what mid-level management was making. Management had tried to instill a sense of 'member-ship' as opposed to 'employee' status among the craft producers. As members, producers elected representatives from each of the work sections (e.g. painting, sewing, and ceramics). These repre-sentatives sat on a board which, in conjunction with management, made decisions and disseminated information between the other craft producers and management team. All of the board positions required a degree of literacy for record-keeping, so on that basis alone a good number of the craft producers were not eligible. Sense of competition for these positions was strong and some-times crystallized into flaring tempers and whispered or even loud accusations of favoritism. The management team at that time consisted of several young post-secondary-educated high caste but non-Maithil women in the roles of storekeeper and assistant storekeeper, accountant, accounting assistant and manager. The first language of the

management staff was Nepali, the national language of Nepal, which is taught in schools; whereas that of the largely illiterate producers was Maithili, the main vernacular of the region. Some of the management staff and some of the Maithil women were bilingual and, in that capacity, acted as informal interpreters for everyday communications among their more monolingual counterparts. Salaries for all of the management posts had been funded by international aid organizations. Until 1995, Claire Burkert held the position of 'founding coordinator;' her salary was markedly higher than the rest, although quite low by U.S. standards.

In practice, decision-making at JWDC was sometimes executive, with demands coming from the coordinator or funders or buyers with whom management met. These external agents did not communicate with and therefore were little understood by most of the craft producers, despite efforts by management to share information in monthly all-center meetings. Differences in status were manifest in the physical arrangements of these meetings: the managers sat up front and higher, facing the craft producers, who sat closely together on mats on the ground of the Center courtyard. Craftswomen saw information and prizes, although theoretically divvied out fairly by the board (people of their own class and culture), as scarce commodities doled out from the top: that is, from management (people of a different class and culture).

These perceptions were formed in part by a reluctance on the part of board members to take responsibility for decisions— for fear of being blamed for bad ones—and also through rumor. Further, management alone controlled the project's finances.[11] The process of monetary flow in and out of the Center was largely opaque to the craftswomen, who were sometimes suspicious that the managers, as the local phraseology goes, were 'eating' (pocketing) the profit.

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11 For a discussion of early struggles over control of the project's finances, see Davis (2003).

Narratives of Kinship

A large literature has developed in the last two decades on South Asian women's expressive traditions, including song, story, art and ritual. While some of this work focuses primarily on the ways dominant (patriarchal) forms and understandings of femininity are reinforced through women's ritual and religious lives (e.g., Leslie 1989, 1991; Pearson 1996), much of the ==more recent== literature stresses that South Asian verbal arts constitute a form of discourse in a field of competing discourses and variety of contexts (e.g., Flueckiger 1996; March 2002; Raheja 2003).[12] Raheja and Gold suggest that we understand women's expressive practices not as a form of resis-tance, subversion or inversion, but as evidence of the coexistence of contradictory perspectives available in differing moral registers (1994; also see Kumar 1994). I am in agreement with this perspec-tive, for I believe that while Maithil women's gender-specific moral registers and cosmological perspectives may be less known by others—from their own menfolk to outside observers—they are nonetheless central psychological and social organizing prin-ciples in Maithil women's lives that co-exist in complementarity and tension with other such principles ==(Davis 2014).== Outsiders, and folklorists in particular, have needed to learn to listen differently to access these perspectives (March 2002). In other words, we have needed to rethink our epistemologies and reshape our methodologies accordingly.

The action at JWDC described earlier cannot be fully under-stood by examining the polarized dynamic within the JWDC alone; one must consider relations among these women in terms of the

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12 These works suggest, for instance, that women's songs are a place to voice criticism and bawdiness not articulable in everyday speech or in mixed-sex settings (Srivastava 1991; Raheja and Gold 1994; Skinner, Holland and Adhikari 1994; Ahearn 1998). A number of feminist anthropologists of South Asia have also pointed to such forms of expression as locations for indirect commentary on the singer or teller's own individual life (e.g., Narayan 1997; Wadley 1994; Davis 2014) in contexts where direct speech or other registers of articulation are not possible.

broader cultural milieu, as well. As I was to learn in the course of my 2003-2004 fieldwork, in the region of Mithila where Janakpur lies, a number of well-known stories highlight the relationship among cross-sex siblings, and this relationship is sanctified on ritual occasions practiced throughout Hindu Nepal (*bhāi tika* and *rākhī*) and in Mithila alone (*sāmā chakeva*) (Davis 2005). By custom, a brother is expected to intervene on behalf of his sister in times of crisis during the course of her married life. In contrast, it seems there are very few stories and no rituals that highlight the relationship among sisters, who as adults have little structural capacity to influence one another's lives. The ties sisters have to one another are the primarily unceremonialized emotional bonds of growing up together and the promise of reacquaintance perhaps once or twice a year at their natal homes.

In the course of my research on Maithil women's storytelling, I recorded two stories that highlight the relationship, structural and tonal, among sisters. In one story, the Eagle and Jackal Tale (Davis 2014), an impious woman, jealous of her sister for her many sons, arranges to have the sons killed. But the power of her sister's spiritual purity brings the sons back to life. Then the impious sister complains to the local *panchayat* (community council) that the other is a witch. Through an examination of their past lives (when one was an eagle and the other a jackal), however, the *panchayat* was able to determine that the impious sister was the guilty one. Her culpability having been demonstrated, the impious sister dies of mortification. The Eagle and Jackal Tale highlights some of the basic principles whereby the moral landscape is charted as a series of paired, opposing qualities: devoutness/sinfulness, truth/deceit, wisdom/foolishness, compassion/cruelty, creation/destruction, fruitfulness/childlessness, generosity/greed, purity/pollution, knowledge/ignorance, and highness/lowness. It is interesting to note that the Eagle and Jackal Tale is a story about two very different sisters whose differences are understood to position them karmically and socially in such a way that they are at mortal odds.

A second story featuring sororal relations is the Dukhiya Sukhiya Tale. In this tale, one sister marries rich and the other poor. The richer sister (Sukhiya, meaning 'fortune'), who is greedy, refuses to help out her poor sibling (Dukhiya, meaning 'suffering'), who, having no food for her children, has pleaded with her sister for support. Rejected by her wealthier sister, the poorer sister goes on a journey in the course of which she meets a tiger who is about to gobble her up, but instead takes pity on the honest and humble woman and blesses her with riches. Upon hearing news of her sister's sudden change of fortune, the greedy sister also goes to visit the tiger, but the tiger tricks her into exposing her greed, and then proceeds to eat her alive.

In the Dukhiya Sukhiya Tale, it is easy to recognize Sukhiya's behavior toward her kin, Dukhiya, as despicable, for a sense of kinship and magnanimity should have ensured that she would treat her sister with kind hospitality in the forms of food and rest.[13] Also evident is the reversal of fortunes of the characters, another common South Asian theme based on cosmological principles of circularity. Most important for present purposes, one notes that the Dukhiya Sukhiya Tale, as well as the Eagle and Jackal Tale, portray relationships of jealousy and inequality among women, and particularly among sisters. As such, they can help us to make sense of some of the interpersonal dynamics that arose at the Janakpur Women's Development Center. Maithil women are often jealous of one another in specific, relational ways. In these stories, the limited, desired resources which form the basis for jealousy are male progeny and wealth, over neither of which Maithil women traditionally have much control, due to the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal nature of their lives.

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13 The virtues of hospitality and generosity are frequent themes in Maithil women's tales. A common subtheme that also appears in this story is that of a god (or sometimes a relative or animal) who, in disguise, tests a human character's virtue, by seeking from them hospitality in particular. The moral point is that strangers of any status, when they come to your doorstep, should be treated as if they were close kin or gods.

Through my description of Maithil sister relations in life and in story, I aim to make three points of relevance to our understanding of the discursive and behavioral dynamics among women at JWDC. The first is that it is not surprising that Maithil women would react with intense jealousy to the distribution of resources at the Center, given local women's expectations about control over limited resources that are procured from outside their sphere of experience, such as through training and salaries. The parallels in the structure of kin relations and workplace relations among women cultivate a similar emotional (and behavioral) reaction. The second point is that there is little cultural basis for an expectation of solidarity among women based on an employment of tropes of sisterhood. Sisterhood in fact signals just the opposite in Maithil narrative tropes. Just as it is hard to say 'mother-in-law' in Euro-American or South Asian cultures without a flood of associations coming to mind, I am proposing that it may be difficult for Maithil women to say 'sister' without feeling the limits and hierarchies of that relationship-establishing and relationship-affirming term. Third, if little basis for solidarity exists among Maithil women themselves, there is no reason to think, on the basis of cultural resonance alone, that Maithil women would imagine a solidarity with non-local women either, on the basis of shared gender identity.

Fictive Kinship, Women's Development, and Disidentification

As is the case in many parts of the world, Maithil people use 'real' and fictive kinship terms much more often than they use names. In this still largely village-based society, almost everyone a person knows may be kin: through birth or through marriage, however distant. This is especially true for women, whose movement and social intercourse are generally more curtailed than that of their male kin. At JWDC, very often women are addressed by the fictive kin term *dīdī*, which means elder sister. When employing terms of address for sisters in Maithili, one may choose between *dīdī*

and *bahini,* the latter meaning younger sister.[14] Outside of biological kin, the terms of address are chosen primarily on the basis of perceived relative age, but also, where relative age is not so clear, on the basis of status or desired status relation, especially when one wants something, material or otherwise, from the addressee or other listeners. As most JWDC producers were around the same age, life stage and social status, there was greater employment among them of *dīdī* than *bahini* as a way of showing respect. Relative age, marital status, and dress style combined to make the choice of *bahini* over *dīdī* for management personnel on the part of the craft producers seem an obvious one. The management personnel, who were generally younger and unmarried (whereas all of the craft producers were married or widowed) were indeed sometimes called *bahini.*

Let us return to the speech of Anuragi Jha with which this essay began. In her speech, Anuragi calls the founder of the development project 'sister,' which, as a move of fictive kinship, is, as noted, the most common way that JWDC women address and refer to one another. What may seem a bit odd is that Anuragi uses the *English* word 'sister' as a kinship title in referring to Claire Burkert. In fact, 'sister,' spoken in English, was the term of address and reference used not only for Burkert, but also for myself and other known non-South Asian women, as well as, at times, the four Nepali management staff, three of whom were from Janakpur, but none of whom, as I have said, were Maithil. Of course, 'sister' (in English) has a long colonial ontology in South Asia as a term of address for female missionaries and teachers. Its use in this context, then, is not so strange. Another explanation of the selection of this English term is that while the addressees were all relatively young (and thus in local speech would be *bahini*), they were of higher status by the standards of office hierarchy and education. Thus,

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14 In Maithili, the term *bahīn* is also an option for both younger and older sister. With this terminology, grammatical and other linguistic features would be used to distinguish seniority.

whereas *dīdī* was inappropriate in terms of age-status, *bahini* felt awkwardly disrespectful in relation to office and educational status. While 'sister,' in English, calls up the right gender category and has the positive meaning of fictive kinship, it nicely circumvents the seniority and status issue. Using this and other English terms was also a way the craft producers might accommodate foreigners while enjoying linguistic play. Finally, as a result of the colonial legacy, the use of English terms is a way of identifying oneself with the developed side in the developed vs. under-developed dichotomy of modernity ideology in an attempt to position oneself to gain social and economic status.[15]

In my view, 'sister,' as used at JWDC in the 1990s, was a multivalent, strategically deployed, and divergently interpreted term. The closeness, affection, and solicitation implied by the use of kinship terminology are only part of the story. Likewise, the pursuit of status, linguistic play, and establishment of solidarity among women do not provide a sufficient explanation for the phenomenon, despite how these utterances might be interpreted by Western feminists, tourists, and international development personnel. The use of 'sister' by the craft producing women at the Center, I would argue, is also a distancing move, a statement of difference among women as much as an indicator of sameness and closeness. Thus, while I think it likely that Anuragi Jha was quite sincere in her appreciation of Claire Burkert and by extension of the development project, she could also sense that the goals of management would not coincide fully with her own perceived needs and desires, and that she was very unlike—and unlikely to be treated like—the project managers or foreigners such as Claire, myself, and international tourists.

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15 Mark Turin has argued that the borrowed English kinship terminology in modern Nepali (a language closely related to Maithili) provides a "context-free and socially-neutral" means of addressing non-Nepalis (Turin 2001: 280). He notes that such terms are "respectful but natural, affectionate but empty of real kinship meaning and the responsibility that such a role entails" (281).

In her review of histories of feminist ethnography, Kamala Visweswaran suggested that we "learn to understand gender as not the endpoint of analysis but rather as an entry point into complex systems of meaning and power" and that gender might be "best understood as a heuristic device [that] cannot be understood a priori, apart from particular systems of representation" (1997: 616). She noted further that theories of multiple positioning create subjects of "disidentification" (1997: 613). It is my contention that the gendered discourse of 'sisterhood' functions as just such a heuristic device in the enactment of disidentification by Maithil subjects at the Janakpur Women's Development Center, whose ethnic, class, linguistic and national, as well as gendered, identities make any sort of sisterhood with their non-Maithil interlocutors, as well as with each other, complicated at best. Indeed, globalised contexts with their attendant mobilizations and uneven regulability are ripe for the development of alternative subjectivities that in turn produce novel configurations of desire and intimacy, even as they may also entail new and sometimes brutal forms of restriction (Besnier 2007; Padilla 2007). In this potent context, Maithil women have engaged in a complicated linguistic dance with their differently classed, female Nepali counterparts and well as with foreigners.

Unity among women is a matter of shared interest, which itself is always multiple (intersectional), situational and a matter of perception as well as social structure and institutional location. In the practices of women at JWDC, this fact was demonstrated again and again, not least in the usages of fictive kinship examined in this essay. Linguistic practices of sisterhood at JWDC resonate uneasily with local systems of kinship but also with a global political economy which places some nations and some women in direct and indirect positions of power over others. It is these global relations, ultimately, that enable 'first world' feminists to claim (however erroneously) kinship and solidarity with 'third world' women. For the women producers at JWDC, using the term

'sister' provides access to a world of status and privileged connection that is part of the very stuff of development, locally articulated. The same signifiers are used by local women to negotiate ambiguous relations of trust, dependency, intimacy, hierarchy, and difference—in such a way that their tactical movements and subtle critique do not put at risk those important social ties.

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"Geographies That Make Resistance":[1] Remapping the Politics of Gender and Place in Uttarakhand, India*

Shubhra Gururani

Introduction

In 1994, thousands of women from towns and villages all over the Kumaon and Garhwal Himalayas in North India took to the streets to demand a regionally autonomous hill state of Uttarakhand. For four months, from July to October, widespread strikes, curfews, meetings, and marches rocked the hills of Uttarakhand.[2] Along with students, women enraged by the government's decision to further reserve quotas for 'other backward classes' (OBCs) in government jobs and educational institutions staged protests in different parts of the region.[3] Barely two decades after the Chipko

1   This phrase is borrowed from Pile (1997).
2   See Neelam Gupta (1994) and the Special Issue of *Uttara* (1994) for a detailed discussion of the rallies and protests in 1994.
3   'Reservation' refers to guarantees of constitutional safeguards and protection in employment and education for castes and tribes that are listed under the schedule of the Indian Constitution.

movement that spanned the seventies, in which women and men from several parts of Kumaon and Garhwal resisted commercial felling of timber and powerfully raised questions of access to forests, development, and social justice,[4] Uttarakhand was once again in flames.[5] Even in villages where people had not heard of the famous Chipko movement before, animated discussions about the future of Uttarakhand took place in front of kitchen fires, in courtyards, and in tea stalls by the roadsides. Situating their opposition to the reservation policy in the historical context of exploitation and marginalization, the protesters sang loud songs and shouted slogans condemning the state and expressed another historical reality: that of despair, poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment. They sang:

> You sold my pebbles and rocks, my soil, my forests of green oak,
> The resin you extracted for profit, was the skin of my body,
> 'Nyoli,' 'Chanchari,' 'Jhore,' 'Chapeli,'[6] you sold all my melodies
> You sold everything, my cool water, my cool breeze
> Today the Himalayas have awakened.[7]

The wave of protests that engulfed Uttarakhand in the nineties and mobilized large numbers of residents from diverse social and economic contexts was not unfamiliar. For several decades, especially since the sixties but certainly earlier as well, Uttarakhand

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4   For a full account see Guha (1989); Rangan (2000); Sinha et al. (1997).

5   Uttarakhand and Uttaranchal are the names of mountainous provinces of Uttar Pradesh. Even though they are interchangeably used, they reflect the contentious electoral politics in which Uttarakhand was mired. The name Uttarakhand is long established and locally used, but the right-wing Bhartiya Janata Party, in order to gain support and establish their presence in an otherwise Congress dominated area, promoted the term Uttaranchal. At the time of its formation, there was a great deal of frustration and anger in choosing Uttaranchal over Uttarakhand. I use Uttarakhand instead of Uttaranchal in this paper.

6   Names of local folksongs sung at different occasions in Uttarakhand.

7   Girda in *Uttara* (1994: 29), my translation from Hindi.

had been home to several movements around anti-alcohol, Chipko, anti-mining and quarrying, regional autonomy, and other regionally specific lesser-known movements. Interestingly, one enduring feature of all these movements is the prominent presence of women,[8] who, as critical social actors and leaders, have raised a wide range of questions about development, employment, access to forests, alcoholism, and more recently regional autonomy. While women's movements in India have a long history (see Gandhi and Shah 1991; Omvedt 1993; Kumar 1994; Ray 1999), Uttarakhand stands out as one of the few places that has witnessed a strong presence of women in spaces of political action.[9] This has not escaped the attention of journalists, academics, and activists; and indeed movements like Chipko have gained global recognition,[10] but the highly visible and persistent presence of women in public spaces begs further analyses. Even though women actively mobilize, their concerns remain undermined. This paper, in an effort to offer a historically sedimented, that is materially and symbolically grounded, reading of women's participation, focuses on the Uttarakhand movement and raises two distinct but related questions. First, in Steve Pile's words, the paper explores "the ways in which geography makes possible or impossible certain forms of resistance and [...] which resistance makes other spaces—other geographies—possible or impossible?" (1997: 2). In this spirit, I will explore what it is about *this* place that has produced such vibrant interventions from rural women and produced a gendered geography of resistance. I wish to situate recent political actions within the historical and political

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8   Bhatt and Pahari (1994) argue that women's participation in social movements in Uttarakhand was not as prominent in pre-independence India but, since the sixties women constitute a critical force in all social protests. See Bhatt and Pahari (1994); Dabral (1994); Pathak (1994); *Uttara* (1994); Jayal (2000).

9   It is important to note that none of these movements were exclusively women's movements and men were always involved in different capacities. Nonetheless, women's active participation in large numbers is remarkable.

10   For a discussion of the Chipko movement see Guha (1989, 2001); Sinha et al. (1997); Rangan (2000).

realities that have over time constituted gendered landscapes and subjectivities, and argue that even though women simultaneously raise questions of livelihood, household, rights, political/regional identity, equity, and social justice, the tendency has been to resist a gendered analysis and rely on persistent dichotomies that either essentialize women's participation or limit their role to the domain of tradition, domesticity, and community. It is precisely this stagnant and narrow reading of women's participation in social movements that overlooks the complex and sedimented terrain in which women come to participate. In addition, this urges us to acknowledge that women's actions, like all actions, are not pre-constituted or fixed but are contingent upon and guided by a range of impulses, sometimes contradictory and conservative, but nonetheless historically and spatially constituted.

To make sense of women's political agency, I situate women's participation in the long history of gendered subjectivation and resistance at the intersection of local and global networks of power and hope to present a rereading of gendered resistance in this region. I treat gender as a performative and relational process,[11] a historically constituted and culturally contingent set of relations which are configured by overlapping relations of patriarchy, economy, family, community, and state. I also describe how sedimented histories produce not only gendered subjects but also gendered landscapes of work, mobility, livelihood, and gendered resistance. In pursuing this line of argument, I highlight the centrality of place in feminist analysis and show how historically constituted identities of (gendered) subjects and places are doubly and simultaneously articulated (Massey 1993, 1994a, 1994b). In a place like Uttarakhand that is overwhelmed by its iconic remoteness and marginality, this

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11 Butler writes, "the performativity of gender revolves around ... the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Second, performativity is not a singular act, but a representation and a ritual which achieves its effect through naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a cultural sustained temporal duration" (1991: xiv).

historically embedded line of inquiry has important analytical and political stakes as it describes how places, even remote and distant places, are constituted at the nexus of local and global networks of power and capital, and in turn constitute social relations of difference, like gender, caste, and ethnicity. Such an emplaced account contests the static and normative accounts of 'remote places' and 'natural feminists' and forces us to take into account the mutual coproduction of place, politics, and subjectivities, neither of which are fixed or pre-constituted, but historically contingent and mutually constituted.

Second, in order to understand how a movement for regional autonomy came to be articulated in the late twentieth century, I document its shifting contours over the decades in post-independent India. Even though a sense of regional difference and cultural identity—marked by geography, language, and ethnicity—has long prevailed in Uttarakhand and there were even calls for separate statehood in 1952, the issue of a distinct regional political identity was never categorically voiced earlier. I argue that the demand for a separate state and the assertion of a regional identity in the nineties and its large-scale and shifting support are located in the messy electoral and reservation politics of caste and that these must incorporate a gendered perspective as the protestors connected the dots of their marginalization and guided the movement towards separate statehood. To a large extent, it was the participation of women that broadened the scope of the movement by incorporating a wide range of issues fueled not by any traditional values, but by aspirations and political claims to modernity and regional identity. Yet, and perhaps unsurprisingly, even though women participated in the movement, their voices and concerns were once again drowned in the chorus of political change that was guided by narrow sectarian logic. As a result, women's concerns and demands were once again overlooked.[12]

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12 While I use the term 'women' in the general discussion of the paper, I do not assume an automatic uniform category, such as the 'women of Uttarakhand,'

I draw most of my analysis from over a decade long engagement with Uttarakhand. I first conducted eighteen months of fieldwork in 1992-1993, and subsequently during shorter trips in 1995, 1997, 1999 and 2008. For this paper, I rely on my extensive field notes, oral histories, interviews, jottings, taped conversations with women and men in villages and towns of Uttarakhand, local and national newspaper dailies, and scholarly and activist writings. I also tap into my conversations and recollections with activists, journalists, scholars, and administrators whom I met during my travel and research in Uttarakhand, and draw on historical details from secondary sources. In the next section, I briefly discuss recent scholarship in cultural and feminist geography that provides key analytical frameworks to rethink gendered subaltern resistance and understand how gendered 'cartographies of struggles' are mapped. In the subsequent section, I present a brief historical snapshot of how the global political economy of capitalism and colonialism significantly transformed the landscape of Uttarakhand and inscribed a terrain of gendered subaltern resistance. In presenting a history of Uttarakhand, I am cognizant of not viewing this history just as a sequence of events that mark the essence of a particular place (Massey 1994: 111) but as a complex set of sedimented processes through which a 'remote' place like Uttarakhand came to be constituted at the nexus of global capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, and developmentalism and produced a gendered geography of work, relationships, struggles, and political identity. The final section focuses on the Uttarakhand movement and shows how amidst competing political impulses like the anti-reservation sentiments, the women did not draw on any traditional tropes but came forward as political agents to question the priorities of the state. Through this mobilization, these women signaled a modern regional identity that was consolidated in the terrain of a new political space and identity.

nor do I assume that all the movements share a unified and an explicitly 'women's' goal.

"Geographies that Make Resistance"

Doreen Massey suggests that we, "think of space, not as some absolute independent dimension, but as constructed out of social relations: that what is at issue is not social phenomena in space but both social phenomena and space as constituted out of social relations, that the spatial is social relations "stretched out" (Massey 1994a: 66). She argues that since social relations are always in flux, space too has to be thought of as "inherently dynamic simultaneity" and hence space, according to her, "is an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification" (Massey 1994a: 3). Moore, in his analysis of 'resistance as a spatial practice,' invokes a similar approach to place and argues that a textured and deeply historical understanding of resistance is possible only if attention is paid to the "cultural politics of place, the historically sedimented practices that weave contested meanings into the fabric of locality." He writes, "Instead of viewing geographically specific sites as the stage–already fully-formed constructions that serve as settings for action–for the performance of identities that are malleable (if also shaped and constrained by the multiple fields of power)," it is important to join "the cultural politics of place to those of identity" (1998: 347). From this perspective, in Uttarakhand, the mountainous landscape, its location at the borders of Nepal and China, resource rich ecology, long history of despotic rule, and later the modernist technopolitics of development and politics of reservation all contributed in configuring contingent spaces of resistance which were not only gendered but also mapped a sense of place as well as a cultural/political/regional identity, producing, what Steve Pile has aptly called, "geographies [that] make resistance" (1997).

Critical to Massey's conceptualization of space/place is the notion of 'double articulation.' In her thinking, "if places are conceptualized [to] take account of the construction of the subjects within them, which help in turn to produce the place, then the identity of place is a double articulation" (1994b: 118).

The notion of double articulation describes how the identity of a place is shaped by social interrelations, some of which are necessarily stretched beyond the confines of that place itself and yet also attends to the co-production of place and identity. Massey takes the case of London's Docklands and maps the competing class-based constructions that characterize the Docklands and highlight the politics of race, ethnicity, empire, and immigration that resist attempts to stabilize any nostalgic or static constructions of place. This spatial approach to politics is important as it counters the dominant tendency to view places, and some places more than others—like the rural third world—as sites of nostalgia, tradition, or authenticity. In looking at places through a more dynamic lens, Uttarakhand and the women of Uttarakhand do not appear as mere embodiments of some traditional, place-bound attributes, but as active subjects enmeshed in multiple relations of power at different scales that constitute both places and subjects who inhabit those (local and not-so local) places. For example, extractive colonial regimes of forestry, mining, and practices of forced labor describe how the micro and macro political economies of global capital and colonialism not only transformed the meanings and practices of work, mobility, and livelihoods but also produced the new political and spatial subjectivities to which I turn to next.

Histories of Subjectivation: Gendered Cartographies of Labor, Liquor, and Resources

I believe that three social fields—labor mobility, resources, and revenue through liquor—were critical in configuring gendered histories of work, struggle and contestation. Even though the colonial histories of labor and resource extraction have been extensively documented and there is some acknowledgement of how it affected women, the dominant tendency has been to either treat gender as a static entity that is already produced and is in place or offer essentialized evaluations of gendered relations (see Guha

1989; Bhatt and Pahari 1994). Instead, I argue that it is critical to consider how the multi-layered histories of resource and labor extraction simultaneously constituted gendered subjects, regional identity, and regional geographies of resistance.

Very briefly then, let me attend first to the practice of coolie *begar* (unpaid, forced, or corvee labor) that marked a critical turning point in the history of Uttarakhand as it set in motion the practice of extracting cheap male labor and inscribing a persistent pattern of male outmigration and rigid gendered divisions of labor. Initiated by the short-lived but despotic Gorkha regime in 1790, *begar* continued well into the British colonial period and left behind an indelible legacy of exploitation and oppression (see Tucker 1983; Pathak 1997). Interestingly, when the British took over from the Gorkhas, they abolished slavery but conveniently retained the practices of *begar* until widespread resistance in the twentieth century led to its abolition. Gradually, practices of slavery, taxation, and *begar*[13] became standard forms of augmenting revenue from taxes and fines, and those who were unable to pay taxes had no alternative but to hand themselves to the rulers. As men were extricated *en masse* from their fields and forests, the pattern of family farming in which women and men worked together was transformed. Women were forced to undertake the prime responsibility for producing livelihoods, tending cattle, fields, and hearths, initiating a long-lasting gendered practice of labor, mobility, and work, in which women continue to produce domestic livelihoods while men work to earn wages (see Boserup 1970; Omvedt 1993; Mies 1998). Like many other regional scenarios, in Uttarakhand too, the processes of colonialism and capitalist accumulation motivated by a preference for markets produced a division between men's work and women's work. However, it is important to note that women's contributions and labor in sustaining the economies of home as well as the market

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13 Pathak notes that *begar* meant, "forcible extraction of labour and/or produce without any payment, or with nominal wages" (1991: 261).

were slowly but surely undermined and even made invisible (see Boserup 1970; Beneria and Sen 1981; Mies 1998) and gradually came to inscribe gendered social relations, meanings of work, and subjects that were to endure.

Historically, this was a critical transformation as it not only changed the practices of work but it also changed the meaning(s) of work. Work, as Gidwani argues, "is a material and symbolic activity. Work is not only the way each of us makes a living but also the way we create ourselves in relation to others through the meanings invested in forms of work" (2000: 231). While *pahari* (hill) men came to be identified as a staple source of cheap labor in the Indian plains, in the absence of men, women came to bear the responsibility of managing their fields and homes back in the hills. Not only did women work long hours to collect fuel wood, water, and take care of the seasonal crops, but it was through the idiom of work that women's subject positions and their sense of self came to be constituted. During my fieldwork, women often talked of their hard lives and the amount of hard work they have to do. They compared their lives to that of their cattle: "we live like cattle, we work like cattle." As they uncovered their bruised arms and legs and talked of their injured backs and shoulders, women commonly said it was a curse to be born a woman in the hills, yet it was this backbreaking work that presented the critical matrix of gendered identity and at once indexed what it meant to be a *pahari* woman.

This spatialization of gendered labor was, however, neither clear-cut nor complete and produced unintended outcomes (see Beneria and Sen 1981; Strathern 1988). In the absence of men, women came to question the exploitative regimes of labor and resource exploitation and, with comparatively more autonomy than women from other parts of India, *pahari* women began to participate in anti-*begar* and forest-related movements as early as late nineteenth century.[14] In short, the historical experience of *begar*

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14 Although there are no clear accounts from the nineteenth century that describe women's participation in anti-*begar* movements, folklore and poems

was critical in not only transforming Uttarakhand into a source of cheap labor and leaving an indelible legacy of highly gendered relations of work and mobility, but importantly it also began to craft the terrain of subaltern resistance which over the years came to witness increasing participation of women along with men.

Second, alongside coolie *begar*, colonial control over local sources of livelihoods, namely forests, and growing systematic restrictions on customary practices of access and the withdrawal of forest products came as a big blow to the residents of Uttarakhand, particularly women who had now come to bear the primary responsibility, with only limited support from men, to sustain livelihoods.[15] Given the fundamental contradiction in priorities, the growing control over the forests from the beginning of the late nineteenth century, and the destruction of forests due to the construction of roads, railways, mines, plantations, and orchards severely disrupted the lives of local people, resulting in what the environmental historian Ramachandra Guha (1989) has described as a long twentieth century of subaltern resistance which witnessed the large-scale participation of women.

In the post-independence period, the imperatives of industrialization and development also guided forest policy and resulted in rapid deforestation immediately following independence. The growing hardships and inability of local people to access forests, while commercial felling continued unabated, resulted in increasing disaffection among the villagers. Tensions began to simmer in the sixties and ultimately saw the birth of the famous Chipko movement.[16] While the issue of forest rights was central to Chipko, it is important to note that Chipko was not only an environmental movement, nor was it a women's movement strictly defined as a movement about household and livelihoods. It was a political movement

make reference to women's vocal threats regarding the new system of labor extraction. See Pathak (1991, 1997).

15 For a rich history of colonial forestry and confrontations in Uttarakhand, see Guha (1989); Pathak (1997).

16 For a discussion of the Chipko movement see Guha (1989, 2001); Sinha et al. (1997); Rangan (2000).

that raised a wide range of concerns regarding the misplaced priorities of the state, development policies and their detrimental outcomes, and diminishing control over their sources of livelihood, namely forests. In many ways, Chipko powerfully located the traditional questions of the domestic—household, family, community, and livelihood—in the domain of the political, and critically engaged with and expanded the modern liberal notions of social justice, democracy, and politics. While women may not have articulated these demands in the language of citizenship or participatory democracy, they nonetheless positioned themselves as active political agents questioning the politics and practices that had repeatedly marginalized them.

Third, a complex issue that highlighted the contours of a gendered geography in Uttarakhand and brought women to the center of political action was liquor. On the one hand, it speaks most emphatically to the domestic strife and despair faced by women and presents a highly essentialized context of women's movements. On the other, liquor consolidates a range of issues that are simultaneously domestic and non-domestic, and illustrates a history of gendered subjectivation.[17] Introduced by the British, alcohol was a way to augment revenue, particularly after 1857. Even though the revenue from liquor sales in Kumaon increased dramatically, liquor was not part of everyday village life.[18] By the 1890s, however, liquor had penetrated the valleys and villages of Kumaon and radically transformed the social and political landscape of Uttarakhand.

The greed for revenue resulted in the opening of liquor shops all over the countryside, a development that was met with great resistance. Debates on prohibition of alcohol raged in the national arena, with prominent national leaders urging the government to enforce prohibition in 1912. Importantly, as early as 1925, women's growing agony and consciousness resulted in 30,000 women in Uttarakhand

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17 See Jackson (2003) on anti-liquor movements.

18 By 1982, the revenue from liquor rose to 60,000 times that of 1822, corresponding with an only 15 times increase in population (Pathak 1985).

signing a petition to the Viceroy in favor of prohibition. The sale and consumption of liquor reached its height during the Second World War and the politics of liquor sale and prohibition became even murkier in the post-independence period. In many respects the anti-alcohol movement was another turning point as it drew women from across the social spectrum. Women from upper and lower castes, urban and rural, rich and poor all found themselves marching together against alcohol.

After independence in 1947, the lure of high revenue from liquor stopped the government from seriously addressing the issue of liquor prohibition. In *Nasha ek Shadyantra* (Intoxication is a Scam)[19] Pathak argues that the politics of liquor, guided by the greed of revenue, overlooked the impact of liquor on local populations.[20] Since no sustained policy on prohibition was formulated, liquor sale and trade continued to expand unchecked. The sixties were marked by a series of protests against liquor shops and contractors, and in 1969 one old woman was bestowed the title of "Tincturi Ma" for her active involvement against the sale of tincture (Pathak 1985: 1382). Frustrated with the state's duplicity and a growing alcoholism among local men, large-scale protests were organized under the leadership of Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini. Women came out in unprecedented numbers and mobilized against a common enemy: the liquor mafia. They organized rallies, road blockades, and strikes. They collectively confronted administrators and politicians and often attacked and stoned liquor shops. With the Chipko movement gaining momentum in the seventies, the movement against liquor not only churned the body politic of the region but also produced women as political agents who made connections between their marginalization,

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19 An abridged version of the manuscript was re-published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, under the title. "Intoxication as a Social Evil," 10 August 1985.

20 Pathak notes that "between 1948 and 1960, several districts were declared dry in UP. But before the hill districts could be declared dry, the policy was abruptly reversed" (1985: 1362).

poverty, underdevelopment, and the apathy and greed of the state.

Changes in the local political economy through the institution-alization of corvee labor, the introduction of liquor for revenue, and growing restrictions on access to forests, characteristically reconfigured the social and political geography of Uttarakhand. The historically embedded practices of labor and outmigration revamped gender roles, relationships, meanings, and identities. Significantly, this history produced a place that was on the one hand located in the periphery, yet enmeshed in the global circuits of power and capital. On the other, it unleashed forces that config-ured new political identities and subjectivities which eventually resulted in the making of a separate hill state called Uttarakhand at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The Making of Uttarakhand: The Gender of Resistance

Beginning in the 1980s and gaining strength in the 1990s, the demand for Uttarakhand began to take concrete shape. As early as 1952, a prominent member of the Communist Party of India, P.C. Joshi, raised the demand for a separate state for the first time. However, even though a sense of cultural and geographical differ-ence from the plains of India has long persisted in Uttarakhand, the movement never gained mass support. Following the turbu-lent decades of the 1970s and 1980s, the demand for a separate state gained ground by the 1990s in the context of the politics of reservation: a complex issue that is deeply intertwined with the thorny and vicious politics of caste. While a full discussion is beyond the scope of the paper, I will examine its reverberations within Uttarakhand. Very briefly, in August 1990, it was announced that the recommendations of the Mandal Commission would be implemented all over the country. According to the recommen-dations, in addition to a 22.5% reservation for castes and tribes accorded in the constitutional schedule, and hence referred to as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, that were already in place, the Commission recommended a further reservation of 27% for

those who were not in the Schedule and known as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This triggered widespread protests by upper castes all over the country. In Uttarakhand, too, reverberations of this recommendation were felt, and upper caste youth and their family members came out in large numbers to protest. Given that the initial sparks were lit in the context of anti-reservation mobilization, it should be noted that there was a great deal of skepticism about the Uttarakhand movement.

With hardly any electoral presence earlier, as the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) gained ground in Uttarakhand, it extended its support for a separate state in order to make further electoral gains. At this conjuncture, there was an entrenchment of the Hindu right and a consolidation of upper caste Hindus and middle classes. Even though there were strong resonances of Hindutva politics and elements of Hindu right tried to steer the movement in that direction, the mobilization in Uttarakhand should not only be viewed through the lens of caste or Hindutva politics. The Uttarakhand movement was not simply a reflection of the crisis of the middle classes who had mobilized in defense of caste privilege, although some elements of such sentiments may have been present.[21] Even though the mobilization was triggered by anti-reservation sentiments, due to the region's unique demography, it went beyond the question of caste. Since the OBCs in Uttarakhand constitute only 2% of the total population of the state, it was widely felt that if the recommendations of the Mandal Commission were to be

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21 Tharu and Niranjana have critically assessed tensions between the middle and upper caste women and lower caste men and women. In an interesting turn of events, they suggest, the upper and middle classes came to represent the secular image of the "Indian nation" and were deployed in the "consolidation of the middle class and in the othering of [lower] caste." The women who opposed reservation and gained significant media attention were strategically constituted as "citizens" and not as gendered beings, whose "claiming of citizenship rather than sisterhood now not only set them against *dalit* [lower caste] men but also against lower caste/ class women," but not against middle class men.

implemented, given that quotas for scheduled castes and tribes were already in place, just under half of all government jobs and slots in educational institutions would be reserved for Scheduled Castes, Tribes, and OBCs. To fill those reserved spots, OBCs from the plains of Uttar Pradesh would migrate to the hill region to take scarce jobs. It was in this context, faced with chronic unemployment,[22] that angry students from several college campuses came out in large numbers and organized their first strike on 31 July 1994 in the hill cities of Nainital, Ranikhet, Berinag, and Haldwani (see *Uttara* 1994). Through the months of August and September, widespread protest, violence, curfews, and strikes marked the region and by the end of two months the women of Uttarakhand jumped into the fray, along with government employees, teachers, ex-army men, and other public servants (see Dabral 1994; Mawdsley 2000). In the autumn of 1994, women from all caste backgrounds, young and old, rural and urban, mothers and widows joined the students in large numbers and organized protest marches, road blockades, and curfews in different parts of Uttarakhand and sang,

> [You] flooded the *pahar* with poison [alcohol], made it a pleasure [tourist] site,
> Listen cruel government, we will take our rights.[23]

As the mobilization continued, it got caught up in the political jockeying and electoral negotiations of different political parties. In order to block the other two major national parties—Congress and Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) as well as the close regional contender Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)—the then Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party (SP), made deft electoral

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22 Jayal notes that approximately "70,000 young people register themselves with the Employment Exchange in this region every year, but the annual employment generation capacity amounts to only 3,000 jobs in the organised sector [Planning Commission]" (2000: 4313).

23 My translation from Hindi / Pahari.

calculations and supported the demand for separate statehood and also pushed for reservation policies to secure support from the OBCs. Amidst all this, in the initial stages of the movement, the question of reservation was indeed central and the general sentiment was very much against the Mandal recommendations. The question remains whether the mobilization was aimed at lower castes. The answer to this question is ambiguous. On the one hand, the mobilization was certainly casteist, but at the same time, it was not directed against the lower castes. Given the demographic profile of the region as outlined above, most of the participants in the rallies were upper caste but at this phase, the movement was neither against the *dalit* nor was it a clearly articulated demand for separate statehood. In the context of failed promises of development, meager infrastructure, and precarious livelihoods, the mobilization must be seen as an enunciation of deeply felt frustration, marginalization, and exploitation that describes how 'new geographies' and identities come to be mapped over time under competing and contradictory political pressures and sensibilities.

Pradhan Singh, a politically active upper caste male in an interview in Nainital in 1997 said, "The people were first fearful what Mandal would mean to their lives, then they were outraged, especially the women, they were not thinking of caste or religion. *Dalit* also joined in, they too want their own people to get jobs." (personal communication 1997). According to Singh, the small percentage of OBCs and Uttarakhand's unique demography were central to the movement. Both *dalit* families and upper caste families saw reservation for OBCs as a threat to jobs for their sons, enabling a shift from a politics of caste (upper against lower) to a politics of region (mountain against plains). As the movement progressed, the tenor and the direction of the movement shifted, and I would argue that the participation of women was central to this critical shift. Women's prior histories of marginalization and mobilization informed this articulation of *pahar* vs. plains that ultimately consolidated the demand for a new state. As in

previous movements, women from rural and urban settings and from different caste backgrounds participated, although in an interview, a local journalist noted that the numbers of lower caste and *shilpkar*[24] women were quite low.

Drawing from their long histories and experiences of mobilization and marginalization, women provided a historical context for the movement and drew attention to the gendered implications of recommendations made by the Mandal Commission. For instance, they incorporated the question of liquor prohibition, and all over Uttarakhand from August to October of 1994, women opposed the sale of liquor. They picketed, burnt, and stoned several liquor shops and forced their closure in many places.[25] In one instance, on 23 September 1994, the women in the town of Haldwani blocked the main highway and stopped the Divisional Magistrate and Police Chief of the District from passing through for over six hours. They took possession of the government jeep and demanded the release of anti-alcohol protestors who had been taken into custody. The women also opposed lottery ticket stalls, organized curfews, and apprehended senior government officers to demand their closure. They directly challenged the development priorities of the state and raised questions of employment, health, education, transportation, and access to forests. In other words, women— some of whom even planted their crops early in order to protest, and not party leaders, broadened the scope of the movement and critically transformed it from one about reservation to a movement that eventually came to demand separate statehood. Clearly, the history of past movements "crystallized in the present structuring of a field, for past winners and losers, past events and their memory, [and] played a part in fashioning its contours and circumscribing its possibilities" (Ray 1999: 12).

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24 *Shilpkar* is more commonly used to refer to scheduled castes although the term dalit is also being increasingly becoming popular.

25 See *Uttara* (1994) for a detailed chronology of anti-alcohol events that were organized in the months of August, September, and October of 1994.

Women raised a range of issues that affected their lives and powerfully drew attention to the gendered politics of everyday life in Uttarakhand. By flagging questions of alcoholism, development, poverty, and exploitation, the women provided a historically grounded approach to massive mobilization and located anti-reservation politics in the wider nexus of regional deprivation and disparities.

The participation of women was largely welcomed and gained support from diverse political quarters. Even though there was a great deal of support and sympathy for the 'poor' and 'hardworking' women of the hills, both supporters and critics tended to cast their participation as an enunciation of their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and domestic(ated) beings. Women's political interventions were largely located in the context of conjugal duties, familial pressures, and maternal love, silencing and misreading the voices of the women who claimed the political stage to express their hardships and frustrations (see Airi in an interview in Amar Ujala 1994; Dabral 1994). One former member of the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal, a local political party that was set up to demand for a separate state, said in an interview, "There were a lot of women in the movement. They came from towns and villages, young and old, mostly older women, they protested and marched, they were strong but they did not really know the issues. The women here are not political, they are too busy in their fuel, fodder, and water" (interview in Almora, August 1997). Similar sentiments were repeated when I interviewed local leaders, activists, and academics. Even though they all acknowledged women's participation, their role was not considered to be critical or constitutive of the direction of the movement. In once again re-inscribing the woman within the sphere of the domestic space, Uttarakhandi women's agency was contained by the dominant trope that sees women only as apolitical subjects or as ventriloquists, speaking on behalf of the family, children, or husbands.

The Uttarakhandi women no doubt deployed the traditional

lexicon of conjugal responsibilities and filial pressures but they did not draw political or emotional sustenance from any essentialized sense of maternal love or conjugal duties. The women brought together the concerns facing Uttarakhand and collectively pushed the politics of reservation, entitlement, access, and livelihood beyond its narrow confines of traditional morality and asserted their political rights and identities.[26] In the context of development, they powerfully challenged "the exclusions of modernity itself" and struggled to carve a space for the politics of the possible (Tharu and Niranjana 1997: 259). The assertion of a distinct *pahari* identity and separate state by women, along with students and public servants, was, "a positioning which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle" (Li 2000: 151). In this sense, the gendering of the Uttarakhand movement was informed by their collective and disparate experiences of exploitation and marginalization that had brought them together in the past, which propelled them to once again join the movement and to configure the terrain of their lives and livelihood. But it was certainly not an enunciation of any traditional identity: it was an assertion of a modern development identity that was consolidated at specific historical and political conjunctures of hill development and a new reservation policy that shaped the contours of Uttarakhand, determining how gendered landscapes, subjects, and resistance are co-produced.

Conclusion

As I bring this paper to conclusion, stories of loss and destruction caused by the devastating floods in Uttarakhand fill the news media.

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26 Ray and Korteweg (1999) explore the "extent to which collective action undertaken in defense of traditional identities spills over into feminist consciousness or consciousness of gender subordination." Other feminists, cited in Ray and Korteweg, argue that "even traditional mobilizations can result in transformed identities" (51), as in the case of Uttarakhand.

After a heavy rainfall along with a cloud burst in June 2013, the pilgrim routes to Badrinath and Kedarnath were washed away and many lives were been lost. Many are still missing and the magnitude of the loss of local livelihoods is yet to be realized (*Economic and Political Weekly* 2013). In an unprecedented show of support and sympathy, funds are pouring in and US-style fundraisers are pledging support to rebuild the temple and put Uttarakhand back on the map. As Uttarakhand struggles once again to find its ground, literally and metaphorically, it is faced with obvious questions: how should Uttarakhand be rebuilt, in whose terms, and for whom? Whose priorities and privileges will be accommodated? Who will negotiate the rights to livelihoods, water, health, education, and transport for the hardworking women and men who toil to access the goods of modernity and development?

In a sense, the recent floods and the devastation are a wakeup call. They force us to revisit and reflect on what has happened to the state of Uttarakhand that was carved out as a separate state on 9 November 2000. The new state, which was then renamed Uttaranchal, first ushered in a sense of hope and excitement, but many commentators have noted that a dominant sense of betrayal and despair prevailed. Jayal (2000: 4311) noted that, "many of the current anxieties of the *pahari* are directly and explicitly attributable to the fear that the raison d'etre of the new state has been lost in the very moment of its birth." When I returned to Kumaon in the summer of 2008, after almost a decade, the general sense was that recognition has come not in the terms and conditions put forth by the Uttarakhandis.[27] There is despondency among the rural residents and almost everyone I spoke to argued that not much has much changed since a new state was carved out. As Janaki Devi, one of women who had gone to Delhi with the rallies for statehood succinctly stated in an interview I conducted with her in Majhera village on 27 May, 2008, "We do have a state, we should be happy

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27 Also see Ramakrishnan (2000).

that we got what we wanted. Some things have changed too, there are better roads, maybe, but it is clear to us that in our lives not much has changed, we are where we were. There are no jobs for ours sons in the plains or here, we are actually worse, still sitting with our hands spread out for water, for fuel, for medicines, for hospitals, for everything ... Now we don't matter to the politicians, we lost out". There is now widespread recognition that the creation of Uttarakhand is mired in electoral politics in which the Central and Uttar Pradesh governments have once again heeded the demands of the rich non-Uttarakhandi farmers of the foothills, political elites, and increasingly addressed market-driven concerns. While there is a growing sense that the movement failed to accomplish what it wanted, there is also a feeling that this may be the beginning of yet another round of struggles in Uttarakhand.

In considering the gendered terrain of the movement, this paper has argued that even though the women of Uttarakhand forcefully contextualized the demand for a separate state and transformed its scope from its anti-reservation beginnings into a movement that captured the gendered politics of everyday life, they are once again relegated to the margins and their contributions undermined. The lack of acknowledgement of women's political role in Uttarakhand and the movements preceding it when women have time and again pushed the familiar boundaries of home and the world, is symptomatic of the general trend in scholarship as well as popular media to contain women's political actions in public spaces within the narrow confines of the home, family, or community. In contrast, by presenting a multi-layered history of the extraction of labor, resources, and revenue, I have centered the gendered dynamics of work and mobility and offered a corrective to the dominant analysis of social movements in Uttarakhand. But equally importantly, in order to take gendered subjectivities seriously and explore how they are constitutive of the politics of a place, I have argued for a double articulation of place and gendered relations and addressed the everyday practices

that mutually constitute places and subjectivities. It is my belief that only through such a gendered and spatialized understanding of regional politics can we come to acknowledge the political agency of women and also begin to craft trajectories of the future that are inclusive, equal, and socially just.

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