



# Bounding difference: Intersectionality and the material production of gender, caste, class and environment in Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

Current theorising in human geography draws attention to the relational emergence of space and society, challenging ideas of difference that rely on fixed identities and emphasising the importance of the everyday in the production of social inequalities. Similarly, feminist political ecology has emphasised the role of 'nature' or 'environment' in the production of subjectivities such that ideas of gender and nature arise in relation to each other. In this paper I build from these insights to explore the ways in which the embodied performance of gender, caste and other aspects of social difference collapse the distinction between the material and the symbolic. Symbolic ideas of difference are produced and expressed through embodied interactions that are firmly material. Through this kind of conceptualisation, I hope to push forward debates in geography on nature and feminist political ecology on how to understand the intersectional emergence of subjectivities, difference and socio-natures. Importantly, it is the symbolic meanings of particular spaces, practices and bodies that are (re)produced through everyday activities including forest harvesting, agricultural work, food preparation and consumption, all of which have consequences for both ecological processes and social difference. Through the performance of everyday tasks, not only are ideas of gender, caste and social difference brought into view, but the embodied nature of difference that extends beyond the body and into the spaces of everyday life is evident. I use ethnographic evidence from rural Nepal to explore the ways in which boundaries between bodies, spaces, ecologies and symbolic meanings of difference are produced and maintained relationally through practices of work and ritual.

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## 1. Introduction

Conceptualisations of gender have shifted dramatically over the last several decades from a biological given, to the social performance of multiple genders, challenging the relationship between taken-for-granted biological difference and gender. Consequently, many feminist theorists have argued that a narrow focus on gender is inappropriate and rather how people are subjected by race, ethnicity/caste, class, gender and other forms of social difference must be seen as simultaneous, called intersectionality (Burman, 2004; Butler, 1997; hooks, 1984; Mohanty et al., 1991; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1988; Pratt and Hanson, 1994; Valentine, 2007). Feminist political ecologists have similarly emphasised the importance of nature in producing particular kinds of gendered bodies (Gururani, 2002; Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2006, 2011). Yet exactly how these 'add up' has not been fully resolved and many people continue to treat gender, ethnicity/caste, class and race as separate processes that produce particular kinds of social inequalities, and nature, of course, remains elusive. Indeed, in my own work, while

theoretically I start from the premise that they are interconnected, it has been easier to produce a more coherent narrative by placing either gender, caste or ecology as the central object of analysis and showing how they are linked to ecological processes (Nightingale, 2003, 2005, 2006). In this paper I want to rectify this oversight by exploring the production of difference through the everyday movement of bodies in space to show how subjectivities are produced out of the multiple and intersecting exercise of power within socio-natural networks. Through this argument, I push forward theorising on intersectionality by exploring how material environments extend from and into the body with profound implications for social difference, space and ecologies. Here I move beyond most present work in feminist political ecology by highlighting the importance of material processes in the production of subjectivities and socio-natures.<sup>1</sup>

My argument rests on the strong foundations provided by work on the relational production of space and subjectivity (Bondi and Davidson, 2003; Longhurst, 2003; Pratt and Hanson, 1994; Probyn,

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<sup>1</sup> I use socio-natures to invoke work on the relational emergence of nature-society (Braun, 2006; Castree and Braun, 2001; Whatmore, 2002).

2003; Rose, 1994). Here, inequalities emerge through space as social and material meanings are co-produced. Difference is understood as an emergent process that must be continually renewed, challenging the idea of fixed identities (Gibson, 2001; Nagar, 2000). In this paper, I draw from work in Nepal to build from these insights to explore how the embodied performance of gender, caste and other aspects of social difference collapse the distinction between the material and the symbolic. In other words, symbolic ideas of difference are produced and expressed through embodied, spatial interactions that are firmly material (and thus socio-natural). Importantly, it is the symbolic meanings of particular spaces, practices and bodies that are (re)produced through everyday, embodied activities (e.g. agro-forestry, food consumption) and have profound consequences for ecological processes and social difference. Attention to everyday, seemingly mundane, spatial practices gives insight into how people produce a particular relationship with 'others' including their environments, that are rarely ecologically neutral.

## 2. Nepal, post-conflict and the production of subjectivities

The recently concluded Maoist People's War in Nepal and the 2006 revolution that precipitated the overthrow of the monarchy (Hutt, 2004; Thapa, 2004) have presented serious challenges to historically entrenched social and political hierarchies. The Maoists' political platform was based on ending the monarchy and its entanglements with imperialism, but also central was an attempt to dismantle old feudal relationships that have kept Nepal an extremely hierarchical society for centuries. The Maoists fought against inequality in caste, ethnicity and gender relations, along with geographical discrimination—all closely tied to economic disparities and class relations (Rankin, 2004)—which in part helped to attract a large following among the population (Leve, 2007).<sup>2</sup> In the post-conflict setting, how to give political representation to groups claiming cultural and ethnic identities is one of the hottest flash points of the on-going Constituent Assembly process.<sup>3</sup> A variety of cultural-identity-based movements have arisen post-2006, most based around 'new' identities that have emerged during and post-conflict (GSEA, 2006). In this context, understanding how social difference is produced, entrenched and contested is of vital importance.

There is tremendous ethnic, religious, linguistic and topographical diversity in Nepal making generalisations about 'Nepalese women' (or caste) inappropriate (Leve, 2007; Tamang, 2002). While caste and ethnicity should not be conflated, and at present are fiercely contested in the political sphere, they are similar in how they create subjectivities and a normatively impenetrable boundary across which various kinship-related activities 'should not' occur. Of course people have always contested these boundaries and the insurgency opened up a variety of new opportunities for contestation (Pettigrew, forthcoming; Pettigrew and Shneiderman, 2004). Nevertheless, the normative boundaries are surprisingly resilient and political. Gender boundaries vary across geography, caste and ethnic groups and therefore I focus on those pertinent in my case study. I steer away from a specific engagement with ethnicity because teasing out the differences between caste and ethnicity would be a paper in its own right, and because the people with whom I worked identified along caste lines. Thus, the specific practices I describe here pertain to people from Dalit, Thakuri, Chh-

etri and Bahun caste groups and the historical and geographical context of my work. The details presented here are snapshots of dynamic processes, yet processes that I argue help explain why there is so much social and cultural diversity in Nepal.

The research for this paper draws from ethnographic work I conducted in Mugu District of northwestern Nepal on community forestry management between 1993 and 2009 (Nightingale, 2003). The majority of the work was done prior to the Maoists having a strong presence in the field area and as a result, some of the practices I describe have recently changed while others have taken on new significance. Mugu is also one of the places where strong cultural-identity movements have *not* emerged (yet), but rather older caste and gender relations continue to be key arenas of contestation.<sup>4</sup>

Northwestern Nepal is home to a variety of caste and ethnic groups including the high-caste Thakuris and people of Tibetan origin (Connell, 1991). The Tibetan groups and Hindu Nepali groups now live side-by-side in some of the market towns, but inter-marriage and significant sharing of important rituals are rare. As I explore below, a variety of everyday practices maintain the boundaries that keep distinctions between ethnic groups and castes clear. The area is very poor and Mugu District ranks lowest in all the UN Human Development Indicators. Food shortages are common in the spring months and until very recently, there has been little investment by international aid agencies. Land management practices among the Hindu groups here are similar to other areas of the Himalayan hills; agriculturists produce for household consumption and trade, utilising inputs from animal husbandry and forest litter, making forests critical to their agricultural systems (Bishop, 1990). The District Forest office has established community forestry user-groups to allow villagers to manage non-private forest lands (Gilmour and Fisher, 1991). These groups convene regular meetings to issue permits and settle disputes and in this place, the user-group is composed of people from all the caste groups mentioned. Struggles over resources are common, including conflicts with recent in-migrants to the adjacent District Centre town and the nearby Rara Lake National Park. The culture of the Thakuris is assumed to dominate the area and is considered by some Nepalis to be the normatively 'real Nepal'. Nepali (*Khas*) language is supposed to have originated here and the first kings of Nepal are said to have ruled from the nearby Sinja valley of Jumla District around 500 AD (Fisher, 1978). Hierarchical relations between men and women and caste groups are also enforced in more 'conservative' ways than many other parts of Nepal.

Land management is integrally bound up in social relations, and as my other work has shown, is a key arena wherein social and power relations are played out (Nightingale, 2003, 2005, 2006). It is in this sense that social hierarchies become materially manifest on the landscape as people are involved in work practices that offer them possibilities to contest, resist or conform to subjectivities (see also Dyson, 2008; Gidwani, 2000). My concern is to show how space and ecologies are entrenched in power dynamics that are multiple and non-linear. Conceptualisations of power that emphasise power 'over' and 'empowerment' do not capture well the subtle ways in which power is exercised in Nepal. In the current conjuncture when new subjectivities emerge almost daily, such a look into the production of difference is vital.

## 3. Intersectionality, subjectivity and space

Feminist theory emphasising the performance of gender has shown how the meaning of gender is produced out of bodies as

<sup>2</sup> The insurgency was fuelled by a variety of complex factors and while several excellent analyses have been done (Hutt, 2004; Thapa, 2004), more research is required to conclusively evaluate to how gender, caste and ethnic inequalities were important. There is no question, however, that the Maoists made significant attempts to undermine traditional hierarchies through their practices and discourse.

<sup>3</sup> The Constituent Assembly is an elected body charged with rewriting the constitution.

<sup>4</sup> There are however, some very interesting regional identity movements emerging, particularly the 'Karnali' movement based on a shared sense of exploitation due to geographical isolation and food insecurity in the region.

well as discourses (Butler, 1990, 1997). In this work, Butler seeks to disturb the alliance of sex and gender by shifting attention to the embodied mechanisms through which normative gender discourses are maintained (Butler, 1997, pp. x–xii). Yet within this work, the emphasis continues to be discursive and symbolic with less attention to the materiality of those processes.

Butler has been careful to emphasise that race, class, ethnicity and “regional modalities” intersect with gender to constitute social difference (Butler, 1997, p. 6). And many other feminists have taken up the challenge given to Anglo-American, white, middle class, feminists that they must take seriously how the experience of difference is not universal or consistently circumscribed by gender (Bacchi, 1990; Henriques et al., 1984; hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 1991; Mohanty et al., 1991; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1988). These critiques have led to a focus on ‘intersectionality’ in feminist thought, and while its currency in geography continues to be somewhat limited (Valentine, 2007), many anthropologists (and some geographers) working in a broadly-defined ‘feminist political ecology’ framework have engaged these debates (Elmhirst, 2002; Elmhirst and Resurrección, 2008; Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2006; Sundberg, 2004; Tsing, 2005). Within this work, drawing from post-structural and relational theory, social difference is understood as emergent and produced out of everyday practices. By recognising the continual production of social difference, essentialist notions of identity are undermined, and it is possible to illuminate how subjectivity is ultimately a contradictory achievement with subjects exercising and internalising multiple dimensions of power within the same acts (Butler, 1997; Mahoney and Yngveson, 1992; Nightingale, 2006). This formulation then opens up possibilities to understand how power operates not only in two dimensions, but rather in multiple dimensions that can have lateral and unexpected consequences for bodies and subjectivities.

Understanding these multiple dimensions of power requires one to move within the intersection of the symbolic and the material. It is not possible to separate out the symbolic achievements from embodied performances and vice versa. And power is inherently manifested within bodies and psyches (Butler, 1997) producing new ways of reading space and new discursive constructions of subjectivities—and new ecological environments. Here feminist geographers’ attention to how space is not an empty container, but rather is constituted out of the social relations that are enacted in and through space (Massey, 2005) is important. What social identities mean are inextricably bound up in the contexts within which they come into view, requiring equal emphasis on space and difference (Harris, 2006; Longhurst et al., 2008). By making this theoretical move, spaces are not socially neutral but rather are enrolled in processes of creating difference and can become potent arenas for (re)producing or contesting oppressive forms of exclusion (Bondi and Davidson, 2003; Massey, 2005).

Yet in much of this work, space remains resolutely unspecific. For example, Valentine (2007) explores how the subjectivities of a ‘deaf’ woman shift between the home vs. the work place vs. a deaf support group, but the materiality of these spaces remains un-described. There is no sense that the type and size of the room, the areas within them, or even the material objects in them are important in producing a different sense of ‘deafness’ for the research participant. Rather the space is defined only by the social activities that occur within it: married partnership, work, or support session.

Building from earlier feminist political ecology contributions (Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2001, 2006), Sultana (2009) adds to this debate by demonstrating how the material practices of water collection and distribution become arenas wherein normative gender roles can be contested and reinforced. The spaces and material qualities of water (i.e. pure, contaminated by arsenic) are paramount to what opportunities are available to women to operate

within or contest normative subjectivities. This work shows clearly the contradictory ways in which symbolic meanings are produced out of embodied, material practices (Csordas, 1994; Longhurst, 1997, 2003; Warnier, 2001; Young, 2002).

In the remainder of this paper, I want to expand these insights to explore how the movement and actions of bodies in space produce power-laden boundaries between people that are open to contestation, but also partially close down possibilities for a radical transformation of social inequalities in Nepal, with significant material consequences. In part I want to explore how ‘environment’ is an extension of and extends into the body as a site of material reproduction and ecological impact. Nepal is a particularly interesting case because the materiality of space is central to the circumscription of difference. How bodies move in relation to physical objects such as the forest, the water tap, the hearth, food containers, religious icons, and substances bodies consume is of vital importance to the production of subjectivities and ecologies.

#### 4. The normative perspective: caste

##### “Your own [kin’s, caste’s] body isn’t like anyone else’s”

—Dalit woman (Mugu proverb)

To make the complex actions and relations I describe more intelligible to those unfamiliar with South Asia, I am going to briefly outline the normative hierarchies and behaviours to which individuals are ‘hailed’ (Nightingale, 2005; Probyn, 2003). Tamang (2002) has argued that these norms have been produced out of the nationalist and developmentalist projects under the King’s government and thus challenges their relevance for forming a backdrop to understanding gender discrimination. I agree with her assessment that the developmentalist project in Nepal was crucial to producing particular kinds of normative gender relations, but the oral histories I collected in Mugu indicate that at least in some places, older historical antecedents formed a basis for these modernist discourses. And regardless of their historical origins, the repetition of normative social identities is crucial to the production of subjectivities as it is through these discourses and the internalisation and contestation of them that the subject is (violently) achieved (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1995).

In Nepal, normative social differences are founded on a number of intersecting ideologies and prominent among them is ritual purity. In the Hindu caste system, people experience various forms of social oppression and privilege based on their ‘purity’. Caste (*jat*)<sup>5</sup> is most often conceptualised in terms of hierarchical spatial metaphors; ‘high’, ‘low’, that were first spelled out in the Muluki Ain (Law of the Land) 1854 (Qigley, 1993). People are born into their caste, and people of mixed caste take on the ‘lower’ of their parents’ castes. Caste distinctions are maintained through a system of ritual purity defined (from the perspective of those on top—i.e. the Bahuns) around the foods people can eat, the ritual places they can enter and the occupations in which they engage.

While the present-day enactment of *jat* is highly contradictory, many of the normative hierarchies and associated spatial practices remain strong in Mugu as in other parts of Nepal (see also Bennett, 1983; Graner, 1997; GSEA, 2006; Hoftun et al., 1999). Importantly, it is these normative practices that provide a backdrop for the most potent forms of challenge to socially-oppressive hierarchies of difference, as the Maoists used to great effect (Pettigrew and

<sup>5</sup> The word ‘*jat*’ can take on many connotations and if one were to ask a Limbu person for their *jat* they would reply ‘Limbu’ even though technically Limbu refers to an ethnic group rather than caste. This is another way in which caste and ethnicity are ambiguously intertwined in Nepal.

Shneiderman, 2004). In Mugu there are four main castes that I will focus my discussion around, Bahuns, Thakuris, Chhetris and Kamis (a Dalit caste).<sup>6</sup>

Non-Hindu groups<sup>7</sup> are situated in relation to the caste system in complex and often contradictory ways. Generally 'western' foreigners are considered 'out of caste' although I have experienced very contradictory practices wherein some instances I am considered untouchable (notably by a Bahun priest eating in the house I stayed in) and at other times considered 'high-caste'. As a western woman doing research on issues of gender and caste, the way I was treated and fitted into many of the interactions I describe in this paper is highly relevant and helped clarify my own understanding of these processes.<sup>8</sup> The ambiguity assigned to westerners is reflective of the ways that class intersects with caste as it is financial power that is the basis of respect given to westerners. Purity—or perhaps more accurately, pollution (*jutho*)—is thus one of the key foundations of social difference in Nepal. Ritual purity is maintained through a wide variety of everyday spatial and bodily practices and it is these practices to which I turn now.

## 5. The normative perspective: gender

**“Well! you see there are only two castes now. Male and female. Only male and female, other castes have been abandoned.”**

—Dalit man in Mugu

The intersectionality of caste, gender, age, space and material practice is starkly highlighted by the normative restrictions placed on Hindu women in Mugu who are menstruating or have recently given birth. They are considered highly polluting and therefore women are spatially separated at these times and anything they touch will be polluted. It is of vital importance that 'polluted' women do not cross the threshold of homes, that they avoid moving around in public spaces where they may accidentally come into contact with others and that they limit the household items they touch. The women I know are required to remain outside the house, sleeping either under the roof eaves or in the animal stables outside the house for seven days when menstruating, nine days for childbirth. They have to cook and clean their own dishes and they are not allowed to prepare food for anyone else or to touch the main household utensils. Hindu women are also not allowed to do many forms of agricultural work or to collect water. Women's bodies then, become damaging to the 'environment' in that crops will not yield properly if they harvest them while 'polluted'. Water is particularly important as it is the substance that confers purity. If a person or household is ritually contaminated, the way to cleanse it is with water. Women therefore must collect their own water during the time of their spatial seclusion and there are complex (and locally specific) restrictions on how they are to use water taps in order to avoid polluting the source. I watched a Bahun woman walk twenty minutes down to the river to wash herself and her baby within an hour of giving birth. No one assisted her. Everything

women have used during their spatial exclusion must be washed (with water) and this cleaning along with a bath for themselves marks the end of their separation.

Some of the meanings of gender, space and ecological conditions then, are constructed in and through the bodies that inhabit them. Animals are less pure (ritually) than humans, and therefore the stable is the appropriate place for 'polluted' women. Similarly, where she touches what water and when is central to whether a woman could pollute a water source and also, by virtue of bathing at the right time, when she is no longer 'polluted'. It is in this sense that women's bodies produce 'ecological' outcomes. If a water tap becomes polluted, the water could stop flowing reliably, or it could jeopardise the 'purity' of other tap users. While perhaps not a meaning of 'ecology' understood in western contexts, locally people do not distinguish between a science of ecology and the factors that may cause a water source to dry up. Attending to the ways that subjects and socio-natures are deeply material and bound up in the everyday thus pushes forward understandings of how power becomes enrolled in symbolic-material processes.

## 6. Contesting space and subjectivities: the multi-dimensional exercise of power

Many of these 'pollution' practices have changed recently as the Maoists forbade them and the insurgency made sleeping outside far more dangerous. After the insurgency ended however, I noticed that many women are again sleeping outside (in 2009), although importantly, women have renegotiated the old spatial boundaries. They generally do not sleep in the open now, but neither are they allowed into the interior of the house nor allowed to touch family members or objects.

Prior to the insurgency, many women had already begun to contest the spatial practices of pollution. One friend who is very frail, long ago rejected the idea of sleeping outside during her menstruation. She stayed in the enclosed stables under the house and after three days washed and declared that as she was no longer bleeding, she would not stay outside. Although she was heavily criticised, no one dared to stop her. Her husband could have forced her to stay outside, but their relationship was such that he would not have tried to do that. Both were educated and sought to present themselves as 'developed' and 'aware'—in themselves potent subjectivities. In Nepal discourses of development are wrapped up in the idea that educated people become aware and they move away from practices that are seen as evidence of 'backwardness' (Leve, 2007; Pigg, 1996; Tamang, 2002). Women's 'pollution' is considered an oppressive practice that marginalises women and has been fought against by a variety of Nepali feminists. My friend's contestation of menstrual seclusion was motivated by a crucible of factors that in many ways made her body into a microcosm of multiple power dynamics and resulting subjectivities.

Her illness, while caused by bacteria, was also very much a social disease. Had she been a man, her relatives would have sought medical care sooner (and had done so for male relatives). But because she was a Hindu daughter-in-law, living in a joint household and her husband was working in another part of Nepal, the family was unwilling to spend money on her. Once she did receive medical care (upon her husband's return), her illness marked her body and brought her into relation with people and ecologies in ways that changed her subjectivity profoundly.

For one, she and her husband separated the household as the lack of care given to her was seen as sufficient grounds to demand division of the family's assets. Also, as she was now frail, she was unable to perform many of the agricultural tasks normally seen as 'women's' work, requiring male household members or hired hands to do them, and changing her long-term commitment to

<sup>6</sup> The Unequal Citizens book recently produced by the Gender and Social Exclusion Working Group argues that 'Dalit' should be recognised as a fully-acceptable term, but given its equivalence with groups who were/are considered untouchable, I argue it does little to unsettle hierarchical notions of purity.

<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to assign labels to these groups as some 'ethnic' groups are also Hindu although not incorporated into the caste system except as Dalits or *janajatis* ('tribals'). But there is a normative idea of 'Hindu Indo-Aryan' groups in Nepal that constitute the caste system and that all others are incorporated into that in a variety of contradictory and peripheral ways.

<sup>8</sup> See Sundberg (2004) for an interesting analysis of subjectivity that places herself in relation to the other subjectivities emerging in her case study. I have steered away from such an explicit focus on my own positionality, but I have tried to place myself within the dynamics I describe where appropriate.

the ecological health of those spaces. Her inability to perform tasks required of village women in this place meant that she was now less 'valuable' as a woman and in many respects her power and status diminished relative to other female relatives. Many women in Mugu are proud of their ability to carry huge loads of firewood, compost and fodder, and their strength as well as suffering (*dukka*) are intimately bound up in their identity as a 'woman' (see also Leve, 2007). For my friend, she turned to her education—she is one of very few women her age in the District who had been educated to the eighth grade—and sought other income generation activities such as sewing or teaching. Due to her illness but also her education, she was able to avoid the pressures on women to perform agricultural chores and instead of being disempowered, she was able to assert her subjectivity as an educated woman. And it was this kind of 'awareness' that she used to broker the compromise over menstrual seclusion she achieved within her household.

Here, she circumvented the material and symbolic practices that served to keep women subordinate to men in the village and household, and that lateral move subjected her as an entirely new category of 'village woman'. This new kind of woman was educated and took advantage of development opportunities (sewing training) to diversify the income of her household. Sixteen years ago, she was the only married woman who had successfully made this transition into the new 'developed woman'. She was followed by another younger woman from the village who was unmarried and successfully held a career as a nurse. Importantly, however, both these women operated in highly ambiguous social positions. My friend's inability to provide for her family elicited criticism, while the other woman remained unmarried well into her thirties, something which was seen to diminish her status. Yet both commanded significant respect and were able to literally move and operate in spaces where other women were too afraid to go such as the District offices that distributed rice or the Community Forest Office. Importantly, however, such 'developed' women do not work in the fields or the forest, putting their bodies into an entirely different relationship with ecological change in the area. Instead of planting and harvesting, they use their 'knowledge' to argue a 'woman's position' at community forestry meetings or to run vegetable cooperatives.

Now, there are several young, married Thakuri and Bahun women in the village who have jobs and divide their time between agricultural chores and paid employment. Their subjectivities are substantially different from those of older, uneducated women. They have far more mobility, particularly in navigating the nearby government offices. Education, development discourses and class relations then, intersect with gender and caste to create new openings for shifting subjectivities. One friend put it to me poignantly when she said, "You educated women are lucky.<sup>9</sup> You can walk on the trail alone; you can go where you want to go. We who are not educated have to stay in our houses and suffer (*dukka*)."<sup>9</sup> She said this in the context of telling me about problems within her household and her sense of having no options. But importantly, these subjectivities are *available*, not normative. Women in Mugu who do not use their education to gain mobility often end up in similar positions of disempowerment that my uneducated friend articulated.

Thus the extent to which contestations of subjectivities lead to shifting power dynamics is often very limited and by viewing them through a materially grounded exploration of subjectivities and socio-natures, the importance of spatial practices in (re)producing power becomes clearer. Many people inhabit (literally) very contradictory relationships to the subjectivities they seek to under-

mine. One young, educated woman who was menstruating refused our invitation to sit closer and share food in a field because she was menstruating. So while on the one hand she was moving around the village more than she 'should' have done, she was also unwilling to cross the boundary that marked her body as different from ours by sitting next to us and sharing food. These examples show very clearly the kind of investment the subject has in its own subjection (Butler, 1990, 1997; Foucault, 1991, 1995). She changes her subjectivity by going where she 'should not' go while her body is 'polluted' but she is fundamentally not resisting the idea that her body is restricted. She remained separate spatially and symbolically by not taking food directly from our hands, and poignantly, she remained outside her house until the seven days were finished. And bringing in my feminist political ecology argument, here she also shows how material practices in space are integral to defining, contesting and bounding subjectivities.

## 7. Boundaries and purity: the lateral and hierarchical exercise of power

Such spatial practices firmly entrench the idea that the interior of houses in Mugu are 'pure' spaces that can be 'contaminated'. In addition to 'polluted' women, people of different castes, particularly those considered 'lower' will also be excluded from household interiors. At a Bahun's house, for instance, Chhetri people would enter but not sit by the hearth, whereas Dalits would not enter into the interior at all, and if invited under a roof space, would stay as close to the outside as possible. Similarly, other castes would consider it polluting of their person to enter into the interior of a Dalit household. While in Dalit households there are not necessarily restrictions on other castes entering, they do not expect it. I have rarely been invited into the interior of a Dalit household whereas I have been in Bahun and Thakuri households. Thus the space of the household is implicated in the production of caste and gender boundaries. Caste boundaries are (re)produced by restrictions on peoples' movements and the spaces they inhabit.

There are not clear material boundaries separating the interior of the house from the outside—in fact in Mugu houses there are quite often a variety of interstitial, semi-enclosed spaces. While they are spaces where food is dried, grains are prepared and grass stored, they are relatively open to any who choose to enter them. There is often a semi-enclosed room that is used for storage and serves as an intermediate space between the outside and the inside. Women sometimes sleep in these spaces when they are menstruating and the weather is especially bad (or as a challenge to the idea that they should sleep in the open) and it is a space that non-family members will enter if they have some business with a household. But these spaces are highly ambiguous, and not every home is laid out the same way creating diversity in the extent to which these interstitial spaces are protected as 'interior' spaces (i.e. with a door that can be locked from the outside) or are 'exterior' spaces that are never locked but nevertheless are not 'outside' spaces.

Of importance to my argument here, these kinds of spatial practices offer tremendous potential for contesting social boundaries. For example, during a community forestry user-group meeting, a Dalit man who was a contractor and thus relatively wealthy, insisted on taking a place (uninvited) inside a Bahun man's house. This act was a potent social and political statement as he inhabited a space that he also considered to be off-limits to the Dalits (he told the others to sit outside when one tried to move inside). In this way, he attempted to transcend his caste, but importantly, he was not unsettling caste hierarchies by doing so. Rather, his action reinforced the idea that the Bahun's house is a 'clean' space and

<sup>9</sup> Here she was referring to me and her young niece who lived in Kathmandu at the time and accompanied me to the field as an assistant.

that Dalits are unclean. It was only himself, as a ‘cleaned up’ Dalit (see also below) who could occupy that space.

In these examples, I suggest the material and the symbolic collapse into each other. It is not possible to understand *where* the interior of a house begins without understanding who is able to occupy that space, under what conditions and with what consequences for the integrity of that space. In the Bahun’s house above, the meeting took place in a room accessible only from the outside; the remainder of the house was accessed from a different entrance. Therefore that room was a highly ambiguous space, and of great interest to me, was the way that ambiguity was used to facilitate the interactions of some members of the user-group and to exclude others, falling largely along caste and gender lines, but not exclusively as other subjectivities intersected with them (Nightingale, 2005).

And, by holding the meetings in that room, the space itself became interstitial; there are no clear ideologies in Mugu that serve to normatively dictate whether such rooms are symbolically inside or outside. As people occupied the room for the meetings, a mutual production of space, bodies and subjectivities occurred. The user-group would never have gotten away with convening a meeting inside the main part of the Bahun’s house as it would have excluded too many members, but because the room could be an interstitial space, that ambiguity was an advantage to members of the committee who wanted to control the process. The committee thus becomes constituted symbolically and materially through the space of the room (as the room becomes constituted through the committee). The Dalit man used his class relations (contractor) and position on the committee to claim the right to occupy the space, but used the room’s ambiguous nature to assert a hierarchical boundary—literally at the threshold—between himself and the other Dalits in the user-group. And importantly, he defines his body as different; that by virtue of his class relations, it has different material and symbolic qualities that allow him to occupy the space without changing the room.

### 8. The lateral exercise of power: Maoist practices and moving out of caste

The Maoists were well aware of these kinds of practices and used household spaces to challenge inequality but also, I suggest, to assert the idea of ‘the people’. The Maoists travelled widely throughout Nepal asking for food and shelter. It was normal practice for them to enter a village and announce that everyone needed to feed a certain number of combatants (Pettigrew, 2004). On these occasions, they would claim a right to come into the household and sit by the hearth. Pettigrew (forthcoming) recounts an incident when a Maoist woman fashioned a tool to repair a gun “. . . which she carried into the kitchen and placed in the middle of the hearth – the central point of the house and the home of a god. Dhan Kumari, who had not previously protested, did so loudly when she saw what was happening. ‘Get that thing out of my hearth.’” The hostess clearly felt that the tool, *in her hearth*, was one violation too many. And importantly, people of all castes and ethnicities joined the Maoists and all expected equal access to anyone’s home. In response to my question, “From which village do the Maoists come and which caste are they?” A Chhetri man in Mugu replied, “Anyone who joins the Maoist party is a Maoist. If you and I join the Maoists then we are Maoist. So it is not from any particular caste.” He suggests that caste does not matter if one becomes a Maoist.

The Maoists’ actions had potent symbolic consequences given the importance of the hearth as the centre of the home and an area protected as ‘pure’. I speculate that part of their intention was to create the sense that ‘everyone’ was part of the ‘people’ who were

rebelling against the state. But the Maoists’ ability to change the exercise of power in village life was somewhat limited. More research is required to explore more fully the ways in which the material and symbolic practices of the Maoists served to create a ‘Maoist’ subjectivity (or even a subject ‘the people’) that transcended and superseded all others. But perhaps in part *because* a Maoist subjectivity was a lateral move rather than a vertical one within the caste system, the lasting impact of their challenges to caste in Mugu have been somewhat limited and short lived. As expressed in one interview,

Research assistant (J): Do you think there is less discrimination after the Maoist came?

Dalit man (M): Yes. There is less discrimination but we ourselves feel uneasy to go to our “*Thulabada*” (big father—i.e. the ‘high’ caste men who historically were their feudal masters.)

J: You feel uneasy yourself?

M: Yes. We feel uneasy to touch people whom we have known.

Dalit woman: (angry) We became “Dalit” because we feel uneasy ourselves.

Here she articulates very clearly the ambiguity of the subject (Butler, 1997, pp. 11–13) as she recognises the extent to which caste discrimination is as much a product of their own actions and internalisations of hierarchy as it is produced by those exercising power over them. So while the interviewees found new openings for changing the meaning of caste post-conflict, the woman recognises that such a transformation is partial at best. I want to make it absolutely clear that I am not *blaming* Dalits for the oppression they experience. To the contrary, I am exploring the contradictory ways that power operates such that oppressed people become invested in their own oppression. As others have argued (Mahoney and Yngvesson, 1992), it is this contradiction that makes understanding how subjectivities emerge so crucial, and that can make them so difficult to escape. Thus the Maoists created a space outside of caste but were less successful in undermining hierarchies within the caste system.

The Maoists also challenged gender discrimination as something separate from caste discrimination and claimed to treat women equally by using female combatants. While some critics have suggested that the Maoists did not really undermine gender relations due to the kind of activities Maoist women were expected to perform in the camps, there is no question the insurgency offered opportunities for people to literally escape the confines of their homes. One Thakuri woman in Mugu described the experience of a young woman from her village who ran off with the Maoists.

Maya, Bishnu’s daughter has joined the Maoists. . . . Bishnu told them [the group of Maoists and her daughter] she would commit suicide if Maya did not return back home [but she refused]. That girl did not return even when her mother called her because she was in love with a Dalit who was also Maoist so it was easy for her. Maoists do not care about caste so it was easy to get married with another Maoist.

In this narrative my respondent expresses the lateral move that Maya makes by joining the Maoists, a move that takes her *out* of caste (“Maoists do not care about caste. . .”) and that allows her to contest the authority of her parents and the normative expectations on her as a ‘high’ caste woman. Here there are two important theoretical points. First, it is not possible to think of the exercise of power as vertical, oppression vs. empowerment. While in some respects the situation could be read in this way, the ambiguous and

contested nature of the (new) subjects are better understood in multiple dimensions. Only by moving laterally, outside, away, was Maya able to shift her subjectivity as a daughter and a Thakuri unmarried woman sufficiently to be able to marry the Dalit man. And, secondly, by making that lateral move, it was “easy” for her to do this, but she needed to draw on more than one subjectivity to do so; an ‘intersectional’ move that simultaneously contests several key markers of her social position.

Even beyond lateral moves such as the one Maya made, in Mugu the younger generation does seem to be changing the practice of caste, just as gender is shifting. People spoke of how food consumption practices were changing. One Dalit man said, “The young Chhetri [men] don’t care about the caste system. They sit with us and eat but all these old people still dominate us.” It is sitting together and eating, embodied, spatial practices, that are markers of new power dynamics between people. Historically such spatial separation marked bodies as different and now transcending those boundaries carries a symbolic weight that simply talking about equality or changing labels such as ‘Dalit’ or ‘janajati’ cannot achieve.

### 9. Purified Bodies: eating, sitting together and the production of inequality

“Your caste, is your caste. You eat in your own kitchen, we will eat in our own kitchen. We won’t go in your kitchen, others won’t come into our kitchen.”

—Dalit man in Mugu

Food production and consumption are the most central aspects of agriculturalists’ lives in northwestern Nepal and arguably the activities that have the most direct ecological consequences. Perhaps because of this, eating and agricultural tasks are bound up in the spatial and symbolic practices that are central to the production of social hierarchies.

Restrictions on the consumption of food and water are a defining feature of the normative caste system. Food and alcohol consumption are emerging as important ambiguous practices that challenge but also re-assert caste as seen above. Wasting of income and domestic violence associated with alcohol have become major problems for women of all castes. Having no history of drinking alcohol, the ‘higher’ castes do seem to be very prone to alcohol abuse and drinking has become an arena wherein men of all castes will sit together. For some this is evidence of growing equality, particularly since meat (goat or chicken) and other snacks will be consumed while drinking in the bazaar, whereas for others this is evidence of the complete dismantling of the cultural system into chaos and lack of respect, fuelled by political changes. As one elderly Bahun man said, “We do *anata* puja (a full moon ritual), say our *mantras* (prayers) and only then do we eat. Now everyone has left this tradition. The *raksi* (alcohol) tradition has come. ... After this multiparty system has come, everyone has gone crazy.”

He equates the political instability with the ‘loss’ of caste for Bahuns and Thakuris. Consuming alcohol is often named as the ultimate turning away from the old customs which kept the social order intact. Even younger people will invoke these discourses—ironically often the same people who drink. Yet normatively, as Bahun and Thakuri bodies become ‘polluted’, Dalit bodies become ‘cleaner’ because they have sat and drank with the Bahuns and Thakuris. Yet the Bahuns and Thakuris have been able to resist strong implications that their caste is jeopardised given their alcohol consumption. I believe this is due to the prevalence of it and the relationship between spending time in the bazaar and class relations. It is not just one or two people near the District Centre, I know of very few men of all castes who do not drink. As one Kami

woman told me, “Alcohol affects us all. Our husbands and sons drink their wages and we do not have enough to eat. It is the same for all of us.” By recognising the intersecting subjectivities—class, caste, gender,—it becomes more intelligible how Dalits can become cleaner and Bahuns stay more or less the same through drinking together.

### 10. Cleaning up: *jutho*, class and the transcendence of caste

“Men’s work is to sit in an office, earn money, then spend it on *raksi* (alcohol).”

—Thakuri woman from Chaina

Recently, notions of *jutho* or ritual pollution have become entwined with ideas of ‘cleanliness’ in interesting ways,<sup>10</sup> and central to my argument here, are entwined in bodies as ‘ecological’ spaces. As an excuse for why Dalits are still untouchable, many ‘higher’ castes will refer to their physical dirtiness. Bear in mind that staying clean in Mugu is a near full-time occupation. The dry, dusty, windy climate means everything is impregnated with dirt and the pine wood burned for cooking produces black soot that quickly settles onto clothes, hair and objects. Staying clean thus involves significant effort in terms of avoiding dirt, smoke, as well as having time to wash clothes and bathe. Soap is expensive and will be the first luxury dispensed with if food supplies are short (a chronic problem in Mugu) or school fees need to be paid. Of course if one does not have to cook or do agro-forestry work, it is far easier to stay clean, reinforcing some of the associations of class relations with cleanliness, power and ‘high’ status. Until recently, most people in Mugu could not afford soap regularly but the Dalits in particular rarely purchased it. This is now changing as soap becomes more available and affordable, but has served to almost reinforce the idea that being dirty on one’s person is to be *jutho*. When one Dalit man challenged a young Thakuri man why he still practised untouchability with them, he said, “If you clean yourself up and stop eating cow meat then you will no longer be *jutho* and we will not care.”

When viewed through the feminist political ecology lens of intersectionality and the material production of subjectivities, such discourses and contestations of cleanliness show how power is exercised in hierarchical as well as lateral ways. In a particularly ironic move, alcohol consumption and sitting together with the ‘higher’ castes is used by some Dalits as a way to demonstrate that they are ‘cleaned up’. Similarly, washing their person is one way in which people will try to ‘improve’ themselves. It is only by abandoning the bodily markers of caste that people can become ‘clean’ and no longer Dalit in some contexts. Yet, the Dalit contractor from the community forestry user-group could only go so far in becoming ‘not Dalit’. It was he who told me that each caste stays in their own kitchen (above) and marries within their caste. Moves such as entering the Bahun’s house at the meeting are often lateral, taking people out of caste, rather than changing the meaning of caste. Bodies and space thus continue to produce and contest caste boundaries with somewhat limited effects.

But perhaps more significantly than alcohol, political change or cleanliness, class relations<sup>11</sup> intersect with gender, caste and other markers of social difference to drive change in inequalities. In 1999, many Dalits spoke of how work opportunities for them had undermined the dependent relationships they had historically with

<sup>10</sup> See also McClintock (1995) for the importance of cleanliness (and use of soap) in constructing racial difference during the colonial period.

<sup>11</sup> Here I use Gibson-Graham’s (1996) feminist understanding of the social relations that emerge from different economic interactions, called class processes, to conceptualise class. This conceptualisation allows for an understanding of how an individual can occupy more than one class position and also avoids problems of assuming all household members have the same class and control over and access to resources.

the Bahun and Thakuri castes, and in 2009 the same sentiments were echoed along with stronger demands for Dalit rights. Work activities are profoundly embodied, material, and in Nepal, have strong symbolic values attached (Nightingale, 2006). This was clearly articulated by the roof of my room which leaked (badly) while I lived in the village.

The patriarch of the family explained that they had the materials but could not get the “*Dums*” (untouchables) to do the work. “They used to come and work all day when we called. We would give them a meal and some grain, maybe a few rupees and they would work. Now, they will not mind. Now they can go up to the airport,” he waved his hand up the hillside, “and earn 200 rupees a day. They say they do not have to mind us anymore.”

Later I asked the teenage sons why they did not fix the roof themselves. One replied, “We cannot do that kind of work. We do not know how to do it, we could learn, but if we did that kind of work our hands would shrivel and fall off!” He was being deliberately dramatic, but nevertheless, the idea that work can contaminate your body is strongly bound up in the kinds of boundaries that mark caste (Gidwani, 2000). And it is through work that many Dalits have managed to challenge caste hierarchies. Education is the most reliable path for Dalits to ‘raise themselves up’ and in 1999 there was one man in Mugu who had passed his School Leaving Certificate and freely associated with ‘higher’ caste people in the bazaar. He complained bitterly to us that while they would drink and eat with him, they would not give him a job because of caste discrimination and his lack of “source-force”. In 2009 I heard that he had gone into politics and one Thakuri man laughed explaining to me, “So that is the way to bring yourself up, to go into party politics.” Here the intersectionality of gender, caste, class and politics is starkly evident. Through education the Dalit man was able to engage in a variety of ‘clean’ income-earning activities and now has gone into politics to gain more credibility and power.

Most other Dalits in Mugu, however, have not had the same opportunities. It is only now among children aged 5–15 that a significant number of Dalit children (mainly boys) are attending school. The few from the previous generation who passed their Student Leaving Certificate have managed to find ‘educated’ jobs and are able to associate more freely with a wider range of people as a result. Uneducated Dalit men, and even some who are educated, have found more work in manual labour. As the roof incident indicated, the airport was an important source of income for many years—particularly since the airport took over 28 years to build evidently due to graft of funds by contractors.

### 11. Space as ecology: the production of subjectivities in the forest

Now I want to make a more explicitly feminist political ecological move, and focus here on ‘space’ as ‘ecological spaces’. In most of this paper I have tried to demonstrate how bodies, spaces and subjectivities are produced out of intersecting and multiple dynamics of power and where appropriate point out how they have ecological implications. Of course bodies should also be understood as ‘ecological’ in the sense that material environments extend in and through the body,<sup>12</sup> but also through embodied work practices, space is also often very explicitly ‘ecological’.

A consistent source of income for Dalits has emerged from community forestry in addition to other kinds of manual labour. Dalits in this user-group rely on selling firewood as a cornerstone to their household income and Dalit men work cutting timber on a piece basis, earning significant wages. While they are reluctant to di-

vulge figures, it is substantially more than wages for agricultural work which at least until recently remained very low. The work is physically demanding and dangerous. Logs are rolled onto large frames so that one man can stand underneath and another on top, both working a cross-cut saw. The most dangerous part is getting the logs onto the frame. I was shocked at the lack of any protective measures other than the men’s own quickness to jump out of the way if the log should go in an unintended direction. When I remarked on this, they replied that a few weeks earlier someone was killed by a log.

This kind of work is important in the construction of subjectivities, space and ecologies in three key ways. First, it is only Dalit men who engage in timber-cutting despite the relatively high wages. While historically timbers for houses were made by Dalits, there have been significant advances in the technology over the past 16 years (notably cross-cut saws) and I have been surprised that these technological advances and corresponding earning potential, have not been co-opted by other caste groups (see also *Gidwani, 2000*). The act of cutting timber, however, is strongly associated with ‘work for the *Dums*’ and I believe this is a key reason why other castes avoid it.

Secondly, working in the forest in this area is done primarily by Dalit men and women of all castes (except for Bahuns and Thakuris, only married women). Other men will graze animals or occasionally collect firewood, but in general it is very rare. The forest is thus an important context wherein subjectivities are produced (*Dyson, 2008; Gururani, 2002*). To cut timber in the forest is to be a Dalit man, and increasingly, it is an occupation that has status and class relations that are serving to distinguish Dalit men from each other. It is not just anyone who can cut timber. It requires fitness, agility, strength and drive. The work is paid by the piece so someone unable to work quickly would not be able to obtain the kind of wages that most of them do.

Thirdly, this work has significant ecological consequences and meaning. Most of the large timber stocks in this forest were over 60–70 years old according to tree ring analysis done in 1999 (making them over 70–80 years old in 2009) and in the past two years there has been an outcry over the destruction of the forest that has resulted from a boom in house-building, and thus, timber-cutting.<sup>13</sup> There are a variety of accusations made, but two recur. First is the extent to which the community forestry user-group committee gives permits and allows cutting beyond the permit limit, and second, that the timber-cutters themselves are using permits as a means to cut additional timber and sell it illegally. Timber-cutting thus becomes enrolled in new caste discourses that are importantly class-based and ecological. The Bahuns, Thakuris and Chhetris accuse the Dalits of being ‘backward’, ‘unaware’ and greedy and thus destroying the forest through excessive timber-cutting. In turn, the Dalits accuse the ‘higher’ caste committee members of greed by condoning excessive cutting through issuing of permits. For example one Dalit woman said, “The people from Chaina (Bahun and Thakuri) accuse us of clearing the Jungle but they don’t realise their mistake. They give permits (*purji*) to *Botals* (a derogatory term for Tibetans) and with that permit three-four houses can be built.” Here the implication is that the permits are being used to cut too much wood.

A systematic vegetation survey is needed to better ascertain the extent of felling, but there is no question that the rate of cutting has increased dramatically since 1999. A visual scan of the forest suggests that the tales of a totally-destroyed forest are a bit over-represented, but areas near the timber-cutting platforms have been clear cut. The main conceptual point here is that what

<sup>12</sup> I would argue that through processes of metabolism (e.g. eating) the body extends into ‘outside’ environments.

<sup>13</sup> The causes of this boom are multiple. For this particular user-group, the growing bazaar town seems to be the major driver. The conflict drove migrants into the bazaar and after the peace, people are attracted to the growing economic opportunities, according to one informant.

it means to be Dalit is transformed through these work practices and ecologies, just as ecologies are transformed. The physical work (re)produces the cultural meanings around manual labour, establishing a clear hierarchy between those who engage in timber-cutting and those who have an 'office job'. Ironically, cutting timber yields roughly Rs. 10,000 per month (based on Rs. 500/day, 20 days a month), whereas an office job, particularly those available to Dalit men who have studied to School Leaving Certificate (SLC) level, would provide no more than Rs. 5000–8000/month. So while cutting timber potentially increases one's economic status, the class relations involved in performing the work act to keep the social value of this status low. A Dalit man working in an office would have many more opportunities to eat and drink with 'higher' caste men, whereas those who work in the forest do not, even if their ability to pay for that food and drink is actually greater.

The embodied intersectionality of gender (only men cut timber and drink<sup>14</sup>), caste, class and ecology is clear in this example. Timber work provides for different kinds of opportunities and blockages for (re)defining caste. These shifting class and economic relations cannot be trivialised. Opportunities to earn good wages have been absolutely vital to undermining old feudal relationships. As Dalits have become less dependent on their feudal masters, some of the key activities and power relations that maintained the caste hierarchy are eroded. But that erosion is only partial and other embodied markers of caste such as cleanliness (symbolic and material), class relations (as opposed to earnings), eating and drinking, remain strong boundaries that differentiate people in a hierarchical order. And while I cannot fully explore it here, the ways in which attending to (or destroying) the ecological health of the forest is enrolled in these multi-directional operations of power and the production of difference is absolutely central to the current politics of the community forestry user-group. Thus the symbolic achievements are not separable from the material acts in and of the forest or the consequences they have for shifting and (re)producing social inequalities and ecologies.

## 12. Conclusion

In this paper I have outlined some of the contested, dynamic processes through which social inequalities in Nepal are produced and entrenched. The way subjects are produced in embodied (environmental) interactions in space sheds light on how inequalities are constantly shifting and open to reinterpretation, but are also surprisingly resilient to major reconfigurations. I argue this resilience emerges from the processes through which boundaries are produced and contested. These processes are not simple and involve the material production of subjects and ecologies. What emerges is an understanding that cultural categories of 'woman', 'Dalit' or 'Bahun' are not universal or fixed, but rather dynamic results of contested practices. Yet, while attention to such dynamism is absolutely vital in political ecology and development studies and practice, it is equally important how normative discourses of 'woman', 'Dalit' and 'Bahun' carry with them a material and symbolic weight that (re)produce hierarchies even when people attempt to transcend them.

These 'resilient contestations' can be understood by exploring the contradictions of the subject and the collapsing of the boundaries between the symbolic and the material. Spatial practices quite literally open up space for side-stepping hierarchies or attempting to move vertically through a social order. Recognising that such moves are constantly being made helps to destabilise

the normative discourses that permeate development policy and practice. But the exercise of power is not straightforward, and many attempts at resistance tend to rebound on the subject, further entrenching subjectivities rather than fundamentally subverting them. Attention to such contradictions opens up possibilities for new mechanisms for transcending oppressive forms of difference and helps to explain why processes of 'gender mainstreaming' seem to have such limited effects.

It is in the interstitial spaces of the material and the symbolic that the ambivalence of the subject is so potent. The Maoist tactics demonstrated that well when they utilised space to transcend and contest caste and gender boundaries. Placing guns in the hands of women and Dalits at the hearth fires in Bahun households gave people opportunities to make lateral moves outside of the subjectivities they found so difficult to escape in their everyday village lives. And importantly, anyone could become a Maoist reinforcing the notion that they offered very different kinds of opportunities to the ones historically available to people in rural Nepal. More research is needed on the impact of the insurgency on gender, caste and ethnicity in different parts of rural Nepal, but such research needs to attend to both the successes of the lateral (and, of course, dominant) exercise of power, as well as the partiality of such moves to truly disrupt the deeply hierarchical and unequal society of Nepal. These moves are vital to understand in the context of shifting ecologies and discourses around rights and resources as many Nepalese people have quite accurately begun to understand the intersectionality of social difference, material space and resources in (re)producing hierarchies and power relations that have served to oppress the poorest of the poor for generations.

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<sup>14</sup> It is not quite accurate to suggest that only men drink. While rare, there are some Dalit women who have reputations as drinkers and certainly Tibetan women drink, albeit moderately. I have never seen or heard of any women cutting timber, however they do cut firewood regularly.

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