Gender, Modernity and Identity: Female Trekking Guides in Nepal

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GENDER, MODERNITY AND IDENTITY:
FEMALE TREKKING GUIDES AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN NEPAL

by

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June 9, 2015

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Sociology
2015
The thesis entitled:
Gender, Modernity and Identity: Female Trekking Guides and Social Change in Nepal
written by Barbara Hypatia Grossman-Thompson
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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

IRB protocol # 12-0080
This article considers the gendered processes of social change in Nepal. In particular, I examine how young working class women in urban Nepal articulate their modern subjectivities. In the last thirty years women have been making significant inroads into Nepal’s public sphere, troubling long-held normative assumptions about women’s place in modern Nepal. In particular, historically dominant high-caste Hindu norms that disapprove women’s public visibility and mobility are challenged by new opportunity structures for women and an emergent structure of feeling advocating women’s equal participation in Nepal’s development projects. Rapid democratization of the political sphere, urbanization, and expansion of capitalist markets has precipitated enormous shifts in Nepal’s social organization including how women from diverse caste and ethnic backgrounds participate in the newly monetized economy as laborers and consumers. Young working class women have unprecedented access to disposable income. With their wages, they enjoy the pleasures of purchasing power and, through consumptive practices, craft their identity as modern commodity consumers. At the same time, as participants in the public sphere of wage labor, working class women are deeply aware of the social risks they are taking as publicly visible women. These risks include the danger of being labeled “over modern” and “open”—descriptors with undertones of sexual immorality. Drawing on 20 months of ethnographic research conducted with one group of young working class women: female trekking guides, I contextualize my informants’ experiences of wage earning and consumption. I explore the justifications my informants use to legitimate their public visibility and the pleasure they take in commodity consumption as well as the strategies they deploy to counter negative stereotypes associated with their status as public women. I end with a discussion of anxiety as a productive force in the lives of my informants and show how tensions between the pleasures of purchasing power and the dangers of being labeled “over modern” bracket their experiences of day-to-day living.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Maggi, Jessamyn, Laurel and Beth with all my love and to Luke for all his love.
Acknowledgments

I would like to gratefully acknowledge my family and friends for their lifelong support. In particular my parents Perry Thompson and Julie Grossman and my grandparents Joanne Grossman, Marvin Grossman and Antoinette Emery Fogg. I would also like to thank my Nepali instructors Geeta Manandhar and Shambu and Banu Oja for their patience and high standards. I am indebted to my Nepali friends, especially the women who allowed me to spend time with them, ask them questions and become their friend. My research could not have occurred without the friendship and support of Bhagwati. I am fortunate to have a dissertation committee that allowed me to pursue an unlikely project. Thank you to Isaac Reed and Liam Downey for their support throughout. Special thanks to Joanne Belknap for a sense of humor that buoyed me in tough times. I am very grateful to Jennifer Bair, who, as an advisor, was both patient with my faults and determined to make me a better scholar. Thank you for all the red ink. This research would not have been possible without the generous support of a Foreign Language Areas Studies grant and a U.S. Student Fulbright Grant. In addition, a Graduate School Dissertation Research Award from the Graduate School at the University of Colorado at Boulder as well as several grants from the Department of Sociology at the University of Colorado at Boulder supported additional fieldwork.
A Note on Transliteration.

Italic Times New Roman font is used to denote Nepali words used in the text. Within quotations, a bold font is used to denote English words used in the original. Transliteration follows Turner (1931) except in the case of 1) the un-aspirated ‘ch’ sound, which I write as ch, and the aspirated ‘ch’ sound, which I write as chh and, 2) the three different ‘s’ sibilants, which are all transliterated in the text as s.


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Introduction

A central road bisects the city of Kathmandu, Nepal from its northern to southern end. On this road there is a particularly busy intersection, 6 lanes across and flanked by wide sidewalks and shoulder-high, white-washed cinderblock walls that separate businesses from the bustle of pedestrians and traffic. For many years these walls have hosted rotating graffiti; often the large red-lettered slogans and hammer and sickle sign of the communist political parties, but also more abstract street art and what can only be called developmentalist murals promoting various social welfare messages. One such mural spans 20 feet of highly visible wall and depicts two staircases emerging from the left and right of a podium with a full-length mirror in the center. Ascending the left staircase towards the podium is a woman dressed in a contemporary blouse and slacks walking with her husband and single female child who is clad in a crisp school uniform. There are four steps in the staircase with each successive step featuring a word in English: education, understanding, happiness, success. On the right staircase a woman dressed in the garb of an ethnic minority carries a basket used for farming on her head as she climbs toward the mirror. She is trailed by four young children while she and her husband, who is dressed in the uniform of a lower-class porter, share the load of another child laid out on a stretcher. The woman is also noticeably pregnant. The stairs below her read: uneducated, unawareness, unhealthy, sadness.

What is the purpose of this prominently positioned mural? What are the explicit and implicit messages it conveys about gender, identity, development and modernity in contemporary Nepal? What is the relationship between the various signposts in the
representation: education, occupation, and family planning? How do young women variously understand this mural as it relates to their own opportunities and desires?

The mural tells a story about two tropes of Nepali womanhood. On the left staircase stands a woman who has gained an education, whose family participates in capitalist productivity, whose family planning choices exemplify middle class urban respectability. On the right staircase a woman quite literally stoops under the burden of her fertility, her lack of education and the weight of an agricultural livelihood. The viewer is meant to infer that the woman to the left represents modern Nepal and the woman to the right represents the remnants of an agrarian past. In pitting these two tropes of womanhood against each other the mural succinctly captures the uncertainty about women’s role in modern Nepal.¹

The mural’s juxtaposition of these two figures suggests that the choice between the two paths to the mirror is clear-cut and dramatic, yet such a representation belies the complex reality of being a modern woman in present-day urban Nepal. This is especially true for young women whose lives straddle these two realities insofar as their working class livelihoods neither match the middle class respectability of the woman on the left nor the peasant subsistence of the woman on the right. For young, working class women in urban Nepal, being modern is not a linear process of ascending the staircase to “success.” Instead, it is a process of navigating competing

¹ The mural is sponsored by Family Planning Nepal (FPAN). While the explicit message is about birth control and the benefits of a smaller family, the particular symbols within the mural only make sense in reference to much broader discourses about women’s role in Nepal’s development projects discussed later in this chapter. Though not directly addressing women’s role in the public sphere or women’s participation in capitalist productivity, the trope of the over-fertile and uneducated rural woman used in the mural is understood as a foil to the educated, modern, progressive woman who participates in Nepal’s public spaces. As another example of this dichotomous understanding of development, across the city, in another busy thoroughfare, a mural by an entirely different NGO shows two young boys facing each other. One boy is clothed in rags, dirty, hair unkempt and carrying a traditional farmers basket on his head. The other boy is clean, groomed and dressed in a new school uniform. They stare at each other across the space of a few inches that are quite clearly meant to represent the gulf between modern and non-modern Nepal. Although both murals visually represent developmentalist discourse in a similar fashion, the message of development in Nepal is not gender neutral. Gendered understandings of modernity, development and identity are discussed in detail in chapter 5.
cultural norms, balancing personal desires and community expectations, and carving out space for autonomy in the face of multiple constraints.

This dissertation concerns itself with women whose lives do not resonate neatly with the trajectories juxtaposed on either side of the staircase. In the following pages I explore social change from the perspective of young, urban, working class Nepali women, asking what does it mean to “be” modern? Specifically, I attempt to answer this question through an ethnographic case study of female trekking guides.²

An Overview

For over half a century development has been the primary if not singular discourse emanating from the Nepali state. The Nepali populace has grappled with the meaning of modernity, development and globalization³ since a coup in 1951 rescinded 100 years of geopolitical isolationism (Whelpton 2005). Post-coup, the Nepali state has championed development nearly to the point of fanaticism (Pigg 1992; Ahearn 2001; Leve 2007). Manifesting in everything from royal proclamations and school textbooks to radio and television programs, the language of development remains ubiquitous even today. In turn, popular culture reflects a preoccupation with being a developed and modern (but still distinctly Nepali) citizen (Liechty 2010).

² I use the term “female trekking guides” as a matter of style. Further, while I recognize that “female” does connote biological sex rather than gender, and may thus seem to conflate sex and gender as the same category, using the term “female trekking guides” is much closer to how my informants talk about their identity as workers. My informants use the term mahilaa (female) as opposed to purush (male) guides to describe their unique position in the industry. The way they speak about the unique challenges of being women workers references both biological (sex) and cultural (gender) differences, which are both captured in the term mahilaa (female).

³ Nepal has been part of global networks of commerce and communication since at least the 1500’s when it served as an important trade-post between China, Tibet, India and surrounding Himalayan civilizations (Whelpton 2005). However, along with many other scholars of Nepal (Liechty 2010), I argue that a new experience of globalization is identifiable post 1951. 1951 marked Nepal’s entrance into a new transnational social, economic and political configuration. From 1850-1951, Nepal was jointly ruled by a monarchy (the Shah dynasty) and an autocratic regime of prime ministers (the Rana dynasty) who implemented a policy of intense political and cultural isolationism. In 1951, the Ranas were overthrown and the Shah dynasty was freed to continue its monarchal rule unfettered. The ousting of the Rana family from power ushered in an era of openness to foreigners including tourists and generous amounts of foreign aid. See chapter 3 for more detail.
2003). Being *adhunik* (modern) and *bikaasit* (developed) is thus an especially contemporary and important aspect of identity for many Nepalis.

The experience of modernity in Nepal is mediated by various axes of social difference such as gender, caste and ethnicity. Claiming a modern identity is associated with the ability to participate in Nepal’s development initiatives, which have historically failed to fully include women, ethnic minorities and low-caste Nepalis. While equally inculcated in the discourse of modernity, a majority of Nepali women have been left out of the promises of development (Ahearn 2001). Specifically, higher education, paid employment and visibility in urban public space, all of which have been touted as signposts of Nepal’s development and modernization, have until quite recently remained overwhelmingly male phenomena.

In Nepal, the radical shifts accompanying globalization, including urbanization and the marketization of the economy, have profoundly upended historically dominant gendered patterns of labor by both pushing and allowing women into the urban public sphere. Such changes are especially visible in Nepal’s largest urban centers, where young working class women from diverse ethnic and caste backgrounds are migrating to find work, but also to stake claim to a modern identity. In the last thirty years especially, women have been making significant inroads in public visibility via paid employment, which has called into question long-held norms about female domesticity and created a sense of unease as to what the role of Nepali women can and should be in modern Nepal. Through an ethnographic case study of one group of women on the forefront of these ongoing shifts—female trekking guides—I explore the emergent contours of gendered modernity in Nepal.

Because of the particularly public nature of their work, female trekking guides are well positioned to speak to working class Nepali women’s position vis à vis development and
modernity. How then do female guides understand and articulate modernity, and their relationship to it? I approach this broader inquiry with three specific questions:

1) In what ways are the changing roles of women in Nepali society, particularly in regard to waged employment, visibility and mobility in the urban public sphere, talked about and understood by my informants?

2) How do female guides leverage their status as wageworkers to create additional decision-making power in their own lives around cessation of education, age of marriage and personal economy, and how is this decision-making articulated as part of a modern identity?

3) What are the particular embodied and linguistic practices female guides use to legitimate their presence in (public) spaces of modernity and address normative concerns about their morality as “public women”?

The Nepali Context

Nepal is a country with a population of around 30 million, about the size and shape of the state of Tennessee. It is landlocked between India and China. From the mid-18th century until 2008, Nepal was ruled by a Hindu monarchy. High-caste hill Hinduism (HCHH) practiced by economic, political and cultural elites in the Kathmandu valley has been the historically dominant socio-cultural ideology in Nepal since its founding as a state in 1769. The Nepali state practiced strict geo-political isolationism from 1850-1950, until a coup in 1951 ushered in an era of increased political and social openness that nevertheless maintained Hindu hegemony. After the 1951 coup, the Nepali monarchy made a concerted effort to court development, especially via international aid and tourism (Whelpton 2005). Throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s, foreign aid
became an increasingly large percentage of Nepal’s GDP as development packages poured in from both individual countries and international bodies like the IMF and World Bank (Tamang 2002b). Despite the ubiquity of official developmentalist discourse, many Nepalis benefited little from foreign aid and were further disenfranchised by the single-party “democracy” sanctioned by the monarch (Whelpton 2005). Tensions soared in the early 1990’s as the majority of Nepalis continued to suffer from deeply entrenched poverty. In 1991 a social movement known as the Janandolan (People’s Movement) successfully pressured the monarchy to institute political reforms meant to foster democratization. These changes were not enough for many radicalized in the reform movement, however, and from 1996 to 2006, Nepal experienced acute social unrest in the form of a Maoist insurgency fought through protracted guerrilla warfare (Shah and Pettigrew 2009). In 2008, the monarchy was dissolved, the Maoists were voted into power and Nepal officially became a secular, multi-party democratic republic. As of May 2015, the Nepali state has yet to ratify a constitution, and dreams of representative democracy remain unfulfilled.

Amongst these political changes, modernization in Nepal has been characterized first, by rapid urbanization and marketization of the economy, and second, by the opening of public space to both political and economic life. In 1952 the number of urban areas in Nepal was recorded at 10; by 2001, there were 58 official urban areas (Government of Nepal 2001). Although the majority of Nepalis still make their livelihoods through agricultural labor, growth in urban residency and employment has dramatically increased since the 1970’s (Ibid.). In fact,

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4 By urbanization I refer to 1) an increase in the total population in existing urban centers as well as a proliferation of new urban centers, 2) a generalized shift to non-agricultural labor and, 3) an increase in both manufacturing labor and tertiary labor/service work.

5 The government of Nepal defines a metropolitan city or Mahanagarpalika as “a municipality with a minimum population size of 300,000, annual revenues of at least Rs. 400 million [approximately 5 million USD given the 2012 exchange average of 82 Rs./1 USD], facilities of electricity, drinking water, communication, paved main and subsidiary roads, provision of specialized health services, essential infrastructure for international sports events, adequate opportunities for higher education in different fields, at least one established university, adequate urban facilities” (Sharma 2012).
although Nepal is the least urbanized country in South Asia, it is also the fastest urbanizing South Asian state, with an annual urban population growth rate of around 6% since 1990 (Muzzini and Aparicio 2014). Accompanying the flow of people into urban areas has been a concomitant proletarianization of the populace as ever increasing numbers of previously agrarian laborers seek work in Nepal’s metropolitan centers and depend on wage labor as their source of daily reproduction.\(^6\) The import and export restrictions, sumptuary laws and substantial infrastructural barriers that dramatically limited free-trade before 1951 have been incrementally eliminated, paving the way for the further expansion of capitalism. Nepal’s new economic openness has spurred ever-increasing monetization of the economy as well as a rapid increase in the availability of imported consumer goods, especially in urban marketplaces (Liechty 2010).

In addition to the dramatic shifts in population density, employment and availability of goods, urban public space has undergone a revolution in meaning. Post 1951, prohibition on public assembly was lifted and for a short time political parties multiplied. Even though the 1960-1990 Panchayat regime (see chapter 3) outlawed all political parties and instituted a single-party democracy, the spirit of public protest could never be fully extinguished. The intermittent demonstrations throughout the 1980’s as well as the successful Janandolan (people’s movement) confirmed the urban public sphere as a legitimate venue for political participation in Nepal.\(^7\) Today, Nepal has a thriving if not contentious civil society rooted in public assembly and public protest.

Though the changes described above have affected all strata of Nepali society, it is undeniable that the individual experiences of urbanization, proletarianization and

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\(^6\) I use the term proletarianization to mean the incorporation of previously agrarian laborers into an urban labor market in which daily reproduction is made possible through waged-labor.

\(^7\) John Whelpton’s (2005) recent monograph on the history of Nepal details the simmering civil unrest throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s and the occasional manifestations of such unrest in the form of public protest.
democratization of the political field have been mediated by aspects of social location like gender, caste, class, ethnicity and geographic origin (Gellner 2007; Shneiderman 2009). In tandem with the expansion of a capitalist economy, core principles of social organization in Nepal including labor, gender, caste and ethnicity are rapidly changing and evolving. Such changes have had serious consequences for women in Nepal, who must navigate unfamiliar social roles.

**Women in Development**

Throughout the *Panchayat* era, the ten-year insurgency, and successive political regimes, the ruling party has always framed itself as the bearer of a modern and developed Nepal. Official state representations of Nepali history promote a linear model of progress, which clearly demarcates an undeveloped past from the developed present and future (Pigg 1993; Ahearn 2001). The mural described in this chapter’s opening vignette is just one example of the frequent deployment of this discourse. In this binary understanding of Nepali history, Nepali women have been associated with the “backward,” domestic and rural vestiges of Nepal’s past, while Nepali men have been associated with the “forward,” urban and capitalist future of modern Nepal.

Within the secular context of the current regime, the state is attempting to embrace a more socially inclusive view of civil society and the public sphere; yet hegemonic understandings of gender and caste persist and are implied in the ranking of particular people as

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8 In the traditional Nepali Hindu caste system, labor was correlated with caste. That is, one’s labor almost invariably marked one’s caste and one’s caste determined one’s occupation. For example, the surname ‘kami’ denotes a low-caste, but also means ‘blacksmith.’ The idea of caste-less occupations is thus an important break in the historical labor schema used to organize everyday life.

9 Caste and ethnicity are separate axis of social difference, however, they have mutually informed each other for centuries in the hierarchical organization of Nepali communities. See also Höefer (2004) for a detailed discussion of the history and intersection of caste and ethnicity in Nepal.

10 As I discuss in detail further on ‘women in Nepal’ are a profoundly diverse group who experience development, modernity, urbanization etc… through the lens of their social location.
stubbornly backward. For example, in 2007, in a forward to Nepal’s 11th Five Year Plan, then prime-minister G.P. Koirala stated:\footnote{Five Year Plans are the definitive state-level policy papers used to guide Nepal’s development trajectory and are akin to a “State of the Union” address. They represent an especially important indicator of state discourse.}

Fifty years of planned development have been completed in Nepal. Although ten periodic plans have been implemented during this period, many aspects of economic and social sectors have still remained backward from the perspective of development. Due to reasons like limited availability of resources, thirty years of restrictive political environment and a decade long conflict, the development process has not been able to move ahead at the expected speed. (Government of Nepal 2007: 3)

Koirala’s intention was presumably to exhort continued effort in bringing more Nepalis “ahead” or forward, yet these remarks leave little doubt that some Nepali citizens remain “backward.” A later excerpt from the same Five Year Plan notes, “substantial change in the status of women in the socially and economically backward groups and rural areas is yet to be achieved” (2007: 100). Such depictions, though designed to trouble gender inequity, lend force to the legitimacy of gendered understandings of space that place women “inside” and “behind.” Thus, according to the state, Nepali women bear the stigma of lingering backwardness. At the same time, the state also asserts that such backwardness can be addressed and alleviated through continued development and modernization efforts.

The contradiction between state and NGO produced developmentalist discourse that encourages women to actively participate in modern Nepal and the day-to-day marginalization women experience within social institutions as personal as the family and as political as the parliament is quite profound. As discussed in more detail in chapter 4, the historically dominant norms of high-caste Hinduism constitute a “state patriarchy,” that subtly and not so subtly
excludes women from full participation in public life and full enfranchisement as Nepali citizens (Tamang 2001). For example, as recently as 2006, Nepali women were only allowed to apply for citizenship with the permission of their husbands or fathers and were not granted the right to pass citizenship to their offspring. In 2006, citizenship through the maternal line was legalized but, as of the writing of this dissertation, a new law is being considered that would rescind this newly gained right. In another example, the 2014 Constituent Assembly (CA)–the group charged with drafting Nepal’s new constitution–is 70% male. Further, no women hold the popularly elected and highly influential positions of political party spokesmen for any of the political parties within the CA. In the face of such institutionalized marginalization, the message that women have an equal share in Nepal’s modernity rings false. Hindu norms promoting women’s role as primarily domestic still hold immense importance in popularly held constructions of ideal Nepali femininity. While Nepali women consistently receive the message that they should come “forward” into the public spaces of modern Nepal, they also face conflicting messages about how such visibility and mobility will be received.

Which Nepali Women?

Despite inconsistent messages about the place of women in modern Nepal young, urban-dwelling, working class women are experimenting with what being modern might actually entail. Whether it is adopting new ideas about the meaning(s) of love and marriage (Ahearn 2001), opting to wear “western-style” clothing (Liechty 2010), or choosing to work as a trekking guide, seemingly idiosyncratic behaviors and decisions are in fact part of a constrained vocabulary of expression available to (some) Nepali women based on emergent local and trans-national forces.

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12 Nepal requires the Constituent Assembly to have 30% female representation, thus the percentage of women actually popularly elected to positions (versus appointed) is much lower at 2% (Ekantipur 2014).
Female trekking guides are part of a growing vanguard of women redefining the very boundaries of what it means to be young, Nepali and female. My informants are operating in a moment of historical flux, where the available options and boundaries are being continually challenged and redrawn. However, the field of possibility is always already constrained by multiple and intersecting institutions, including family, community, state and donor agency development programs, as well as Nepal’s position as a peripheral player in a world economy.¹³

As briefly alluded to earlier, the term “Nepali women” is of course just as problematic and indeed nonsensical as the homogenizing term “American women.” Women in Nepal are not a monolith and I do not mean to undermine the radical diversity that exists between them. This diversity includes not only caste, but also ethnic, linguistic, religious and increasingly, class difference. However, as I explicate in chapter 5, Nepali women do share similar exposure to “structures of feeling” and social mores around proper female behavior (Williams 1977). The specific manifestations of these norms vary within communities, families and individuals, but the shared concerns with respectability are reflected in the responses of informants. In particular, the qualities of propriety, modesty, demureness and compliance appear to be trans-caste and trans-ethnic traits of the ideal Nepali women.

Young and Urban

In this dissertation I use several adjectives to bracket the statements I make about the experiences of gendered modernity in Nepal. My research is about a particular generation of women who occupy a particular socio-economic stratum and thus share some common experiences in spite of the multiple dimensions of identity they do not share and which

¹³ See chapter 2 and chapter 3 for a discussion of how Nepal’s position as a less industrialized nation heavily dependent on foreign aid has influenced the dominant discourse on modernity and development, including women’s role in development.
necessarily color their experience of being modern in Nepal. If Nepali women cannot be discussed as a monolithic category, which women am I discussing, and how can claims about these women be made?

When I invoke the category “young Nepali women” I am primarily referring to women under 35. Although there is some arbitrariness in such a decision, what is important about this age range is that those under 35 experienced the majority of their schooling after the *Janandolan* (People’s Movement) of 1990, which successfully lobbied the monarchy to allow multi-party democracy and loosen restrictions on public assembly for political causes. The People’s Movement catalyzed a new conception of a modern Nepal as synonymous with a democratic Nepal and a new understanding of “citizen” as a public identity.\(^\text{14}\) The *Janandolan* gave new importance to public space as a locus of progress and democratization. To be a young, Nepali women in these terms is to have grown up hearing the discourse of *loktantra* (democracy), *swatantrata* (freedom), and *adhikaar* (rights), and to have experienced the revolutionizing of public space in Nepal as a legitimate place of social and political protest.\(^\text{15}\)

The *Janandolan*’s battle cry of *loktantra* and *swatantrata* catalyzed more than simple enfranchisement. In many respects the *Janandolan* lead to the expansion of modernity itself. In response to the civil unrest, the state made a public commitment to expanding Nepal’s modernity projects–as synonymous with development–beyond the Kathmandu Valley. After 1990, Nepal saw the building of massive infrastructure projects, an increased shift from agrarian barter economies to capitalistic forms of consumption, and sustained campaigns to build and staff

\(^{14}\) A democratic Nepal did not necessarily mean a non-monarchal Nepal for many Nepalis, as is evidenced by the 18 additional years of monarchal rule experienced in the country post- *Janandolan*. The *Janandolan* did not call for the overthrow of the monarchy–whose members were historically considered living Hindu gods–rather it called for a less absolutist monarchy.

\(^{15}\) Although *loktantra* and *swatantrata* are used, “democracy” and “freedom” are also frequently used as borrowed English words.
primary schools in even the most remote parts of Nepal. For my informants, such changes link the concepts of development and democracy to education, western consumer culture, and free movement of goods and people in a complex web of signification. Whether in agreement or not with the ideas promulgated in the *Janandolan*\(^\text{16}\), young Nepali women as defined herein were certainly exposed to them in a way previous generations were not.\(^\text{17}\)

A further clarifying question remains: why study the presence of young Nepali women in the *urban* public sphere to get at the relationship between gender and modernity in Nepal? It is true that most Nepalis live in rural areas and are occupied in subsistence agriculture (NLSS 2011). It is also true that rural communities have their own thriving public spheres, in which women are variously able to participate (Bennett 1983; Cameron 1998). I focus on the urban public sphere, hereafter referred to as the public sphere, for several reasons. First, urbanization is spreading and an ever-increasing number of Nepalis will experience urban livelihoods as opposed to primarily rural and agrarian livelihoods. Understanding gender dynamics within the urban setting is an important area of study as these demographic trends continue. Second, the state sanctioned discourse of modernity has emanated from Nepal’s urban centers and has emphasized the trappings of urbanization as equivalent to modernization (e.g. infrastructural projects, higher education, marketization). Although women’s experiences in the rural public sphere are part of how gendered modernity is variously experienced in Nepal, the idea of being *bikaasit* (developed), as present in state discourse, popular media, and the imagination of my research participants is closely tied to urban life. Situating my research in an urban context

\(^{16}\) Most Nepalis are quite supportive of the ideals of the *Janandolan* and see it as a positive step in Nepal’s history of democratization. Views toward the Maoist insurgency and dissolution of the monarchy are much more ambivalent and complex.

\(^{17}\) It is important to note that across regions, caste and class, and even in quite remote and impoverished areas, such discourses of democracy, freedom and public protest were available and circulating via Nepal’s extensive radio broadcast network. Government and non-government radio broadcasts became widely available in the mid 1970’s, much earlier than television, movie theatres and even popular print media entered the market (Liechty 2003).
allows me to ask women at the heart of modernity discourse how they see themselves as meaningfully participating in modernity or not.

*Working Class Women*

For 200 years Nepal’s populace was governed according to the Hindu caste system (Whelpton 2005). The emergence of class stratification in Nepal has presented opportunities to undermine caste-based systems of stratification but has also reified existing inequality by exacerbating hierarchies of social prestige with hierarchies of economic status. The monetized economy provides more opportunity for upward and downward class mobility in spite of caste, but there remains a strong relationship between the ascribed status of caste and the achieved status of socio-economic class (Liechty 2003). High-caste populations have historically had much greater access to the positions of power and tangible resources that have allowed them to remain elite within the class system, while low-caste populations are disproportionally poor (NLSS 2011).

To give further shape to the class system in Nepal I use a Bourdieusian approach in associating class with a particular habitus, or embodied competence. Bourdieu (1984) defines habitus as “the internalized form of the class condition and the conditionings it entails” (101). Habitus includes not only the sensibilities and comportment of a particular group of people, but their collective access to different forms of capital, including economic, educational, cultural/social and political. Previous scholars of Nepal have also used habitus to flesh out the emergent class system. For example, Mark Liechty (2010) describes Nepal’s fledgling middle

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18 Not surprisingly, ethnic minorities resisted such governance to varying degrees and there is argument about the extent to which the Hindu caste-system was ever followed within particular communities and regions. Nevertheless, official state-level governance operated via Hindu-caste ideology.

19 See chapter 3 for an outline of the caste system in Nepal.
class as defined in part by its consumptive patterns. Though the tastes of the urban middle class are varied, Liechty (2003) identifies a “consumerist subjectivity” that emphasizes public consumption of commodities such as apparel, home appliances and private-school education associated with transnational cosmopolitanism (55). Liechty argues that such consumption choices are how the middle class distinguish and perpetuate themselves by investing in particular products that confer cultural capital across generations.

Below Nepal’s urban middle class is the working class and below that still are the urban poor. I focus here on the working class and in particular, working class women. Although I speak about “working class women,” this population is especially difficult to locate in class terms. The women I discuss are young and mobile in both a physical and economic sense. They are, above all, aspirational in that they hope to become part of the stable middle class, yet at present lack the economic and cultural capital to conform to the middle class habitus described by Liechty (2003). To give a better sense of the day-to-day reality of young, working class women in urban Nepal, below I sketch an outline of the working class habitus exemplified by my female trekking guide informants.

A defining characteristic of the informants is that they are the first women in their family to access any formal education. Importantly, the majority attended school through Plus 2, or the equivalent of 11th-12th grade, which is considered a post-high school degree. In Nepal, 1st grade through 5th grade is primary school; 6th-10th grade is considered secondary school. Completion of 11th-12th grade or “Plus 2” is considered a higher education degree, akin to an Associate’s degree in the United States. Completing Plus 2 is a benchmark academic achievement that signals suitability for skilled-work. The Plus 2 degree is a requirement for participation in any
professional occupation and demonstrates a significant commitment to educational attainment in a country where only 8% of school-aged children complete this credential (NLSS 2011).

Although they have completed Plus 2, my informants attended government-funded schools rather than the preferred but more expensive private schools. For female guides, the difference between attending a government or private school matters because, as I was told over and over again, the government schools had poorly trained teachers who could not transmit the important skill of English fluency. Many guides discuss the ability to speak English as a particularly valuable type of cultural capital that itself opened up additional avenues for accumulating other kinds of capital, cultural, economic or otherwise. The ability to speak some English marks them as having reached a higher level of educational attainment than most of Nepal’s subsistence peasantry, but their low fluency speaks to their working class rather than middle class background.

Another commonly held trait of informants is that they are the first generation in their respective families to economically subsist through paid employment rather than agricultural labor. Previous to their generation the vast majority of Nepalis were agrarian laborers, and women rarely participated in the cash economy or migrated for labor. Participation in waged-labor marks an especially significant change as this livelihood transition is framed in development discourse as a shift from the proverbial peasant targeted in Nepal’s development initiatives to the modern citizen productively earning in a monetized economy (Pigg 1992). The significance of this transition is particularly apparent when one considers that informants (and many other Nepalis) use the term gau (village) as a derogatory moniker to describe a person who

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20 With the notable exception of women from particular ethnic and caste communities such as Tamang (March 2002), Sherpa (Ortner 2001) and Dalit (Cameron 1998), which have a history of women actively participating in trade and commerce, Nepali women’s participation in the labor force has been limited. As discussed in further detail in chapter 3, dominant social norms about women’s domestic role have historically kept women from participating in the cash economy or doing labor outside of domestic agrarian tasks.
has not shed the (negative) habitus of a rural livelihood. Working as a wage laborer encompasses varying lifestyle changes including buying rather than growing the bulk of one’s own food, and following a bureaucratic rather than seasonal schedule. The adoption of these embodied competencies constitutes the radical changes in day-to-day life on which their urban working class habitus is predicated.

In addition to sharing the above particulars of working class habitus, my informants have in common some other notable characteristics. First, they are part of the vast stream of internal migrants from rural areas. They have come to an urban area to find paid employment based on a variety of push and pull factors that have displaced them from traditional agrarian labor. Their migration is significant in shaping their class position because they come to the city with few resources besides their eagerness to find work. That is, they have left rural areas with little capital and hope to parlay their low to mid-level education into semi-skilled employment in the tertiary/service sector. Second, as internal migrants, they live outside of their natal family home and pay rent for their housing. Many are living together with friends or relatives in small, shared apartments.21 Pooling multiple incomes to afford a decent apartment marks them as above the urban poor relegated to slums, but it also evidences their financial insecurity. Third, the informants have access to some but not all urban amenities. They live in apartments with electricity, but five or six individuals may share a small one-room flat and plumbing may be limited to a single outdoor tap shared amongst many tenants. As Liechty has pointed out (2010), middle class consumption patterns in urban Nepal necessitate the purchase of commodities such as refrigerators and television sets that working class individuals simply cannot afford. Female

21 Rural to urban migration, living outside the natal home and pooling income to rent an apartment are characteristics of urban working class men and women. Yet, as I go on to show in the following chapters, especially chapters 5, 6, and 7, these traits of working class habitus have gendered meanings that differ significantly for men and women. For example, young men leaving the home for wage work in the city has a long celebrated history in Nepal, for women, doing the same is not only new, but potentially ruinous to a woman’s reputation.
guides can afford to purchase a cheap pair of jeans, but they cannot afford a pair of Levis, and they certainly cannot afford a washing machine to clean them. Finally, and relatedly, they lack the cultural and economic capital to work in more respectable white-collar jobs, which would necessitate, above all else, higher command of English. The jobs they hold are a step above manual labor, but their wages remain barely sufficient to meet the demands of working class respectability.

The characteristics discussed above define a cohort of aspirational female laborers who work in less prestigious occupations: waitresses, tuk-tuk drivers\textsuperscript{22}, shop girls, day-time security personnel, airline hostesses, traffic cops, beauty technicians and, the subjects of this dissertation, trekking guides. What these jobs have in common is a required mid-level education and a willingness to work in the public sphere of day-to-day commerce. The publicness of these jobs—the fact that they take place in public rather than within an office or closed-to-the-public organization—is what gives them a “tinge of immorality” and makes them less desirable to more affluent and more highly educated women (Liechty 2010: 79). For women who lack the economic and cultural capital to get ideal middle class jobs such as teacher, social worker or banker, working class jobs offer an opportunity to cash in on some of the promises of modernity. Although fully aware of the negative moral connotations of working so publicly, few viable alternatives are available to these women who imagine themselves as modern subjects eager to participate in a new Nepal.\textsuperscript{23}

Working class women are on the cusp of upward mobility, yet precariously close to becoming the urban poor. How these women navigate Nepal’s changing social, economic and political landscape through entering the wage labor market and claiming space in the urban

\textsuperscript{22} Tuk-Tuks are small electric rickshaws used in large cities as alternatives to buses or cabs.

\textsuperscript{23} See chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of the problem of being a woman in public.
public sphere is intimately bound up with emergent understandings of the relationship between gender and modernity. As part of this complex dynamic, female trekking guides are an important source of information about the politics of gender and development in Nepal.

**Female Trekking Guides**

Concomitant with broad socio-economic shifts, Nepal, like many other countries in the global South, has sought to promote development within its borders through the implementation of a strong tourism industry (Adams 1995; Nepal 2007). This strategy makes sense given that transnational bodies such as the IMF and World Bank have aggressively touted tourism as a primary means to create development in the so-called developing world (Scheyvens 2002). Even as Nepal has undergone massive political change the state remains resolutely committed to development via tourism (Croes 2007). Trekking tourism has been at the center of many national tourism initiatives (Ortner 2001). Since the 1970’s a steady stream of tourists have arrived seeking a world-class trekking experience in the fabled Himalayas. Foreign tourists have typically relied on male porters and guides to organize and lead their trekking expeditions. However, in the early 1990’s, the first Nepali female guides began to appear. During Nepal’s biannual tourist season (fall and spring) female guides lead trips as short as one day and as long as 40 days for foreign tourists. These expeditions involve trekking from one lodge or campsite to the next while facilitating the safe journey of their client.

Female trekking guides are well aware of the state’s framing of tourism as a boon to Nepal’s economic growth. Tourism is understood as an essential *generator* of modernity because of tourism’s widely assumed ability to precipitate capitalist enterprise and infrastructure development. For example, a recent and well-publicized announcement from the Tourism
Ministry touted the statistic that “one job was generated for every six tourist visits” (Government of Nepal 2014). Such headlines cement the association of tourism and tourism workers with development and modernization. Cognizant of their role in the state’s larger development via tourism initiatives, informants are especially well-poised to speak about their labor in the context of Nepal’s modernity projects.

Being a trekking guide is a particularly public form of waged-work. As such, the informants provide a revealing case of how working class women articulate and manage their identity as public women. Trekking guides heightened visibility is multiple. First, as mentioned, tourism has been highly publicized as a pillar of Nepal’s development program. Tourism workers are thus symbols of modernization efforts unlike other working class positions. Second, in performing their work they are necessarily publicly visible, as they guide clients through foreign terrain. Third, the nature of the work also requires direct interaction with foreigners, especially westerners. Contact with non-Nepalis increases the public nature of their work by transgressing norms about women’s domestic role on an international scale. Despite these distinct features I do not describe female trekking guides as a wholly unique case. Rather, I argue that guides share many commonalities with other working class women but that the extremity of their public position, and their location at the center of modernization efforts, makes their navigation of gendered social change hyper visible. Guides’ experiences act as a magnifying glass of sorts through which one can view working class women’s experiences of modernity in urban Nepal.

Although the overt publicness of their work is unusual, the experiences of female trekking guides resonate with other young, working class women migrating to urban zones in search of education, employment, and respectability as modern citizens. Affluent and highly
educated women have, at least since 1951, been able to use their economic and cultural capital to secure respectable bureaucratic jobs if willing and able to work. Emergent opportunity structures and shifting norms surrounding women’s wage labor are expanding the boundaries of what respectable women’s work encompasses. Through their new roles as wage laborers, female guides both engage with globalization and modernity and destabilize gendered conceptions of public and private space. Like other young, urban, working class women, my informants are attempting to craft a socially respectable identity even as they forward a new understanding of what being a respectable Nepali woman entails. In the chapters that follow I do not claim that female trekking guides are representative of all Nepali women. However, the data collected form a snapshot of women’s working class livelihoods, which can tell the reader something about important and ongoing shifts in Nepal’s gender regime(s) in the larger context of development and modernity.

**Project Significance and Theoretical Framework**

This research project has two ambitions. First, I hope to elucidate and contextualize the fascinating life stories of a group of women pioneering new spaces of social and economic productivity. Second, I hope to show that these women’s lives are emblematic of intense processes of social change that are ongoing in Nepal, in particular, women’s engagement with modernity through new roles in the urban public sphere. In this section I elaborate on the theoretical framework I use to understand how female guides make sense of themselves as modern individuals. In particular I look at how three theoretical concepts—modernity, habitus and

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24 Previous to 1951, during the dual rule of the Rana prime ministers and the Shah kings, Rana women are said to have been particularly influential in all matters of governance (Whelpton 2005).
25 High-caste women have historically avoided any labor outside the house (Cameron 1998). As in many South Asian societies, women’s ability to not work is a sign of a household’s prosperity and high status (Chakrabarty 2009).
structures of feeling—help answer the opening question: for working class women in urban Nepal, what does it mean to “be” modern?

*Modernity and the Imagination*

I have already noted that in Nepal’s state discourse, modernity continues to be linked with universal education, infrastructural development, and increased urbanization and marketization. Explicit in this discourse is the push for capitalist expansion into the everyday lives of more and more Nepalis. Before 1951 the relationship between most Nepalis and global capitalism remained extremely regulated and defined by a few members of the Nepali state. Today, there are few areas of Nepal that have not been incorporated into a monetized economy. This is not to imply that Nepal has been “pre-capitalist” and simply waiting to evolve into a modern capitalist phase. While it is true that promotion of modernity discourse by the state occurred in tandem with the expansion of capitalist markets into rural regions, urbanization and democratization, I do not frame this transition as some sort of “penetration” of capital (Chakrabarty 2009: 95).

As a counter to the penetration of capital thesis, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) has written persuasively on the subject of modernity in South Asia. The prevailing trend has been for academic treatments of political modernity in South Asia to conceptualize modernity as singular and progressive, that is, as a moment to be achieved by individual states once pre-modern (non-capitalist) stages were successfully shed. Chakrabarty notes that in much Western social science, “it was through recourse to some version of a stagist theory of history…that European political and social thought made room for the political modernity of the subaltern classes” (2009: 9). Chakrabarty attempts to “provincialize,” or decenter this Eurocentric and ultimately racist theory
of modernity. In the discussions of modernity and development in Nepal that follow, I agree with Chakrabarty’s insistence on the “heterotemporality” of modernity or, a “now” that is “irreducibly not-one” (2009: 249).

This dissertation avoids placing Nepal in the “global waiting room of development”, while simultaneously acknowledging that shifts associated with globalization have amounted to a sea change in daily life for the majority of the populace (Chakrabarty 2009: 8). As Chakrabarty notes, ethnographies such as this one would do well to avoid historicism–labeling particular beliefs and practices of the “subaltern” as anachronistic or relics of the pre-modern past. For example, as I elaborate upon in chapter 7, the modern subjectivities that female guides articulate do not “reproduce the autonomous ‘individual’ of European political thought as a figure of its own desire” (Chakrabarty 2009: 218). Yet, this is not because female guides have a false conscious or have not fully embraced modernity. Instead, their understanding of modernity stems from a conception of agency and personal freedom that differs from Western individualism in its accommodation of priorities other than the self (Mahmood 2011). Modernity as experienced by Nepal’s diverse population neither mimics, nor follows primarily from a desire to replicate, modernity in the West.

The use of modernity as a productive theoretical framework has produced vigorous debate (Thomassen 2012). The thrust of the debate has asked whether ethnographers should avoid situating their research in the context of modernity (Englund and Leach 2000) or embrace modernity as a framing principle (Kahn 2001). Although I share this broader concern with the usefulness of modernity, Bhambra (2007, 2011), in agreement with Chakrabarty (2009), has rightly identified the Eurocentric bias at the heart of this discussion, which tends to assume that scholars alone are qualified to choose how contemporary social worlds can or should be
discussed (Eisenstadt 2000). Osella and Osella (2006) offer an intriguing alternative to this problematic by arguing that regardless of what modernity “is,” it remains a powerful force in shaping people’s behavior. Thus, the task becomes one of identifying how informants imagine and articulate modernity and how they accommodate this conceptualization in a way that iteratively constructs the boundaries of modernity in the process.

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai (1991) provides a template of how this might be carried out in the context of ethnography. He writes, “ethnography must redefine itself as that practice of representation that illuminates the power of large-scale, imagined life possibilities over specific life trajectories” (1991: 55). Taking this injunction seriously, I draw on Appadurai’s (1991) explication of the imagination as “a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (1991: 4). Rather than defining modernity as a particular constellation of things, and then assessing whether or not young wage earning Nepali women are commensurate with this definition, I attempt to understand the meaning of modernity as it emerges from my informants’ experiences and imaginations.

What I mean by the imaginations of my informants needs a bit of further clarification. Appadurai writes, “the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility” (31). This definition describes the type of imaginative “work” female guides do as they construct modern subjectivities through discourse and comportment within the limits of their particular social location.²⁶ It is through the imaginations of my informants that modernity is understood and

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²⁶ As chapters 5-7 demonstrate, the imagination is a critical part of the experience(s) of modernity for the informants of this research. However, Appadurai’s framework fails to adequately account for an important aspect of
lived. Modernity is a central term of reference through which female guides make sense of themselves and the world around them. For this reason, I also use modernity as a signifier with the explicit acknowledgement of the transitory and flexible nature of what is being signified.

Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) uses the term habitus to help better understand what makes class a social phenomenon outside of a definition based on ownership of the means of production or annual income. In Bourdieu’s conceptualization, habitus is a set of “corporeal dispositions and cognitive templates” shared in common by groups of the same class (King 2000). Habitus is a particularly useful term for understanding the shared aspirations, material preferences and moral schema of my working class informants. However, habitus has faced two important criticisms that threaten to undermine the utility of the term in the context of an ethnography such as this. First, is the critique of its declining relevancy in an age of globalization. For example, Appadurai (1991) argues that through a process of deterritorialization of individuals, knowledge, culture and language from a bounded state, habitus becomes less powerful in shaping how people make class distinctions. Speaking from this stance Appadurai writes, “culture becomes less what Pierre Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation, the latter often to multiple and spatially dislocated audiences” (1991: 44). Appadurai’s point is well taken that diaspora mediates new forms of global culture, but habitus has not lost analytic strength simply my informant’s experience. Appadurai (1991) labels himself as postnational and does not assume the salience of the nation state. It is true that the nation state may indeed be less powerful in an age of late capitalism. However, the Nepali state continues to exert immense influence on its populace and in doing so, shape the “defined fields of possibility” through which informants experience modernity (1991: 31). As an example, current laws in Nepal prohibit women under 30 from migrating to Gulf countries for labor without the permission of her husband or father. The patriarchal rationale of this law cannot be interpreted as anything but the state intervening on the possible modernities of my informants. The role of the state is still quite salient.
because there are some arenas in which markers of territorially defined class have been diluted over transnational expanses. In fact, the very things Appadurai brings forward as examples of the “the possible lives that many persons are today able to envision” deeply implicate a particular habitus (1991: 48).

Globalization has not undermined the relevance of class habitus in Nepal; in fact, it has given this term new legitimacy as the transition from a previously insular, caste-based, semi-feudal state to a capitalist one has precipitated a class system with new forms of comportment and consumption-based stratification. Particular ways of living, including the way things are thought about, spoken about, and the tangible ways in which things are done communicate class status in Nepal. Habitus provides a useful tool to look at class as a relatively new mechanism of social organization in Nepal. For example, Ahearn’s (2001) ethnography of love-letter writing in a rural Nepali township offers one example of applying habitus to a study of modernity by focusing on the material practices her informants use to assert their modern selves. Ahearn demonstrates how particular social practices such as letter writing reflect her informants’ broader concerns with cultivating an identity as modern and developed young women. Ahearn uses the tangible experiences of her interlocutors and the habitus they express through their written and corporeal undertakings of love and marriage to define modernity as a lived experience.

Female trekking guides are deeply aware of and in many cases quite invested in their working class habitus. In chapter 6, I show how working class habitus is central to female trekking guides’ sense of self. The clothes they buy, the careers they aspire to and the types of cultural and educational capital they invest in all implicate a classed and gendered ways of approaching modernity. Habitus helps uncover what it means to “be” modern for urban working class Nepali woman by turning attention to the subtle details of everyday living. Further, by
focusing on the habitus of my informants I can consider modernity via how it is understood and done by my informants, without trying to define its parameters.

A second critique of habitus is that, despite Bourdieu’s stated goal of challenging structuralist theories of culture, the term inadvertently prompts a return to objectivism. King (2000) argues that in much of his writing Bourdieu constructs habitus as externally imposed upon unknowing individuals whose behavior is thus over-determined by structure. This reading of Bourdieu makes sense given quotations such as, “the principal division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of the internalization of the division of social classes,” which seem to leave little room for social change or human agency (Bourdieu 1984:70 qtd. in King 2000: 423). Using such excerpts as evidence, King (2000) argues that “habitus is derived directly from the socioeconomic or structural position in which individuals find themselves,” (423). In other words, Bourdieu’s habitus assumes structural determinism. If habitus did indeed leave little room for social change or denied the social embeddedness of structures, it would not be a useful term for discussing the livelihoods of my informants. However, King’s critique of habitus overlooks Bourdieu’s repeated attempts to clarify his position through ethnographic example. For instance, in one of his last publications Bourdieu (2000) wrote about the usefulness of habitus in understanding “historical acceleration,” or the rapid shift from pre-capitalist to capitalist economy experienced in much of the global South (18). Bourdieu (2000) notes that the shifts in habitus accompanying historical acceleration are not in fact imposed from above; rather, they develop organically within communities through a process of amalgamation of new and old practices, values and beliefs. In this rendering of habitus, Bourdieu clearly suggests a less structurally-determined concept than King implies. Although habitus may sometimes suffer from what Ortner (2005) calls “heavy structural
determinism,” it can also be deployed in ways that leave more room for the flexibility of social organization and the play of individual subjectivities (33). Blommaert (2005) notes, “habitus is durable not static,” and it is with this understanding that I engage habitus (222).

I define habitus as a persistent yet flexible assemblage of dispositions and behaviors that my informants engage as part of their working class subjectivity. Class habitus is particularly important to my informants as women navigating “historical acceleration.” In his own ethnography of rapid social change in Kabyle society, Bourdieu (2000) notes, “entry into the urban world and into the economic economy brought about by wage labor necessitates a decisive break,” and “presupposes and effects a very deep transformation of the most fundamental dispositions” (27). This description is quite relevant to the transformations occurring for my own informants who are searching for ways to define themselves within new social structures. Their working class habitus—whether intentionally fashioned or not—provides a scaffolding through which female guides construct a solid sense of self in a shifting social context.

Structures of Feeling

To contextualize the lives of my research participants within new understandings of gender and modernity I also draw on Raymond Williams’ (1977) term “structure of feeling.” Williams describes a “structure of feeling” as “a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating” (1977: 132). A structure of feeling encompasses the texture of everyday life including how concepts like gender, labor and modernity are understood and thought about. Structures of feeling impart a sense of the day-to-day, taken-for-granted truth about the way things are, yet they are intrinsically impermanent and subject to change. Williams originally used the term to
talk about collective shifts in aesthetics but realized the term had broader applicability to shifts on the scale of social order and culture. Williams also recognized that an understanding of social change must consider how hegemony functions to limit such change. Importantly, structures of feeling accommodate subjective elements of the social experience—anxieties, hopes, anticipation and revulsion—into an understanding of collective social change (Nenga 2003). The desires and fears of my informants, their subjectivities, constitute (in part) a new structure of feeling about women’s role in modern Nepal. Simultaneously, these desires and fears occur in the context of Hindu hegemony that shapes the realm of possibility for female guides.

My informants live within hegemonic understandings of class habitus, caste, gender, public space etc. However, as structures of feeling evidence, “any lived hegemony is always by definition dominant, it is never total or exclusive” (Ahearn 2001: 52). For example, Ahearn (2001) shows that changing structures of feeling about gender and literacy in Nepal influence young, rural, high-caste women’s decision to pursue schooling in spite of hegemonic norms that have historically disapproved female education. In my own field site, new ways of thinking and talking about women in the urban public sphere signal new structures of feeling and “qualitative changes in the way people experience and interpret events,” such as the entrance of women into the wage labor economy (Ahearn 2001: 52). As Ahearn suggests, structures of feeling are necessarily fluid as they accommodate and carry forward shifts in how social life is collectively thought about and felt. According to Williams (1977), structures of feeling are not mutually exclusive, that is, multiple structures of feeling may overlap and may even be at odds. In Williams’ concept then, there is often a dominant structure of feeling representing hegemonic ways of understanding as well as emergent counter-narratives. In Ahearn’s ethnography, as in my own, one dominant structure of feeling is HCHH gender ideology, while emergent structures
of feeling can be identified in the hopes and desires articulated by our young female informants.

The “imagined modernities,” of my informants— the sense of modernity as encompassing a particular type of bikaasit (developed) social life—is a structure of feeling that female guides engage with, even as other dominant structures of feeling about gender, class and being properly Nepali structure the field of available options (Appadurai 1991). The individual subjectivities and “specific desires and intentions” of young working class women are both bracketed by and constitutive of structures of feeling (Ortner 2003: 34). In this sense, a “class-based structure of feeling is expressed through individual class subjectivities” (Nenga 2003: 171). Ortner (2003) writes, “subjectivity as the basis of ‘agency’, [is] a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. Agency is not some natural or originary will; it takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thought, and meaning” (34). Ortner notes that she uses the term “matrix of subjectivity,” as a synonym for structure of feeling in order to call more attention to the power of emotion and identity in fomenting new ways of thinking about social life and the self. As Ortner points out, structures of feeling are iteratively informed by individual subjectivities. The ideas, aspirations and beliefs perceived as individual and idiosyncratic are in fact, part of a collective process of change that sets new boundaries for fundamental categories of social organization.

I engage structures of feeling and habitus as complementary concepts that mutually support the core inquiry of this dissertation: what does it mean to “be” modern for young working class women in urban Nepal? While structures of feeling encompass emergent ways of thinking and feeling about social life, habitus implies particular ways of being that signify social status. In his analysis of working class subjectivities in the United Kingdom, Kirk (2006) defines
habitus as “accepted ways of going about things,” whereas structures of feeling are “shared meanings and feelings at the level of lived experience” (8). Kirk explains, “Williams's concept structure of feeling has a greater capacity to flag up the cognitive dimensions of feeling than does Bourdieu's notion of habitus” (2006: 2). What Kirk demonstrates is that structures of feeling are less materially articulated than habitus and encompass ways of thinking and knowing about social life that may or may not yet have found clear expression. Habitus has an embodied component, which operates along shared understandings of proper comportment that are finely attuned to distinctions in social class.

Both structure of feeling and habitus have useful explanatory power for my project. In chapter 5 I describe a new structure of feeling around women’s mobility and public visibility that has important implications for how my informants understand themselves as modern subjects. In chapters 6 and 7 I elaborate on the day-to-day material practices that mark my informants as working class. Ahearn (2001) points toward the dialogue between the two concepts when she states that structures of feeling “are subtle but nonetheless strong enough to exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and action” (53). The “experience and action” that Ahearn alludes to is the everyday way people go about living, dressing, speaking and being in space, in other words, their habitus. Following Ahearn, in my own research, structures of feeling encompass shared ideas, values and beliefs about social organization while habitus is the embodied competencies used to navigate social interaction. Through their comportment, speech and public visibility, my informants embody a working class habitus; through their collective sensibilities they participate in a new structure of feeling circulating about the “place” of women in contemporary Nepal.
My informants articulate an emergent structure of feeling that puts forward women’s equal participation in the public sphere. The acceptability of women’s public visibility and mobility is gaining momentum, and in the process is opening up the possibility of new subjectivities and a new female working class habitus. Concurrently, historically dominant ideas about women’s domestic role remain strong. Female guides recognize that as women with high public visibility they still face substantial social disapproval. Yet, the presumption of being a morally suspect public woman is also countered. While guides acknowledge the hardships of waged-labor in the urban public sphere, they also note with excitement the possible futures and the imagined modernities such labor makes possible.

**Conclusion and Chapter Outline**

This project examines modernity as imagined, articulated and embodied by young, working class women navigating urban public spaces and the politics of development in Nepal. In the introduction to this chapter I describe a highly visible public mural that starkly contrasts one version of Nepali womanhood against another. A second vignette will illuminate why, as I suggest earlier, the dichotomy between being a modern versus non-modern woman is neither as clear-cut nor as easily navigated as the mural suggests.

Swasta Rawal, a 28 year old Chettri woman had been guiding for 5 years when we met through a mutual acquaintance. Swasta came from a very small village in Western Nepal and was one of the few guides who had not finished her Plus 2 (approximately high school) level

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27 All names are pseudonyms. First names were chosen by my informants and last names are kept in orginal. Last names are important identity markers in Nepal as caste and ethnic background is usually easily derived from a last name. For example, those from the Rai ethnic group generally have the last name Rai.

28 See chapter 3 for a more detailed description of the caste system in Nepal. Chettri is a high-caste, although in Swasta’s case, her family’s caste does not correlate with a similarly high-class status. Throughout the dissertation I include pseudonyms, age and caste/ethnic background when quoting or providing anecdotes about specific informants. The purpose of including this information is to show readers that across caste and ethnic differences, there are commonalities of experience.
education. Swasta was confident, brash, very quick to laugh and gregarious. When Swasta spoke, she gesticulated animatedly and was happy to give anyone a withering look when they said something she disagreed with. Although Swasta often lamented her lack of formal education, it certainly did not stop her from being articulate and well-respected by her peers.

A month after I met Swasta she purchased a laptop. She had saved for one and a half years to afford the price of approximately $300 USD. This was an enormous investment, considering her monthly rent was $30 USD. Four months after her purchase she was still having trouble using some of the basic applications. I started meeting with Swasta weekly for computer lessons and on our third session we covered using internet browsers. While Swasta could access a strong wireless signal from her street-facing balcony, she refused to use her computer in a location that would be visible to her neighbors. Instead, she crouched uncomfortably in a corner where a weak signal allowed her to just barely access her new Facebook account. I asked Swasta if she would come outside with me so I could show her how to use a search engine but she demurred repeatedly to be seen publicly with her computer.

During a subsequent computer lesson I recommended we go to a café several blocks away with a strong wireless signal and added anonymity. Swasta seemed to like this idea but still initially refused because it would require carrying her computer past her neighbors. After several minutes of convincing her that I would carry the computer in my own backpack and that no one would even know there was a computer in it, she agreed to go. Once at the café–populated almost exclusively by Western tourists–Swasta visibly relaxed and we spent several successful hours looking up pictures of Bollywood stars and finding her village on Google Maps. I later asked Swasta why she had been so worried about being seen with her computer. She replied that people would think badly of her and that women “didn’t do that” (have computers, let alone
carry them publicly). “Pahilo dekhi (from the beginning/since before) women have not done such things” she asserted. Swasta added, people would think she was “doing style” if she was seen with a computer. “Doing style” is not a good thing; its connotation is akin to “high falutin” or “putting on airs” and implies the person has forgotten his or her proper place in society. By carrying a computer publicly, Swasta felt she would be calling excessive attention to her economic autonomy and her access to Western commodities and further flouting hegemonic norms about women’s domestic role.

Swasta’s anxiety about being seen with a computer speaks to the contested place of women in the public sphere and more specifically, the urban public sphere and its association with the promises of modernity. Swasta’s story suggests that the political, social and intellectual life of women is suspect when it is subject to the scrutiny of the public and that being a modern Nepali woman is not a simple process of following the right path (or taking the right stairs, as the mural suggests). Instead, young, urban working class women like Swasta must maneuver within conflicting messages, norms, desires and opportunities.

This project goes beyond a description of women’s struggle to enter the public sphere. In the following pages this dissertation explores how women like Swasta actively re-constitute the meaning of public space in urban Nepal and simultaneously construct a modern subjectivity. The next chapter, chapter 2, is a literature review in which I discuss the primary scholarship I use to frame my argument. In particular, I draw upon feminist political economy and Nepal area studies to contextualize my discussions of modernity, subjectivity and identity. Chapter 3 is an historical overview of the geo-politics of Nepal. I discuss Nepal’s history of democratization and development initiatives as well as the importance of bikaas (development) discourse. In chapter

29 Swasta’s exact phrase was “style garne,” which literally translates to doing style. In colloquial Nepali it is not uncommon to hear a borrowed English word used in conjunction with the Nepali verb garnu (to do). Thus phrases like ‘fashion garne,’ ‘style garne,’ ‘shopping garne,’ translate as doing fashion, style or shopping respectively.
3 I also describe changing patterns in women’s employment in Nepal as well as the history of trekking tourism. In chapter 4 I explain the methods used to carry out data collection and describe the research process and research population in detail.

Chapters 5-7 are my attempt to answer the overarching research questions that frame this dissertation. As a reminder, the central questions I ask are: 1) In what ways are the changing roles of women in Nepali society, particularly in regard to waged employment, visibility and mobility in the urban public sphere, talked about and understood by my informants? 2) How do female guides leverage their status as wageworkers to create additional decision-making power in their own lives around cessation of education, age of marriage and personal economy, and how is this decision-making articulated as part of a modern identity? 3) What are the particular embodied and linguistic practices female guides use to legitimize their presence in (public) spaces of modernity and address normative concerns about their morality as “public women”?

In chapter 5 I attend to my first core question about the ways in which the changing roles of women in Nepali society are understood and talked about by young working class women. Spatial language–terms such as inside, outside, forward and backward–is leveraged by both state actors and my informants to articulate multiple, sometimes conflicting, messages about Nepali women’s role in contemporary society. In chapter 5 I show that the dominant discourse of development uses gendered spatial language that “places” women in the domestic sphere and excludes them from the promises of modernity. In response to this discursive marginalization, female guides repurpose the parlance of development to identify themselves with Nepal’s modernity projects and thus legitimize their mobility and public visibility. Informants particularly draw on evocative narratives of mobility to locate themselves within a story of national progress. I show that norms regarding women’s role in Nepal are changing and that the
use of spatial metaphors by my informants reveals an emergent structure of feeling more favorable to women’s waged employment, mobility and public visibility. I conclude chapter 5 by arguing that unlike other examples from the global South, in which women have framed their emergent presence in the public sphere as an extension of a traditionally feminine and domestic role, female guides appropriate a masculine language of overt publicness and mobility to justify their visibility. I contend that in so doing, informants author themselves as the agents of modernity, rather than the subjects of the state’s development efforts.

In chapter 6 I address my second core question, which asks how my informants leverage their wage earning to increase their decision-making power in a number of commodity markets, and why this purchasing power is central to their identification as modern women. Through participation in the wage labor economy, female guides are able to carve out spaces of economic independence that allow them to make choices around personal economy, education and marriage. Consumption choices in these markets are a central part of how guides “do” modernity. For example, guides use their earnings to invest in their own education and by doing so hope to earn additional cultural and educational capital that will further their career prospects. My informants also discuss their earnings as a way of increasing their say in their marriage timing and partner selection. At the end of chapter 6 I demonstrate that informants frame their increased purchasing power in the education and marriage “markets” as a type of freedom (swatantrata)—a term closely associated with notions of progress and modernity.

In chapter 7 I address my third research question, which asks how guides negotiate their identity as public women through linguistic and material practices. I first review hegemonic tropes of proper femininity that preclude women’s participation in the public sphere. I then describe the moral challenges associated with being a public woman and describe informants’
take on shifting norms around women’s work. Informants are quite aware of the dangers of claiming a modern identity, which include being labeled “over modern” or “broken”–terms with distinct undertones of sexual promiscuity. Guides use specific impression management techniques to affirm their status as respectable women. These various techniques include dressing modestly and sending remittances to their families. Through purposeful acts of impression management, female guides assert their modern identity while maintaining that they are a good Nepali didi/bahini (older sister/younger sister).

In the final chapter I revisit the main arguments of the dissertation and end with a discussion of the implications of the research. I argue that female trekking guides experience modernity through a framework of anxiety and tension. For my informants, modernity is understood as their entrance into Nepal’s public spaces, including the wage labor economy. Yet, by entering these spaces, my informants open themselves up to presumptions of immorality and accusations that they have forgotten their culture and their ‘place’ in Nepali society. As a consequence, in their day-to-day attempts to carve out identities as respectable and modern women, guides articulate a palpable anxiety about meeting normative expectations while fulfilling deeply held desires.

My focus on anxiety is a direct engagement with previous feminist political economy scholarship that concerns women’s incorporation into the wage labor market and the meaning of this transition for women’s sense of self. Although research in this vein has well articulated the tensions that accompany women’s entrance into the paid labor force, anxiety has yet to be explored as a prime motivator of social action that accounts for how newly proletariat women articulate and embody their modern subjectivities (Lynch 2007). In my conclusion I extend ongoing discussions by feminist political economists by showing that anxiety acts as a
productive discourse—that is, a discourse with real material consequence for how women live their lives. I argue that anxiety is not only a commonly held affect accompanying the transition from agrarian to waged-labor based livelihoods, it is also a force that shapes both the mundane and important behaviors that come to signify young women’s working class habitus. In this sense, anxiety, along with the manifold joys and pleasures afforded to my informants through new opportunities and new experiences, brackets the experience of being a young, working class and most importantly, modern woman in contemporary Nepal.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

How have concepts like globalization, development and modernity been variously explained by scholars attempting to make sense of them? How have gender and subjectivity figured into these explanations? These queries frame this chapter, which traces several lines of academic inquiry that inform my core questions. In Nepal, discourses of development and modernity form a backdrop against which my informants go about the process of living and making both mundane and important life decisions that mark them as modern women. To better understand the power of these discourses I draw on critical development studies, which has led a sustained inquiry into the causes and consequences of development as an idea and practice. Yet, as I show below, critical development studies ultimately lacks analytic nuance, both in its treatment of localized iterations of development and, most importantly, its engagement with gender as a lynchpin of social organization.

I suggest that feminist political economy offers important correctives to this gap. Feminist political economists have recognized the discursive power of development and modernity, but have been more attuned to the way these concepts inflect daily life through gendered meaning-making. After discussing why feminist political economy provides a helpful framework for my own research, I touch upon Nepal area studies to suggest that the analytic tools developed by feminist political economists can add richness to current discussions regarding Nepal’s encounter with globalization. I end this chapter by pointing to how my own work extends arguments in feminist political economy and Nepal area studies in particular.

Critical Development Studies
Critical development studies (CDS) emerged out of the 1960’s and 1970’s as a discipline embedded in critical theory and with firm ties to postmodernism and postcolonialism (Schuurman 2009). Early CDS scholars recognized that development as an idea and practice had taken hold of the global imagination and was increasingly being held up as a rationale for large-scale geo-political and socio-economic actions at the state-level (Ferguson 1990). Development as a concept was affecting the livelihoods of billions of people and CDS scholars took on the task of critically interrogating the meaning of this powerful transnational discourse. CDS coalesced around a number of books and edited volumes that critically appraised development as an ideology rooted in imperialist yearning, which was ultimately counterproductive to the stated goal of improving livelihoods for the world’s most marginalized populations (Escobar 2011[1995]; Sachs 1992; Ferguson 1990). Arturo Escobar’s (2011[1995]) monograph, *Encountering Development*, is considered a founding text in CDS scholarship and his controversial idea of jettisoning development as a practice continues to be a central referent in CDS literature. Escobar’s thesis is that development as a concept is an extension of racist and Eurocentric thinking that imagines one (Western) way to be modern and leads to the forceful and violent “development” of peoples across the global South.\(^{30}\) Escobar draws on Foucault’s (1980) idea of governmentality to describe development as a discourse with the power and force (via development policy and development projects) to inflict great harm on populations that are deemed by state actors and international bodies like the World Bank and IMF as “undeveloped.” Escobar insists that development has failed and that it is time to move toward a paradigm of

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\(^{30}\) Postcolonial scholars including Said (1978), Chakrabarty (2009) and Gandhi (1998) similarly suggest the discursive power of development and modernization discourse. These scholars have shown how a hegemonic idea of modernity as exclusive to the West has resulted in a model of human progress that consigns much of humanity to the “waiting room” of history (Chakrabarty 2009, 8).
“post development” in which alternatives to colonial imaginings of progress can be articulated and carried out.

Although approaching development with a critical lens is a common denominator in CDS, the discipline is quite heterogeneous and includes: 1) applied CDS, which is most concerned with how to implement better development practices; 2) debates about the meaning and power of development as a discourse; 3) discussions about CDS in conversation with other disciplines such as anthropology or geography; and, 4) case-studies and ethnographies of development in situ. Applied CDS is designed for practitioners of development projects and deals with the mechanics of development programming (Marchand 2009). Thus, this stream of CDS has little bearing on my dissertation research. The other streams of CDS, however, are quite relevant and are discussed below.

**Development, post development and beyond**

Escobar (2011[1995]), argues that development discourse and development projects, “often end up reproducing old power/knowledge asymmetries,” especially those between the global North and global South (xviii). He explains, “as Western experts and politicians started to see certain conditions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as a problem—mostly what was perceived as poverty and backwardness—a new domain of thought and experience, namely, development, came into being” (2011[1995]: 6). Escobar argues that development turns people and ways of living into problems—a way of thinking not far removed from the patronizing and racist logic of “the white man’s burden.” What is important is that development discourse informs development policy and practice, which has material consequences in people’s lives. Escobar’s analysis of development as practiced is bleak, arguing that so-called development
projects have led to the immiseration of people en masse in the name of a one-size-fits-all model of progress. CDS scholars, including Escobar, question the value of development, given clear indications that livelihoods do not always improve and quite often suffer under the forceful beneficence of development projects (Ferguson 1990; Sachs 1992). Much early CDS scholarship paints development as a discourse and social practice that leads to violence and disempowerment. Escobar (2011[1995]) suggests an alternative in “post development”, which describes a world no longer beholden to the hegemonic concept of development and its implicit Western supremacy.

Escobar’s critique of development and his suggestion of a post development agenda have been extremely influential in CDS, garnering both praise and criticism. Post development’s harshest critics note that Escobar’s conceptualization of development is monolithic, leaves little room for institutional change, is focused too narrowly on development as discourse and, most seriously, ignores lived experiences of development that defy his negative appraisal (Kiely 1999; Pieterse 2000; Corbridge 2007). Corbridge (2007) goes so far as to say “Escobar and his fellow post-developmentalists voice their opposition to the discourse of development itself. It is the dream of abundance that now comes under attack” (185). The point Corbridge is making is that Escobar and post-development advocates, while correct in noting the material power of development discourse, fall into a trap of romanticizing some pre-development past, which neither reflects historical realities nor gives agency to marginalized people who find development projects or the idea of development useful in some way. Other criticisms have focused on post-development’s lack of sensitivity to social differences like race, gender and caste and the fairly narrow definition of what development might entail (Kothari 2006; Mohan 2006).
CDS continues to focus primarily on development as a regime of discursive power, but more recent scholarship has argued for refinement of this analytic tack. For example, Brigg (2002) notes that power is not always repressive and that this truth must be applied to how power operates within development discourse and practice. Brigg states, “taking the post-development critical impulse seriously requires moving away from the colonisation metaphor to a closer understanding of the operation of power through development, including its productive modality” (2002: 422). Ferguson (2009) suggests that CDS must expand beyond critiques of neoliberalism carried out primarily through discourse analysis in order to better grasp what development actually means for people experiencing it. In addition, a number of creative treatments of development as ideology have moved away from a project rooted primarily in Foucaultian terms of discourse (Blaney 1999; Robinson 2000; Hart 2004). Still other scholars have shown that the discursive focus of CDS can still prove useful as it informs studies of development originating in disciplines like geography (e.g. Rankin 2010; Silvey and Rankin 2010), anthropology (e.g. Mosse 2008), postcolonialism (e.g. McEwan 2001) or gender studies (e.g. Ramamurthy 2011).

Yeh’s (2007) research on development projects in Lhasa, Tibet that target Tibetans offers a trenchant critique of CDS scholarship extending from Escobar. Yeh notes that rather than “seeing development as a universal machine,” development must be interrogated as “as set of specific projects” in the context of highly local discursive and political economic histories (2007: 594). She writes, “political economic conditions shape the cultural idioms through which development is understood and negotiated” (Yeh 2007: 595). Yeh jettisons the idea of development as a transcultural and unidirectional (read: oppressive) force and instead shows the various forms of power that operate through development discourse in her field site. In her case-
study, development ideology originating in the Chinese state and directed towards reforming “indolent” and “spoiled” Tibetans is shown to be oppressive and indeed racist, yet Tibetans themselves repurpose the same discourse of “indolence” to communicate their deep ambivalence about development projects (Yeh 2007: 608). Yeh’s critical reading of the post development project acknowledges that within CDS development discourse must be problematized. However, Yeh also insists that development is a culturally situated, historically unique process that cannot be subsumed under one colonial impulse attributed to an abstract “West.” My project extends Yeh’s arguments by forwarding another example of how development discourse is experienced ambivalently by the intended targets of development policy. In particular, in chapter 5 I detail how young working class women navigate the discourse of development in ways that, like Yeh’s informants, reclaim and retool development ideologies for their own purposes.

Localized iterations of development

In the context of my project, the most important criticisms of early CDS include its tendency to paint development with rather broad brushstrokes and to ignore localized iterations of development on the ground. As I show in chapters 5, 6 and 7, development is a powerful idea and a ubiquitous practice in Nepal, though my informants do not express their experience as anything resembling Escobar’s descriptions of “closure, difference, and violence” (Escobar 2011[1995]: 214). Bebbington (2000) notes that CDS has more recently turned towards accounts of development in which local experiences of development are privileged. He cites the need for “more nuanced interpretations of development that emphasize human agency and the room to maneuver that can exist within otherwise constraining institutions and structures,” and adds that “interpretations of development, and its alternatives, might differ if they were based on
ethnographic and historical analyses of the ways in which development interventions and market transactions become part of a longer, sedimented history of a place and its linkages with the wider world” (Bebbington 2000: 496). Certainly, my own ethnography is modeled after these sentiments. Development in Nepal can only be understood as it occurs within the particular socio-cultural, geographical and political-economic histories of the diverse communities that comprise the Nepali populace. As I show throughout my dissertation, it is the “sedimented history” of Nepal that gives the discourse of bikaas (development) its singular operative power.

Continuing in this line, Simon (2007) suggests that CDS must attend to the “continuum of flexible and dynamic possibilities,” which is “demonstrated by the supposed victims of development” (209). Perrault (2003) gives one example of what this might look like in his ethnography of an Amazonian township in Ecuador. Perrault’s informants incorporate development initiatives into pre-existing exchange relationships at the micro and meso level, resulting in equitable social change. Perrault demonstrates that development projects can be successfully co-opted by communities to serve locally-defined priorities. Appadurai (2001) uses the example of civic organizations operating in Mumbai, India to show how, within development initiatives, those targeted for development may create space for creative enterprising and transnational organizing conducive to their own notions of progress. Li (2009) notes that development’s opposite, understood as a lack of intervention to prevent humanitarian crises, is also a way in which development is materially felt at a local level. Li terms this lack of intervention “let die,” and through the site-specific example of dispossessed Indonesian peasants, shows that development programs are not universally unwelcome interventions. In the examples of localized ethnographies of development by Perreault, Appadurai and Li, it becomes clear that
development is not a monolith and that scholarship proposing to understand what development means (or can mean) must be extremely sensitive to the social context in which it occurs.

Missing gender in development

Despite all the discussion of local iterations of development and explorations of how development is done in situ, there is a rather noticeable analytic gap in much CDS literature. Bluntly, CDS has a gender problem. Kabeer (1994) notes that the way development has been thought about, both as an idea and a practice has resulted in a troubling gender blind-spot in critical development scholarship and in the more applied side of development planning. Kabeer points out that a lack of gender sensitivity in development scholarship is important because there is an “intimate relationship between ways of thinking and ways of doing.” (1994: 303) Following Kabeer’s call for a critical development scholarship more attuned to gender, several CDS scholars have taken on the task of theorizing gender and development as mutually constituting categories (Nagar et al. 2002). Hart (2002; 2004) has written extensively on the necessity of thinking through the relationship between development and gender, noting that such research is necessary to call attention to “interrelations, constitutive processes and forms of power – as well as to slippages openings and contradictions” in development as theory and practice. (2004: 97)

Although writing from quite different field sties, feminist geographers Farhana (2013; 2014) and Bastia (2013; 2014) both show how the contradictions of development described by Hart(2004) materialize in particularly gendered ways. In Farhana’s (2013) ethnography of water distribution in the Bengal delta, she shows how gender mediates the experience of development delivery. Farhana shows that notions of what development means and how development will be ‘administered’ must take into account local social ideologies, including gender ideologies, lest
development become a vector for increased social stratification. Bastia’s research on the “migration-development nexus” suggests that women’s experiences of migration and development cannot be understood as gender neutral, but are instead closely tied to norms of mobility and duty that differ for men and women (464).

Swarr and Nagar (2014) look more closely at how sex, gender and sexuality may complicate the experience of development. In their study of lesbian women in South Africa and India, Swarr and Nagar, “bridge the gulf between development theory/praxis and lesbian studies by conceptualizing new frameworks that explore the mutually constitutive struggles for resource access and material survival on the one hand and sexuality, intimacy, identity, and community on the other.” (493: 2014) Specifically, Swarr and Nagar illustrate that the organizations and institutions such as NGO’s, religious groups, and place-based community organizations through which everyday citizens in the global south encounter development are also important social mediators of sex, gender and sexuality. Thus, how development is actually navigated must necessarily consider how other aspects of identity like sex, gender and sexuality are approached by the institutions that implement development as a social practice. What Farhana, Bastia as well as Swarr and Nagar demonstrate is how research on development as an ideology and practice can, and more pointedly, must include gender as an analytic concept.

With the exception of the scholars mentioned above, the extent to which CDS scholars seem to omit gender as an organizing principle of social worlds and gender-focused scholarship as a source of important insight into development is troubling. A few critical development scholars have noted this gap, but omissions of feminist scholarly engagement with development remain the norm in most CDS research (e.g. Schuurman 2009; Klenk 2004; Bakker and Silvey 2012; Lawson 2014). As an example of this lacunae, Chua et al. (2000) argue for a new
framework for understanding development, which she dubs “women, culture, development” (820). According to Chua et al., this framework is necessary because, “when Third World studies attends to gender, it suggests that gendered divisions are often manifested in ways that are particular to that nation-state, region and ethnicity, and that it is therefore necessary to examine such divisions and inequalities alongside their political and economic bases in order to analyse what actually occurs in specific situations” (822). I agree with Chua et al. on each point, yet the necessity of attending to gender within the interplay of local and global forces has been argued over the last thirty years by feminist political economists–none of whom are mentioned by Chua and her co-authors. Similarly, Ramamurthy (2011) calls for a CDS that documents “the down to earth impacts of globalization on women’s lives,” without noting that this has been the singular project of feminist political economists since the 1970’s.

The omissions in Chua et al. (2000) and Ramamurthy (2011) are repeated in other CDS work, which is made all the more strange because many of these authors do reference both classic political economists (e.g. Schumpeter 1947; Polanyi 1944; Wallerstein 1974) and proto-feminist political economists (e.g. Boserup 1970). Merely overlooking the contributions of scholars of gender and development would be less of a problem if CDS analyses showed nuance in grappling with development as a gendered discourse and practice. This sensitivity is often lacking in the literature, making the omission more problematic.

In summary, CDS is useful to my project in its articulation of development as a powerful discourse with material consequences in the lives of development “beneficiaries.” However, its usefulness is limited in that, as a discipline, it quite often neglects gender as a principal aspect of social organization even while calling for local-level treatments of development in context. How
then can CDS grapple with development as a social force with gendered consequences? This question is addressed by feminist political economy, to which I now turn.

**Feminist Political Economy**

As a discipline, political economy insists on the importance of macro structural forces in explaining the organization of labor and of regional flows of capital and people (Schumpeter 1947; Polanyi 1944; Wallerstein 1974). Globalization—a term generally understood to mean the last 50 years of accelerated transnational socio-political and economic interaction—has particularly captured the attention of global political economists and comparative sociologists (Fröbel et al. 1978; Gereffi 1994; Boltanski and Chiapello 2007). Global political economy (GPE) encompasses many disparate theories, but what many have in common is a transnational focus that recognizes the inequitable relationship between the global North and global South (Harvey 1989, Wallerstein 1974). Missing from much earlier GPE is an explicit focus on gender as an important organizing aspect of the transnational exchanges of people and labor power that structure the stratified global economy (Elson and Pearson 1981).

In the last several decades, GPE scholars have begun to ask in earnest how gender is implicated in the macro and micro political-economic changes occurring across much of the global South (Safa 1981; Parreñas 2001; Carraway 2007; Ngai 2006; Gal and Kligman 2000). This scholarship, which is generally identified as feminist political economy (FPE), “expands the parameters” of political economy by “acknowledging the existence of an international division of labor and the gendered nature of this segmentation” (Osirim 2003: 542). FPE asks,

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31 There has been extensive discussion of the terminology used to describe this socio-economic and geographic division: 1st world/3rd world, developed/developing etc. I have chosen to use global North and global South because it most accurately portrays the geographic distribution of power within the capitalist economy without subscribing to the pejorative connotations associated with 1st vs. 3rd world or developed vs. developing.
why do women do particular types of work? Why is some work considered more or less appropriate for women? What are the social and economic consequences of women’s concentration in particular labor sectors? What is the subjective meaning and experience of labor for women? Most importantly, they ask, why and how is labor gendered at the local and transnational level?

Importantly, while much FPE provides fine-grained analysis of particular labor regimes, what separates this scholarship from micro-level workplace ethnographies is the explicit connections made between local economies and geo-political and socio-economic forces at the national and transnational level. For example, FPE scholars question what role(s) the state may play in setting the parameters of women’s public participation in waged-labor, and/or how multilateral agreements (e.g. NAFTA, CAFTA) and transnational organizations (e.g. IMF, World Bank) shape the opportunity structures that effect women’s participation in the global economy. FPE does not take the gendered structure of labor regimes for granted. Instead FPE interrogates why and how gender is implicated in the organization of labor locally and globally.

FPE has focused particular attention on the “feminization” of certain sectors. Feminist political economists use the term feminization to refer to two phenomena. First, it refers to the concentration of women in specific occupations. For example, export-oriented production is said to be feminized because of the predominance of women working in this labor sector. Second, feminization also refers to the process of devaluing certain occupations. Devaluing is accomplished through a number of strategies including discursive and material practices. Particular types of work are discursively positioned as low skill by transnational companies, state bodies and hiring managers. Constructing work in this way justifies material practices that devalue both the labor and the laborer. Many FPE scholars have focused on the feminization of
export-oriented production of labor-intensive manufacturing in particular, showing that it is primarily women who work in these factories for low wages and in insecure conditions (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Salzinger 2003). The question for FPE, then, is why and how are these sectors feminized? Feminist ethnographies of global production have been especially useful in answering these questions by linking globalization to local labor practices and showing the “contingent and patterned” relationship (Bair 2010: 224) between the gendered dimension of household and/or local economies and transnational labor networks (Wolf 1994; Ong 2010 [1987]). Using an FPE lens, scholars have shown how culturally specific expectations about what kinds of labor women can and should do in the domestic realm have profoundly shaped the job opportunities made available to them in the wage labor economy (Elson and Pearson 1983; Fernandez Kelly 1983; Lynch 2007).

FPE scholars have come to many different conclusions about the nature of gendered labor, but two primary ways of understanding why certain occupations are feminized are central in this literature. First, some scholars employ what could generally be described as a Foucaultian framework, arguing that labor becomes gendered via discursive production and technologies of the self (Salzinger 2003; Carraway 2007). In this explanation of feminized labor, certain jobs are considered appropriate for female workers because workers themselves are hired, trained and disciplined within a discursive framework that actually produces the feminized worker through the embodied practice of work. On the shop floor this would look like workers internalizing and self-policing their gender expression to reflect managerial or institutional expectations.

In the Foucaultian framework, gender is understood as a flexible phenomenon that varies greatly not only between labor sectors but between competing production sites. For example, in Salzinger’s (2003) monograph on the performative genders of export-oriented factory workers in
Mexico, she argues that in each of her factory field sites, a unique trope of feminine productivity was nurtured in line with particular managerial policies. According to Salzinger, as a result of personalistic management techniques, the factories showed very little overlap in the type of “femininity” on each production floor. Salzinger then suggests that it is difficult if not impossible to make statements about why and how women work, beyond the particularities of their specific workplaces. Although, like Salzinger, I do not discount the importance of discourse, culture, and identity formation in constructing place-specific gendered labor regimes, a potential weakness of this approach is that the emphasis on the local determinants of discursive variation is limited in its ability to connect back to macro-structural forces such as state intervention and transnational capital, which also shape labor contexts (Bair 2010). In the case of female trekking guides, a purely Foucaultian analysis would diminish the role of Nepal’s changing geo-political context, which is largely responsible for shaping the limited field of my informants’ career opportunities.

In the second framework, scholars incorporate a materialist perspective. More materialist interpretations argue that formation of a feminized work force is not just the result of localized discursive practices, but rather the result of transnational tropes about women workers, which are employed by capitalist institutions to further extract surplus value from their employees (Fernandez-Kelly 1983). In this framework authors emphasize less the discursive production of gender and instead engage with the dialogue that occurs between global capital and local cultural institutions—including patriarchal ones—in the creation of a gendered workforce. FPE from this perspective argues that globalized economic networks and their attending institutions such as capitalist business enterprises and state policy making bodies employ pre-existing, local discourses of femininity to justify particular labor practices (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Elson and Pearson 1981; Wright 2006). According to Fernandez-Kelly (1983) the logic of capital, in its
quest for increasing accumulation of surplus value, works in conjunction with patriarchal notions of docile and naturally dexterous female workers to ensure a labor pool of women ready to accept poor remuneration and insecure labor conditions. Other authors have made similar arguments, noting that both local and global markets prey upon pre-existing discourses related to women’s labor such as nimble fingers (Elson and Pearson 1981), or disposable women (Wright 2006), to justify the positioning of women in low-paid, low-status and precarious work. Like the Foucaultian-inspired stream of FPE, this framework falls short in describing the particulars of my informants’ experience. A solely materialist lens might emphasize Nepal’s peripheral position in the global economy to explain the career choices of female trekking guides, but miss the important role of hegemonic Hindu gender norms in bracketing working class women’s field of available options. Culturally dominant norms still play into my informants’ decision making, and any analysis of working class women’s entrance into the wage labor economy would be remiss to not consider the power of HCHH ideology in shaping Nepal’s labor regime.

There are examples of FPE scholars who bridge the discursive/materialist analytic divide, and borrow successfully from each theoretical camp to make their argument. One feminist political economist in particular has been especially instructive in guiding my research design, as her work successfully blends discursive and materialist orientations towards the study of gendered labor patterns. Carla Freeman has been producing scholarship on the Caribbean for over a decade (2000, 2001). Specifically, she examines the intersection of the local and global in producing site-specific gendered labor regimes. Her research subjects are the women of Barbados, who embody the transnational subject, fluidly moving between local cultural meanings, global flows of capital and hybrid production and consumption patterns. Freeman’s nuanced discussion of local labor regimes as mediated by discourses of gender and the pressure
of transnational capitalism speak to my research site in important ways. As Freeman (2001) states, “Globality and locality are inextricably linked, but through complex mediations and reconfigurations…the nonlocal processes driving capital mobility are always experienced, constituted and mediated locally” (39). As chapters 5, 6 and 7 demonstrate, my informants are similarly positioned to Freeman’s—that is, they find themselves tacking between local and global processes through which they must mediate their own meanings of gender, labor and their modern selves.

In starting from the assumption that globalization is a profoundly gendered process (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Salzinger 2003), the theoretical framework of my project engages with previous sociological projects that have used a gendered analysis to show the complex dialectical relationship between the specific and the broad, between local labor strategies and global economies (Mohanty 2001; Otis 2008; Lee 1998; Moghadam 2005; Bair 2010). In my own research site I am, like Freeman (2000), concerned with the convergence of multi-scalar forces, which ultimately produce a particular, site-specific gendered labor regime. Female trekking guides are transnational subjects, whose “gendered subjectivities must be taken into account in conceptualizing labor markets, labor processes, and the macro-picture of globalization” (Freeman 2001: 3). Like Freeman, my research project attends to the material lives of subjects who are living and working within global economic and political processes.

_Feminist political economy outside of export-oriented production_

The ethnographies of gendered labor that I have discussed above have been written almost entirely in reference to women’s employment within global export processing zones. Though this form of labor may seem to relate minimally to self-employed women in Nepal, some
important similarities are present. First, this scholarship is concerned with how women approach paid employment, and in particular how they negotiate their subordinate position in the labor market. These concerns are a central theme in my own project. Second, the research design used in these studies is relevant to my own research, which has a strong component of workplace ethnography. Like other FPE scholars, I wish to explicate the processes by which certain occupations become gendered over time. In the case of female trekking guides, I am specifically interested in how this profession opened to women only in the last several decades. Lastly, drawing upon a materialist FPE tradition, I am concerned with the relative ability of my informants to manage and broker their own labor power into other forms of social/cultural capital. For example, in my research site I look at guides’ ability to use economic and cultural capital acquired through wage labor to increase personal decision-making power around life course events.

I employ a FPE perspective because it is helpful in framing the ambivalence with which many women, including my own informants, experience entrance into paid employment. Shifting patterns of labor that accompany the arrival of ever multiplying configurations of capitalist production and consumption have meant that proletarian women are confronted with not only new forms of work, but new forms of time, new forms of being, and new forms of subjectivity. Numerous examples from the global South show that state intervention is often critical in directing the trajectory of women’s incorporation into the global workforce via intensive modernization initiatives (Lee 1998; Hanser 2005; Ngai 2005; Lan 2006). This scholarship reveals how women have navigated state pressure to modernize through a variety of techniques including spirit possessions (Ong 2010 [1987]), appeals to their feminine identities as

32 In noting the ambivalence of their informants as they grapple with globalization and social change, both feminist political economists like Ong (2010) and critical development scholars like Yeh (2007) find important common ground between their disciplines.
daughters (Lee 1998), and labor strikes (Salzinger 2003). I similarly engage with the role of the state by focusing on how historical and contemporary discourses of development in state programming and policy circulate conflicting messages about women’s role in “developed” and “modern” Nepal, leading to palpable anxiety among my informants.

In various regions of the global South women’s wage labor is a contested terrain. The FPE perspective queries the troubled relationship between work in the public arena of paid employment and “traditional” norms about the appropriate place of women. In FPE ethnographies based variously in Mexico (Salzinger 2003), Java (Wolf 1992), China (Lee 1998), Sri Lanka (Lynch 2007) and Barbados (Freeman 2001), scholars have identified a tension between women’s need and/or desire to labor and the implications of immorality that often accompanies women’s paid work. A common thread in these monographs is a seemingly transcultural and tenacious discourse about the dangers of women’s public wage work to the moral order of society. Certainly, the idea that paid employment creates a cohort of morally suspect public women who undermine traditional values is old and prone to localized iterations (Landes 1988). The unease around women’s paid work thus remains an important aspect of the often turbulent relationship that women in the global North and global South have with wage labor. In Nepal, concerns about the deleterious effects of female wage labor on women’s propriety and the social order more broadly are expressed in the anxious discussions about women who “go outside,” and are “broken,” described in chapter 7.

Examples from the global South show that working women use a variety of culturally specific tactics to insulate themselves from accusations of immorality. In many FPE workplace ethnographies, informants have appropriated the discourse of sacrificing mother (Fernandez-Kelly 1983) or of dutiful daughter (Parreñas 2001, Lee 1998) when describing their entrance into
the labor market and public sphere. South Asian women’s various approaches to managing the stigma attached to waged-labor has been well documented in India (Aneesh 2012; Philips 2013), Bangladesh (Kabeer 2002; Khosla 2013; Feldman 2013) and Sri Lanka (Lynch 2007), yet the entrance of Nepali women into the wage labor economy has so far remained understudied. My research addresses this gap, and builds upon current understandings of female wage laborers by focusing on working class women who, because of Nepal’s particular development trajectory, do not follow the typical proletarianization route of incorporation into industrial or factory labor. To better contextualize my own findings, two fairly recent accounts of women’s entrance into the workforce in South Asia deserve particular attention. They are Lynch’s (2007) ethnography of textile workers in rural export-processing zones in Sri Lanka and Vijayakumar’s (2013) ethnography of women IT workers in Bangalore.\footnote{I return to the work of Lynch (2007) and Vijayakumar (2013) again in the conclusion. There I look more closely at how Lynch’s and Vijayakumar’s informants undertake various strategies of stigma management to reconcile their identity as working class women and good/moral women within their specific cultural contexts.}

In her ethnography of female textile workers in Sri Lanka, Lynch (2007) describes the construction of export-oriented factories in the country’s rural hinterlands. The factories are specifically designed by state actors to recruit young village women without pulling them out of the village context. The explicitly stated purpose of this plan is to draw on the readily available cheap labor without exposing the (presumed) impressionable workers to the depravities of city life. In Lynch’s field site, popular opinion holds that if village girls go to the city, it will only further accelerate the processes of social change threatening traditional Sri Lankan gender norms. Lynch notes that this rational is widely accepted by her informants, who work hard to position themselves as good village girls as opposed to morally suspect city girls. Lynch (2007) notes, “it is evident that [her informants] had ambivalent responses to the expectations put on them, and they worked hard to fashion identities as women who were Good girls, despite being
garment workers” (165). Like Lynch’s informants who strive to be “Good girl[s] of Sri Lankan modernity,” my informants strive to be good girls of Nepali modernity (2007: 167). Yet, because of the different development trajectories of Nepal and Sri Lanka, there is simply not the same type of export-oriented work available in Nepali villages, or cities for that matter. If young women in Nepal need or want to earn wages, they must come to the city. In this sense, my project extends Lynch’s findings by showing how Nepali women who face similar proscriptions against women’s public visibility as their Sri Lankan peers work to frame themselves as good girls, even as they populate an urban context.

In the second case from South Asia, Vijayakumar (2013) reveals that women IT workers in Bangalore use feminine language of “flexible aspiration” to make sense of their identity as wage workers. What Vijayakumar means by flexible aspiration is that her informants aspire to have successful careers only up to the point at which they will marry and enter into a more traditional role as wife, daughter-in-law and mother. Vijayakumar’s informants express their aspirations to be present in the public sphere of wage labor in a way that explicitly recognizes and accommodates normative expectations that once married, a woman will leave the workforce for a domestic role. They excuse their current public visibility as IT workers by claiming that they are simply daughters earning pocket money and sparing their family the burden of supporting their personal spending. In this sense they draw on the culturally approved trope of selfless daughter to legitimate their presence in the public sphere.

It would not be surprising, given the similar South Asian context between Vijayakumar’s scholarship and my own, if my informants also called upon tropes of normative femininity to justify their presence in the public sphere. However, this is not the case. Instead, as I show in chapters 5-7, informants invoke feminized tropes of being a “good daughter” in combination
with more confrontational and male-gendered justifications for their work. Specifically, guides use a *masculinized* vocabulary of modernity and progress propagated by and through the state. By elaborating on this unique strategy, this dissertation expands the FPE framework for understanding the relationship between the state and gendered subjectivity in global labor networks. The differences in how Vijayakumar’s (2013) as well as Lynch’s (2007) informants understand their incorporation into waged-labor and the implications of this transition on their gendered subjectivities points to the necessity of ethnographic research that elaborates how this transition operates uniquely in the Nepali context.

**Nepal Area Studies**

Within the much larger discipline of Nepal Area Studies, there is a strong and rich history of feminist and gender-focused scholarship to draw upon and engage with. Some of the earlier scholarship on gender in Nepal, such as Bennett (1983) and Cameron’s (1999) ethnographies of high-caste and Dalit women respectively, provide detailed accounts of how multiple axes of social difference such as caste, class and religion, circumscribe the lives of women in disparate communities. Bennett’s (1983) work has been particularly influential because of her careful descriptions of high-caste gender norms, which have maintained cultural significance far beyond the HCHH community. Bennett’s monograph reveals the cosmological justifications for a number of normative discourses pertaining to idealized Nepali femininity including proscriptions against women’s public visibility and requirements for deferential behavior towards men. Complementing Bennett’s work, Cameron’s (1999) account of Dalit women’s lives provides a perspective from the margins of Nepali society. Cameron points out that less caste-privileged women such as her informants may actually have more autonomy than high-caste women.
because of necessarily laxer strictures on low-caste women’s movements. Yet, Cameron also
notes that ideals of female purity, domesticity and deference remain present in her field site.
Importantly, both Bennett and Cameron explicate the historical processes that enforced HCHH
hegemony in Nepal throughout the 20th century.

March (2002) and Rankin’s (2004) monographs further tease out the complexity of
gendered identity in Nepal through nuanced accounts of ethnic communities grappling with
social change. March’s ethnography of a Tamang village reveals that within non-HCHH
communities, gender norms are considerably more flexible and allow women and girls a fair
amount of social and physical autonomy. 34 Like Cameron (1998), March (2002) also shows that
despite such freedoms, an archetype of HCHH femininity is still idealized by her informants and
that women are systematically subordinated to men within her field site. Rankin’s (2004) account
of a semi-urban Newari community focuses on the spatial aspects of gender and caste. Rankin’s
ethnography is especially compelling in its illustration of the tangible (e.g. architectural) and
intangible (e.g. social pressure) forces that compel women to avoid the public sphere. Rankin
describes the important concept of ijaat, or social honor, that her female informants cultivate and
protect through self-imposed domestic seclusion. Using the concept of ijaat, in chapter 7 I
compare Rankin’s findings to my own fieldwork completed some 20 years later. I argue that the
processes of social change already underway during Rankin’s fieldwork have further eroded, but
by no means dispelled, the power of gossip and social exclusion over women’s movement in
public space.

Seira Tamang’s (2002a; 2009; 2011) critical feminist scholarship on gender and political
inclusivity has furthered the field of gender research in Nepal by explicitly linking legacies of

34 Tamang is the name of an ethnic community with linguistic and religious ties to Tibeto-Burman communities. They have been historically disenfranchised and exploited by HCHH. Tamangs worked as indentured servants for HCHH landlords in around the Kathmandu valley for much of the 19th and 20th century.
HCHH dominance and Nepal’s long history as a recipient of development aid from the West to continuing gender discriminatory practices at the state level. Tamang’s description of “state patriarchy,” or the process through which patriarchal HCHH norms permeate Nepali law, is important for understanding individual and institutional resistance to shifting gender norms in contemporary Nepal (2000). Tamang’s research provides a complement to the more cultural treatments of gender made in earlier research by showing how the political economy of Nepal, and in particular its dependence on foreign aid, has direct consequences for how women are incorporated into development. For example, Tamang (2011) shows that via intervention in Nepal’s democratization processes, including advisement on drafting national legislation, foreign interests have unintentionally reified Nepali women’s roles as mother, wife or daughter. New laws that make the state the ultimate arbiter of women’s rights via policies governing marriage, childbirth and citizenship, though designed to protect women from so-called oppressive practices, also eliminate women’s choices to live by localized norms that may actually provide greater personal freedom. Importantly, Tamang’s scholarship provides numerous examples of the lingering hegemony of HCHH norms clearly evidenced in gender-discriminatory state policy. I use this evidence in the concluding chapter to elaborate on the tension my informants face as they navigate competing discourses about women’s place in modern Nepal.

Gender, development and modernity

    In Nepal, the experience of development and modernity is heavily mediated by gender as an intersectional aspect of identity (March 2002; Tamang 2002b; Hertzog 2011). Influential works by Pigg (1992), Ahearn (2001) and Leve (2007) have given sustained attention to the intersection of transnational processes like globalization and development with locally grounded
gender ideologies, and reveal that concepts such as modernity, development and the public sphere have been historically gendered as masculine. More specifically, and as discussed in further detail in chapter 5, Pigg’s (1992; 1993) and Ahearn’s (2001) research on government textbooks and Leve’s research (2007) on government development programs reveals how central hierarchical notions of gender and caste have been to shaping public understandings of the bikasit (developed) individual as a male high-caste hill Hindu. What is clear from this scholarship is that the gendered nature of development discourse and practice in Nepal must be understood within the context of culturally dominant HCHH gender norms that shape understandings of public and private space (Bennett 1983).

That development and modernity are still gendered as male concepts and masculine spaces is made clear in Liechty’s (2003; 2010) ethnographies of male youth in Kathmandu. His research shows that indeed, being modern is heavily mediated by gender and class identity. Liechty’s (2010) treatment of working class masculinity and commodity consumption in urban Nepal is an especially valuable foil to my own exploration of working class femininity. Liechty’s concentration on male youth reaffirms that a study of gender in Nepal is not synonymous with a study of women (Liechty 2003: 2010). Instead, gender is a filter through which men, women and institutions such as the state and education system operate. In detailing the modern masculinities his informants construct through their pastimes, comportment and consumption, Liechty (2010) does briefly gesture to the importance of purchasing power in solidifying a female and modern subjectivity. He writes, “women desire the sense of cultural empowerment and validation that accrues to them as consumers of modern goods” (Liechty 2010: 345). Liechty calls for more research on working class femininity, noting that with very few exceptions processes of globalization and experiences of modernity have yet to be explored from the point of view of
young women who are increasingly on the front-lines of Nepal’s modernity projects (Ahearn 2001; Pettigrew 2012). Building on and expanding upon Liechty’s findings, in chapter 6 I discuss the consumption choices of my female informants. I argue that as consumers in the personal commodity, education and even marriage “markets” my informants choose products that are significant indicators of their bikaasit (developed) subjectivity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I review critical development studies (CDS), feminist political economy (FPE), and Nepal area studies. CDS is useful for approaching development as a productive discourse—that is, how development as an ideology has material consequences in people’s lives. However, CDS scholarship often lacks the nuance and sensitivity to gender seen in ethnographies by feminist political economists. Two quotations demonstrate the root of CDS’s gender problem. In 1995, in his path breaking work, Encountering Development, Escobar notes that “local ethnographies of development and modernity,” are “much-needed” to better understand development in practice (1995[2011], 13). In the 2011 preface to the re-publication of Encountering Development, Escobar states that since the book’s first release in 1995, “women have come to occupy a central place as subjects, objects, and conceptualizers of development” (2011, x). What these quotations demonstrate is a persistent blind-spot to the work of feminist political economists who have been producing “local ethnographies of development” that have recognized women as “subjects, objects, and conceptualizers of development” since the 1970’s! The oversight, especially over a span of 15 years, is hard to explain, and it is this gender blind spot that limits much of critical development studies’ analytic utility in my own project.
The gender gap in CDS is addressed and corrected by feminist political economists who attend to development as a lived process of meaning-making that is invariably filtered through multiple axes of social location including, but not limited to, gender (Salzinger 2003; Lynch 2007). FPE recognizes the gendered nature of development, especially as played out in the incorporation of women into transnational labor networks throughout the global South. For the informants of many FPE ethnographies, as well as my own informants, development as a discourse has accompanied major shifts in socioeconomic organization that have ultimately both allowed and compelled women to enter the paid workforce for the first time. A long lineage of FPE examines the processes through which gendered subjectivities are forged in labor practices mediated by both local and global forces. Modeling my research particularly after the work of Carla Freeman (2000), my dissertation expands conversations in FPE about women’s entrance into paid labor by focusing on informants who do not follow what has been a modal route in many countries of becoming factory or export-oriented workers.

While FPE scholars have forwarded several explanations as to how and why labor is gendered globally, for the purposes of my dissertation research, what is most interesting are the debates on what work means for worker subjectivity and how workers navigate their new roles as waged-laborers in site-specific contexts. FPE points to the necessity of locally grounded studies of globalization and gender. To carry out such a study and to contextualize how processes of social change are felt and experienced by Nepali women, I draw on a rich body of research on gender, development and modernity in Nepal. As I detail in the concluding chapter, the particularities of Nepal’s political-economic and socio-cultural histories frame my informants’ experiences of gendered modernity.
This ethnography is deeply indebted to previous research conducted by feminist political economists and scholars of Nepal alike and contributes to discussion in both disciplines. I fill gaps in FPE by providing an important empirical case of how women contend with their new identities as wage laborers when their proletarianization occurs outside the more typical pathway of factory work. I also fill gaps in Nepal area studies by applying a feminist political economy perspective to a population that is quite understudied: working class women. As I detail in the conclusion, by bringing FPE to bear on Nepal area studies, this dissertation offers a new way of understanding the gendered valences of development, modernity and identity that may be applicable beyond the Nepali case.

What critical development studies, feminist political economy and Nepal area studies all agree on is that fine-grained ethnographic research is needed to better understand ongoing processes of social change in the global South. In a conversation on the state of FPE, two prominent FPE scholars note, “the concept (gender) has received scant attention in studies of globalization. Economists speak about neoliberalism and free markets as if those phenomena were gender neutral. On a lesser scale, sociologists do the same” (Fernandez-Kelly and Wolf 2001: 1243). Fernandez-Kelly and Wolf (2001) argue that more political economists must “take up questions of meaning and identity,” because, “it is important to understand how women's identities are affected by shifts in work, and by the meaning of labor, wages, consumption, and modernism” while still attending to “the actual conditions that engulf them and their families” (1245). In short, Fernandez-Kelly and Wolf argue for locally attuned ethnographies of development and globalization that grapple with subjectivity as seriously as the political economic forces that remake the landscape these subjects navigate. In the following chapters I take up this challenge in an ethnographic account of female trekking guides in urban Nepal.
CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the introduction I ask, how do female trekking guides articulate and understand modernity? To understand the contours of modernity in contemporary Nepal a brief overview of the history of the Nepali state is in order. This chapter will provide such an overview in three parts: 1) a brief description of the history of modern Nepal with a focus on the hegemony of Hindu ideology; 2) an historical review of state modernization and development efforts; and, 3) a description of women’s diverse roles in contemporary Nepal. Taken together these coeval and intersecting histories have set the stage for young, working class Nepali women to enter the public sphere and claim a modern identity.

Building the Nepali State: The Hegemony of Hinduism

In this section I provide a brief overview of the formation of modern day Nepal and give particular attention to the influence of Hinduism on the organization of the state body and its citizenry. As I discuss in chapters 1 and 2, my informants attempt to articulate a modern subjectivity in the context of historically dominant Hindu norms about women’s domestic role. It is thus important to review the historical ascendance of HCHH ideology as well as the more recent events that have disrupted its dominance. I focus particular attention on the last fifty years of political change, which has seen the governing body of Nepal shift from an absolute Hindu monarchy to a fractured secular democratic republic.

A Hindu Kingdom
Within the boundaries of contemporary Nepal lays an astounding diversity of ethnicities, religions and languages. Nepal encompasses both tropical rainforests on its Southern border with India as well as the highest mountain peak in the world on its Northern border with Tibet and China. The ethnic diversity in Nepal stems from both the country’s geography of extremes and the historic trade routes bisecting central Nepal that encouraged settlement from both Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan groups. As Figure 1. Nepal’s Geographic Zones shows, Nepal is often broken down into three main zones that horizontally cut across the country according to rising elevation levels.

*Figure 1. Nepal’s Geographic Zones*

The uppermost zone is the Himalayan zone, which is populated mostly by Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups and has maintained a closer cultural, linguistic and religious affiliation to Tibet. The zone below that is the mid-hill zone, which has historically been inhabited by Hindu communities known as Parbatiya (hill people) who spoke Khas Nepali (now commonly known as simply...
“Nepali”). The mid-hills have been the seat of economic and political power for centuries and Parbatiya religion and language are still culturally dominant (e.g. HCHH). Below the mid-hills is the tropical Terai zone, which is populated mainly by those with close linguistic and cultural ties to India and several indigenous ethnic minority groups.

Despite centuries of coercive attempts to homogenize the population, the Nepali state still registers 123 spoken languages. Clearly then, Nepal is a land of profound difference. Social, economic and political power has always rested in the wealthy mid-hill kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley, which is highlighted in Figure 2. The Kathmandu Valley, below.

*Figure 2. The Kathmandu Valley*

The history of the Nepali state is, in many respects, a history of power held and lost within the centrally located Kathmandu Valley. Until the mid-eighteenth century, the current boundaries of the Kathmandu Valley were populated by fragmented feudal kingdoms. Around 1750, Prithvi Narayan Shah, who ruled the Gurkha principality to the west of the modern day
capital city of Kathmandu, embarked on a two decade military campaign to unify the various kingdoms of the Valley and beyond. Shah’s successful capture of the Valley kingdoms in 1769 is commonly referred to as the “unification of Nepal.” Shah declared Nepal a single country under his leadership and, importantly, declared Nepal a Hindu kingdom. The Shah lineage would continue to successively rule Nepal as a Hindu kingdom from the throne in Kathmandu Valley until the eventual dissolution of the monarchy in 2008.

At the same time as Shah was expanding Nepal’s borders, he carefully withdrew Nepal from relations with European powers, who were instituting full-blown colonialism in India to the South. Shah had several reasons for such maneuvering. First, he expressed disgust for the subservient relationship between India and British forces and wished to avoid a similar colonial relationship with Europe. Second, as a devout Hindu he believed that foreigners were heretical by nature and their presence in Nepal was quite literally polluting. Following Prithvi Narayan Shah’s example, later Shah Kings continued to expand Nepal’s border while attempting to avoid confrontations with colonial powers. However, in 1815 after skirmishes with the British East India Company, Nepali forces were eventually repelled back to approximately Nepal’s current border. In 1816, Nepal brokered a treaty with the British that allowed Nepal to maintain political autonomy in exchange for valuable territorial concessions. The treaty reached with colonial Britain marked not only the recognition of a unified Hindu Nepal to the rest of the globe, but the beginning of a long semi-isolationist policy of soft diplomacy with its much larger neighbors to the North (China) and South, East and West (India and Sikkim).35

After the treaty of 1815, geopolitical isolationism continued to be practiced for much the same reasons first articulated by Shah. In addition to the tactical considerations for maintaining

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35 Sikkim was an independent nation that shared its western border with Nepal until it was annexed by India in 1975.
distance with the West, the Hindu religious dictates categorizing westerners as ritually impure and polluting continued to hold sway with successive monarchs. Following Shah’s “unification of Nepal,” successive Shah monarchs institutionalized Hindu supremacy as national law. Hindu doctrine was formally codified into a legal code known as the Muluki Ain (MA) beginning in 1846. The MA combined pre-existing Hindu texts and organized them into a comprehensive guide to state policy and law. Importantly, the MA upheld a Hindu cosmological understanding of social organization that demanded strict adherence to caste and gender hierarchies. The MA represented the formal institutionalization of high-caste, Khas (Nepali speaking), Parbatiya (mid-hill dwelling) Hinduism, otherwise referred to as high-caste hill Hinduism (HCHH).

HCHH includes adherence to a caste system based on the hierarchical ordering of individuals according to their ascribed-at-birth spiritual status. In HCHH, the highest caste, Brahmin or Bahoun, is the priestly caste that performs the required religious practices for communities and households. Below the Brahmin caste is the warrior caste, Chettri. In contemporary Nepal, the Chettri caste fills many of the high-level professional occupations. After Chettri is the merchant caste Vaishya, which is largely absent in Nepal as members of the Newar ethnic group have largely filled this occupational niche. Below these three castes come the “impure” castes, or Shudra. Those in the Shudra castes have traditionally filled low-level occupational roles such as tailor, cobbler or launderer. According to some understandings of the caste system, below even the Shudra are the “untouchables,” who commonly self-identify with the political term Dalit. Dalits’ total ritual impurity makes them quite literally “untouchable” by any other caste. Thus, Dalits were (and still are) often relegated to ghettos outside of town limits where their polluting presence could be contained. Dalit communities traditionally filled the lowest level and dangerous occupations like blacksmith or tanner. Because Nepal’s official caste

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36 I discuss the Muluki Ain in further detail in chapter 5.
system includes many non-Hindu ethnic and religious minority groups, the social ranking is substantially complicated. The largest and most colloquially observed division in ranking is between “water sharing” and “water not sharing” groups. The “water sharing” groups are communities one could conceivably share a water bottle with without becoming ritually impure. The “water not sharing” groups are those groups that would defile the ritual purity of water in a vessel by their touch (Höefer 2004).

The MA catalogued in exhaustive detail the various status rankings between different occupational castes as well as “water sharing” and “water not sharing” groups. Rules governing whose shadow one could cross, whose cooked versus uncooked rice one could accept, and who one could have sexual relationships with were explicitly described. Infractions of these rules merited punishment, which the MA also detailed. In keeping with the deep belief in the cosmological necessity of social hierarchy, punishments for the same crime also differed depending on the caste status of the offender. High-caste offenders received far less severe punishments than low-caste offenders for equal infractions. Women were also more harshly punished across caste rankings, especially for sexual offenses (Höefer 2004).

The influence of HCHH as codified in the MA has dramatically shaped Nepal’s social landscape. As the backbone of Nepali law, the MA set the tone for state engagement with Nepali subjects for the next century. Through the MA the Nepali state promoted and upheld HCHH cosmological understandings of social organization that supported caste-based and gender-based discrimination. Caste-based discrimination was made illegal in 1962 through a constitutional amendment and caste-based behavioral norms have become considerably more lax, yet, the distinctions described above still exert considerable influence (Gellner 2001). This is particularly the case in more rural communities, where caste-based stratification is strongest (Ibid.). In fact,
the ongoing prevalence of caste-based discrimination and the practice of untouchability remained strong enough to warrant the passage of further legislation punishing such discrimination in 2011 (Law Commission of Nepal 2011). The 2011 “Caste Based Discrimination and Untouchability Offence and Punishment Act” outlines a series of measures meant to curb continued caste-based prejudice through stricter punishment of caste discrimination.

*The “opening” of Nepal*

In 1846, the Shah Kings lost much of their political power when the elite Rana family staged a violent coup that effectively made the monarch a symbolic figurehead. The Ranas implemented a hereditary prime-minister position from which real state power flowed. From 1846-1950, the Ranas ruled as an autocracy and were notorious for using the state treasury as their own private reserve. In this 100 year period, while the prime minister and his extended family enjoyed the luxuries imported from the industrializing West, the majority of Nepali subjects remained isolated from the forces of globalization and, for the most part, on the cusp of indigency. Royalists dissatisfied with Rana leadership as well as the general populace’s disdain for Rana opulence set the stage for a 1950 coup that ousted the Ranas and reinstated the monarch as the Nepali state’s one and only political leader. After regaining the throne, King Tribhuvan heralded the monarchy’s return to full power as the beginning of a new era for Nepal. In his short reign, Tribhuvan instituted important reforms including the revision of the MA to eliminate many caste and gender discriminatory laws and punishments. In addition, this period is often described as the “opening” of Nepal to the West. Westerners were finally allowed into Nepal on a limited basis, stronger diplomatic ties were forged and foreign aid began to flow in.
In 1951 King Tribhuvan went even further than moderating some of the caste and gender discriminatory aspects of the MA; he allowed independent political parties to form and register their ideological commitments publicly. Despite increased political openness, the monarchy promulgated a policy of “eota desh, eota besh” meaning literally “one country, one dress.” This state slogan very succinctly summarized a concerted effort to homogenize the social diversity of Nepal through a forced imposition of the norms, religion and language of HCHH. In the nascent public educational system, all instruction had to be in Nepali. Further, any legal matters (e.g. filing lawsuits, registering land titles, claiming citizenship) or government processes (e.g. voting) were also required to be carried out in Nepali. Such laws had the effect of marginalizing vast numbers of the population from participation in a supposedly more inclusive Nepal.

Challenges to Hindu hegemony

When Tribhuvan passed away in 1955, his son Mahendra became king and quickly made it clear he was less interested in democratization than his father. When tension mounted between political party leaders and the unresponsive king, King Mahendra responded by dissolving the congress, arresting political party leaders and banning political parties and public political gatherings. The dissolution of the multi-party system in 1960 marked the beginning of the unpopular Panchayat regime, which King Mahendra referred to as “guided democracy,” but which was in practice an absolute monarchy. The Panchayat regime did little to improve the living conditions for most Nepalis who lived outside the boundaries of the comparatively wealthy Kathmandu Valley. During the Panchayat era subsistence farming continued to be the primary means of survival for most Nepalis. Education levels and health indicators also remained abysmally low through this period. Yet, this time was not marked by fatalism in the populace.
Instead, covert political organizing continued to occur both within Nepal and in India. Beginning in the mid 1980’s social unrest and political mobilization against the Panchayat regime became more aggressive. Direct challenges to the monarchy and the Panchayat system were increasingly being organized by student groups with the backing of underground political parties.

Between 1980 and 1990, resentment towards the repressive and ineffectual Panchayat mounted and culminated in the Janandolan or First People’s Movement of 1990-1991. After a series of increasingly tense stand-offs between police and protestors, then King Birendra granted concessions to the protestors, including an end to the ban on political parties. On April 8th, 1990, multi-party democracy was restored. Further negotiation over the next several months resulted in other concessions. A new constitution was drafted, which instated a popularly elected house of representatives. Importantly, the new constitution recognized Nepal as a “multi-ethnic, multilingual” country, yet did not go so far as to declare Nepal secular. Instead, the new constitution reaffirmed Nepal as a Hindu kingdom. The Janandolan was important because, as mentioned in chapter 1, it firmly implanted concepts like swatantrata (freedom), lok tantra (democracy) and adhikaar (rights) into the public consciousness.

In hindsight, it seems inevitable that in spite of the liberties gained through the Janandolan, tensions would flare again due to the continued disenfranchisement and crippling poverty experienced by the majority of rural Nepalis. Yet, for a few years, it seemed that King Birendra had found a way to balance the continuation of a Hindu monarchy with increasing calls for social and political liberalization. Despite changes initiated by the Janandolan, political unrest continued to coalesce around an ideological platform that dubbed themselves “Maoist.” The political commitment to Maoism originated in the initial exposure of movement leaders to socialist ideals including social liberation through the violent overthrow of “class enemies” while
in exile in India. The Nepali Maoists, led by the once exiled high-caste intellectuals, gained momentum in the far west of Nepal, which was historically the most isolated, impoverished and disenfranchised region of the country. The Maoists framed themselves as radical reformists hoping to oust the monarchy, overthrow HCHH hegemony and institute a secular democracy.\(^{37}\)

The official declaration of a “People’s War” did not occur until 1996, when a splinter Maoist party officially dedicated itself to armed struggle against the monarchy and launched a coordinated attack on a remote police post. Why these initial acts of violence spiraled into a ten-year civil war has been the topic of much debate. Evidence suggests that the Maoist guerrillas were able to successfully play on the long-standing disenfranchisement of much of the rural populace (Do and Iyer 2010). Joshi (2013) argues that, “the structural persistence of poverty, as well as the socio-economic inequality and sustained marginalization of ethnic minorities from accessing state power and resources, were conditions that catalyzed the outbreak of armed conflict in Nepal” (821). Maoist attacks specifically targeted large landholders and especially HCHH landholders. In this regard, Maoist violence was a direct response to the social and economic hegemony of HCHH that had defined Nepal since its unification in 1769 (Shah and Pettigrew 2009).

For the first several years of the insurgency, fighting was centered in the most remote and impoverished areas of Western Nepal and was managed by local police forces (Nepal et al. 2011). In 2001, an attack on an army barracks controlled by the monarchy initiated a new and much more violent phase of the conflict. After this attack the Royal Nepal Army was mobilized to quash the rebellion, and it began a concerted campaign of uncovering Maoist strongholds in

\(^{37}\) Simultaneously, the Maoists had by the early 1990s splintered into several contentious political groups. Nevertheless, several basic principles were shared in common across their various platforms: a call to dissolve the monarchy and abolish the caste-system, a stated goal of founding a secular Nepal, and a plan to redistribute political power and economic resources to the historically marginalized rural majority.
rural areas. What this amounted to was an increasingly militarized atmosphere in the Maoist controlled regions of Nepal.

In 2001, a bizarre tragedy further complicated the general public’s understanding of the People’s War. Crown Prince Dipendra, apparently intoxicated and angered that his girlfriend had not been welcomed by the King and Queen, entered the royal palace with an automatic weapon and killed 11 members of the royal family before also killing himself. Among those killed in the massacre were the King, Queen and any direct descendants to the crown. Consequently, the unpopular uncle to Prince Dipendra, Gyanendra was crowned King. This episode had two major consequences. First, it shook the deep spiritual faith many Nepalis had in the royal family. Second, it resulted in the crowning of a very unpopular royal. Overall this sequence of events served to severely weaken the institution of the monarchy in the eyes of many. This would become decisive in the years to come, since the decline in public support led the monarchy to be able to act with less impunity to quash civil unrest. Further, the specter of a secular Nepal became more palatable to many who could not accept the idea of Gyanendra as a living God.

From 2002 to 2005 fighting continued to intensify as both the Maoists and the Royal Nepali Army strengthened and grew their ranks. Stories of abuse, rape, torture, and disappearances perpetrated on civilians by both the army and the Maoists abounded. In this context, the urban centers of Nepal swelled as previously rural inhabitants sought refuge from the crossfire of ongoing conflict. In 2005, the Maoists were gaining control of increasingly large territories of Nepal and protests were beginning to spread to the Kathmandu Valley. In response, then King Gyanendra dismissed congress, seized absolute authority and imposed martial law. This unexpected roll-back of citizens’ rights galvanized anti-royal sentiment in the public and served to create a degree of unity among the different Maoist factions (Joshi 2013). Facing
opposition from both Maoists and the general public, in 2006 the King agreed to reinstate the congress, whose first act was to force Gyanendra to cede his political powers. Later in 2006, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was ratified by the leaders of the Maoist insurgent groups and members of the re-instated congress. A Constituent Assembly was formed to draft a new constitution reflecting the political changes wrought by the Maoists’ political ascendance. In the 2008 elections the Communist Party Nepal (CPN) won a majority of seats in the newly formed Constituent Assembly and the leader of the guerrilla movement, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, became Prime Minister. In 2008 the monarchy was also dissolved and Gyanendra left the royal palace to live as a private citizen of Nepal. Nepal was then declared a secular federal democratic republic by the Prime Minister and Congress.

Approximately 13,000 people lost their lives during the Maoist insurgency and over 200,000 were displaced (Nepal et al. 2011). This figure does not include the many millions of Nepalis who, while not directly displaced, moved to avoid exposure to violence or migrated to find work outside of Nepal’s ravaged economy (Ibid). Following the elections of 2008, the Nepali state has struggled to regain any semblance of political stability. An attempt to draft a new constitution floundered in 2012 and again in 2015. While there have been many issues under discussion, the sticking point is a disagreement over how to re-draw and re-name the 75 districts comprising Nepal. Ethnic federalism has gained political traction since the 1990’s and the tension over ethnic groups’ rights to self-identification is central in ongoing constitutional debates. As of the time of writing, no constitution has been approved in Nepal, and Nepali citizens continue to hope for a representative and functional democracy.

Changes in the Wake of Conflict
The *Janandolan* and the Maoist insurgency did more than shift the political makeup of Nepal. They were *social* revolutions, with primarily social consequences—most notably the destabilization of HCHH hegemony. These conflicts thrust a particular ideology of freedom, democracy and social change into the mainstream for several decades and succeeded in bringing topics of gender and caste equality into everyday discourse. In addition, the tumult of the conflicts both coincided with and accelerated transnational processes like rural out-migration, industrialization, urbanization, expansion of the wage labor sector, increased access to education, and increased marketization of the economy. In short the *Janandolan* and successive events marked an escalation in Nepal’s encounter with “globalization.” In the context of Nepal’s simultaneous engagement with the global and the re-negotiation of its own political identity, social categories linked to caste and gender were troubled, re-evaluated and re-drawn. My informants are both constitutive of and witnesses to these profound changes.

One of the key successes of the *Janandolan* was the elimination of many lingering caste and gender discriminatory laws at the national level. Participants in the People’s Movement were able to call attention to the hegemony of HCHH and destabilize the centrality of Hindu ideology in state operations. Importantly, many high-caste Hindus actively participated in and helped lead caste-discrimination reform movements. The *Janandolan*’s motto of representative democracy made room in the larger social consciousness for identity-based politics that continue to heavily shape the current political field. The focus on democracy also brought renewed attention to the systematic economic, political and social subjugation of Nepali women. Women’s rights activists as well as many high-profile male political party leaders were quick to state that any movement for democracy that did not include women would be ideologically hypocritical (Leve 2007).
The Maoist movement brought further critique to the oppressive aspects of HCHH caste and gender ideologies. A central platform of the Maoist fighters was elimination of caste and gender discrimination, in addition to ending to Kathmandu Valley’s supremacy in terms of politics, religion and culture. During the insurgency and after, Maoist leaders (who were overwhelmingly male) made much of the high percentage of female insurgents in their ranks as evidence of their progressive commitments. While it is true that many Maoist fighters were female, doubt has been cast as to how much power and autonomy such fighters had within the insurgency hierarchy (Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004). Nevertheless, there is evidence that the presence of female insurgents has been a powerful symbol of changing gender norms and perhaps even indicates a degree of women’s empowerment (Menon and Van Der Meulen 2015; Pettigrew 2012).

As discussed above, the chronic violence and political uncertainty felt throughout Nepal’s rural regions fomented a massive relocation of individuals and families from the countryside to the city. Further, the depressed economy of Nepal—caused in part by its long-term instability—precipitated further rural out-migration and international migration. The last two decades have thus seen dramatic changes in rural/urban population distribution. The balance between Nepalis participating in agrarian versus wage labor-based livelihoods is shifting towards the latter. Metropolitan areas have expanded rapidly in the past 30 years, particularly Kathmandu, Pokhara and several cities on Nepal’s southern border with India. In South Asia, Nepal is “the fastest urbanizing country, with an average [urban] population growth rate of about 6 percent per year since the 1970’s” (Muzzini and Aparicio 2014: 1). Kathmandu’s population has swelled to over 2.5 million as a result of a steady annual growth rate of about 4% between 2001-2010 (NLSS 2011). The swell of previously rural inhabitants to urban zones has been a
profound demographic shift (Government of Nepal 2011). For example, a 2011 national report shows the percentage of Nepal’s total population living in urban areas surging from 14% to 17% in just 10 years (Government of Nepal 2011: 3). Given the immense challenge of conducting census work in Nepal the actual population living in urban areas is estimated to be significantly higher (Muzzini and Aparicio 2014).

As families and individuals continue to join the burgeoning cities, the marketized economy has simultaneously expanded to accommodate the diverse needs of city-dwellers. New commodity markets have opened as livelihoods are increasingly sustained through waged-labor and a cash-based economy. The shift to urban life has meant a shift in procuring basic goods like food and clothing, as well as less tangible goods like entertainment. Rapid construction of housing developments, shopping malls, and business parks has substantially altered the labor and consumer landscape. Urbanization has resulted in the development of innumerable grocery stores, restaurants, clothing shops, sundry stores, flea markets, movie theaters, music clubs, etc. Infrastructural services like public transportation, banks, police departments, schools and local NGOs have developed in tandem with the urban and semi-urban sprawl. Servicing the population of large urban areas like Kathmandu and Pokhara employs millions of Nepalis through a wage labor system.

The emergence of waged-labor as a livelihood model continues to have rippling effects on the social organization of the populace. The cash economy has stimulated the consolidation of a class-based system of stratification, which has destabilized caste-based stratification (Liechty 2010). The ascendance of class-based divisions has thus eroded HCHH hegemony by undermining caste identity as the primary marker of social status. Liechty (2003, 2010) has

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38 The figure of 17% of Nepalis living in urban areas is a very low estimate. Issues like seasonal rural-urban migration, large unregistered urban settlements and a lack of resources to conduct a more systematic census almost certainly result in a significant underreporting of the urban population (Muzzini and Aparicio 2014).
written most definitively on the emergence of class in Nepal and its consequences for social ordering and social hierarchies. He speaks of the emergent middle class economy in Kathmandu, noting that, “the city’s new cash and market-oriented economy demands that people pioneer new forms of cultural practice, identification and privilege” (2010: 56). Liechty’s research on consumer cultures in Kathmandu deftly deconstructs the “daily balancing” between “the demands and possibilities of a transforming social and material context against those of deeply rooted cultural milieu of moral values, systems of prestige, and notions of propriety” (5). As Liechty demonstrates, the growth of a cash economy opens up possibilities for different types of lives that are less circumscribed by caste status. While caste certainly remains critically important and is closely tied to social and economic opportunity structures that determine class, it is also apparent that the wage labor economy provides a modicum of flexibility in accessing incremental upward mobility.

The socio-demographic trends described above have had material consequences for how my informants are able to construct an identity as a modern women. Their access to education, the amenities of urban life and new forms of consumer commodities is a result of the various social, political-economic and demographic shifts since the 1990’s. These shifts have coalesced into a sometimes bewildering force of change for many Nepalis including my informants. It is in this context of flux that young women entering the wage labor economy in Nepal’s new urban spaces contend with the task of fashioning modern subjectivities. In the next section I describe another important component facilitating the myriad changes taking place in Nepal: the vast development sector.

A Legacy of Development
In this section I review the history of development in Nepal and present some of the criticisms of these ongoing modernization projects. Importantly, although Nepal has experienced significant political instability and conflict, there has been surprising continuity in the discourse and practice of development. The state’s focus on development and modernity has assumed an archetypal Nepali subject/citizen that upholds the hegemony of HCHH and inadvertently marginalizes women’s role in Nepal’s narrative of progress. The discursive exclusion of women as part of Nepal’s development trajectory continues to shape how my informants articulate their role in contemporary social organization.

Receiving Foreign Aid

Following the coup of 1951, which effectively ended 100 years of isolationist policy, development began to take center stage in Nepal’s state discourse (Whelpton 2005). Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the Nepali state championed development ad nauseum. Manifesting in everything from royal proclamations, school textbooks and radio programs, the language of development remains ubiquitous today. In the 1950’s the Nepali monarchy’s turn to development was well-timed, as it coincided with new policies in Western countries of providing foreign aid to so-called “less developed nations.” Nepal became a popular recipient of foreign aid from the United States and several European countries. In addition, rivalry between India and China over control of valuable overland routes through Nepal created a competition for which neighbor could provide Nepal with more valuable aid packages. The strong socialist leanings of political parties from Kind Tribhuvan’s (1950-1954) reign onward had the effect of garnering the sympathy of Russia as well, which also contributed substantial foreign aid to Nepal. Today,

39 In particular, the Truman Doctrine of 1947 encouraged global aid monies to flow into Nepal.
foreign aid continues to pour into Nepal; currently India, China, Japan, the United States and Scandinavian countries are among the top contributors (Whelpton 2005).

In 1955 the Nepali state drafted its first comprehensive development agenda for the nation, which focused on infrastructure, agriculture and education. The 1950’s and 1960’s witnessed sluggish change but did see significant progress in the infrastructure development in and around Kathmandu Valley. In the 1970’s then King Birendra instituted foreign aid-funded educational reforms, which broadened access to primary school for millions of Nepalis. The 1980’s were a period of continually increasing engagement with the West, particularly through projects with international NGOs and transnational organizations like the World Bank and IMF. In the 1980’s Nepal negotiated a structural adjustment plan with the World Bank and IMF. In exchange for loans, Nepal implemented policies to simplify regulation of the private sector. In the 1990’s and 2000’s, foreign aid was channeled towards peace-keeping missions and, in the case of monies from the United States, was directly targeted towards anti-terrorism training for the military. After the conflict came to an end in the mid 2000’s, foreign aid was once again dispersed over a number of social programs.

The results of 60 years of aggressive development and modernization projects by the government, local NGOs and INGOs are mixed, but have certainly resulted in tangible gains in a number of areas. Education and literacy rates have shown marked improvement. In 1998 the literacy rate for Nepalis 5 years of age and older was 49.8% and in 2008 the literacy rate for this group had risen to 63.2% (Government of Nepal 2008). These improvements can be directly traced to the expansion of the education system into more remote areas. Infrastructure and information access has also greatly improved. For example, in the 1970’s Nepal debuted a nation-wide radio-broadcasting network that has been instrumental in disseminating news to
even the farthest flung communities. The state also constructed an international airport, which has allowed an increase in transnational trade and is centrally important in allowing the arrival of international tourists. Dams and hydropower facilities have given extremely remote areas of Nepal access to electricity, which has substantially improved the quality of life for millions. Road infrastructure has also dramatically shifted the day-to-day life of Nepalis. As roads have extended into previously isolated communities, residents have been able to reach better food, quicker medical intervention and easier travel routes to education facilities. The effect of roads on improving the overall living standards of many Nepalis cannot be overstated (Shrestha et al. 2014). In sum, there are many successes in Nepal’s development portfolio.

Despite improvement in national living standards, Nepal’s human development index continues to register near the bottom, and Nepal remains a “Least Developed Country” according to the United Nations. For example, in 2011, an estimated 44.2% of the population lived in “multi-dimensional poverty,” which measures deprivations in “health, education and standard of living” (UNDP 2013). Further, Nepal is ranked 102 out of 148 countries in gender inequality (Ibid). According to U.S. State Department statistics, current unemployment is around 46% (State Department 2014). Even this startling figure does not communicate the pervasive underemployment that keeps many Nepalis at or below the poverty line. In spite of decades of development initiatives, accessing basic amenities remains a struggle for many Nepalis. This is especially true for the most remote parts of Nepal, which still lack electricity, motorable roads or consistent access to potable water.

_Devlopment as a Social Ideology_
In comparison to other South Asian countries, foreign aid in Nepal has made up a larger percentage of GDP (Gautam and Pokhrel 2011). For example, between 1995 and 2001 Sri Lanka’s and Pakistan’s foreign aid as percent of GDP averaged around 3% while for this same time period Nepal’s foreign aid accounted for just under 9% of GDP (Ibid.: 1). Scholars of Nepal have noted that Nepal has disproportionately attracted the “benevolence” of foreign aid (Tamang 2000; Pigg 1992). Because development projects in Nepal are primarily funded through foreign aid, the discourse of modernity that Nepalis experience is mediated by the construction of bikaas (development) from the perspective of foreign donors. As Carney and Rappleye (2011) point out, “international engagement with Nepal…must be understood within the frameworks of post-colonialism, not least in terms of the ways in which ‘development’ establishes an ideological encounter in which universalist notions of progress and modernity meet locally grounded social visions” (3). The result of omnipresent development discourse and development programming has generated an ideology of bikaas (development) with far reaching consequences for how Nepalis understand their country, themselves and their fellow citizens.

Historically, development discourse and programming in Nepal has tended to target the rural peasant majority living outside the Kathmandu Valley, while the control of projects has remained firmly within the control of Valley HCHH elites. The flow of development aid through local and international NGOs headquartered in the Valley has exacerbated divisions between those Nepalis considered as needy recipients of aid (e.g. poor, rural, illiterate, low-caste) and those Nepalis considered competent to receive funds and implement programming (e.g. highly educated and likely upper class and high-caste). Writing over 20 years ago, anthropologist Stacey Pigg (1993) describes development as a “social practice” insomuch as the “structures of development actively pervade social experience in Nepal” (46). What Pigg and other critical
development scholars reveal is that development and modernization projects engender particular ways of thinking about development that has material consequences in people’s lives (Escobar 1995; Bebbington 2000; Yeh 2007). For example, Pigg (1993) notes that in Nepal, the term bikaas (development) has come to signify particular things such as “water pipes, plastic buckets, electricity, video cassette recorders…” that are considered foreign (51). In this process of signification, bikaas itself is framed as an external and foreign state of being that Nepal should strive to reach. Pigg (1993) notes that in such a construction, “the rural people who are ‘targeted’ for development intervention are implicitly deemed inferior, because the premise of development activity is that it supplies to rural Nepal what it lacks” (51). In post 1951 Nepal, development became what Pigg (1993) calls an “idiom of hierarchy” in that some Nepalis were understood as closer to bikaas than others (53). Bikaas also became a stand-in term for a number of complimentary ideas about modernity and progress. In the state’s zeal for development, the term bikaas became antithetical to the rural way of life that defined day-to-day living for the majority of Nepalis. Most notably, the villager embodied all that was not bikaas. Writing two decades later, Nepali scholar Seira Tamang (2002b) reiterates that this troubling juxtaposition remains strong. Tamang (2002b) notes that an emphasis on “civil society” in contemporary bikaas discourse reinforces the notion that particular ways of social organization—such as village life—are not only abikaasit (undeveloped) but actually uncivil (342).

In sum, the consequence of development discourse in Nepal has been the creation of an ideology that links various dichotomies together: modernity/tradition, progress/stagnation, urban/village, educated/ignorant. The outcome of these conceptual linkages is a disparagement of a particular way of life deemed incommensurable with bikaas. The representative of this abikaasit (undeveloped) life was and remains the uneducated peasant. Importantly, the abikaasit
(undeveloped) figure is also gendered in that rural women are seen as the epitome of this unfortunate identity. The continued relevance of the bikaasit/abikaasit dichotomy is made clear in the opening vignette of this dissertation, where I describe a public mural that pits the educated, wage earning urban family against the poor, uneducated peasant family.

The ideological tie between development and modernity is such that some scholars suggest Nepalis experience “modernity through development” (Carney and Rappleye 2011: 2). The things associated with contemporary development programs: the expansion of capitalism, urbanization and cities, higher education and infrastructure are also markers of modernity. By marking these things as modern, Nepal’s development discourse sets up a foil to modernity in the form of the village and the villager. Carney and Rappleye (2011) note, “this reconfiguration of the village as a place of ‘relatively little bikaas,’ indeed as a place marked by its inability to understand and embrace ‘progress’, is the profound consequence of a developmental process couched in terms of economics but which is essentially cultural” (4). They continue, “the city becomes not only that place of opposition to the vast remainder of the Country, but the merging of ‘developed’ Nepal with the imaginative and material spaces of the west” (4). In short, development in Nepal is not just a set of programs aimed at increasing education or improving maternal health. Development is a productive discourse that produces ways of understanding social categories, including the self. Development is a social ideology that, as I demonstrate further in chapter 5, engenders specific ways of thinking about, talking about and doing modernity.

Tourism and development discourse
Prior to the break of 1951, Nepal’s contact with foreign visitors was quite minimal. It was not until halfway through the 20th century that Nepal started to appear more frequently in Western media and interest in “Shangri-La” slowly mounted as did the Nepali states interest in tourism promotion. In the last half century Nepal, like many other countries in the global South, has sought to promote development within its borders through the implementation of a strong tourism industry (Adams 1995; Nepal 2007). Even as Nepal has undergone massive political change, the state in all its varying configurations has remained resolutely committed to development via tourism.

In 1950’s Europe, the birth of modern-day mountaineering prompted a search for greater feats of mountain climbing, which led to adventure seekers hoping to climb the world’s tallest mountain, Mount Everest. Mount Everest, or Sagarmatha as it is known in Nepal, is situated in the Northeast region of Nepal and straddles the Nepal/Tibet/China border. The successful summit of Everest by Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Sir Edmund Hillary in 1953 drew international attention to Nepal and put it on the map as the ultimate mountaineering destination. For the next decade highly experienced mountaineers began to trickle in, building a steady route between Kathmandu and the Everest region. More important than the income generated from the actual mountaineering expeditions was the global exposure such high-profile feats gained for Nepal.

Tourism began to pick up in the 1960’s when Kathmandu became part of the overland Asian travel route for adventure seekers from Europe and the U.S. In the 1960’s and 1970’s, though the Nepali state did little to actively promote tourism development, official state discourse began to gesture towards the incorporation of tourism as a pillar of broader

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40 Sherpas are an ethnic community that is indigenous to the Everest region. Although the word ‘Sherpa’ is often taken to mean porter or guide, this is an incorrect usage. A porter or guide may be of any ethnicity, but because of the historical association of Sherpa people with portering the terms have been conflated.
development policy (Pradhanang 2000: 19-21). Throughout the 1980’s tourism continued to steadily increase, especially as trekking tourism in the Himalayas became more popular and accessible. In the 1990’s through the early 2000’s, tourism was brought to a near standstill as a result of the ten-year Maoist insurgency. During this time business contracted significantly and state-led tourism promotion was put on hold. In 2008, after the Nepali monarchy was dissolved, tourism policy reemerged as a more prominent state issue. Since 2009, tourism has picked up pace considerably and the tourist areas of Kathmandu Valley are once again bustling (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2013). Trekking tourism in particular has been at the center of many national tourism initiatives (Ortner 2001). In 2013, the state registered 12,937 trekking tourists (Government of Nepal 2013). This official statistic does not include the substantial number of tourists trekking outside of designated national parks, nor the significant flow of pilgrims from both India and China who use the same routes as recreational tourists to access remote temples in the Himalayas.

Although most of the country’s tourist flows are centered in urban Nepal, the post-conflict state has made a concerted effort to frame tourism as a vector of rural development. In the last several Five Year Plans, there are lengthy chapters on how tourism can play a central role in providing income to remote regions by bringing tourism dollars to villages located along trekking routes (Government of Nepal 2003). Current promotion of tourism by state actors emphasizes tourism as a source of development for villagers and especially village women, who, it is argued, can provide services like food, lodging and handcraft production to tourists and thus earn capital (Ibid.: 240). This logic is in line with the larger discourse of development that frames villages and village women as in need of development. Tourism, the state argues, will provide a route to development for village women by giving them access to cash wages.
Current Trends in Gender

*Urbanization, Education and Employment*

The entrance of women into the wage labor economy has been supported by several socio-economic trends, most notably urbanization, the emergence of new markets for goods and services and increased female education. Women’s increasing access to education is reflected in rising rates of female literacy and education over the past several decades. For example, in 1998 75.4% of women reported *never* attending school, while in 2008 this figure dropped to 58.2% (Government of Nepal 2008). The gap between male and female literacy rates in Nepal continues to decline, with a 2011 report showing male literacy at 75.1% and female literacy at 57.4% of the total population (Government of Nepal 2011). A 2014 report claims that Nepal has reached “complete gender parity” in primary education, though women lag behind in secondary education, and the gap widens further for increasingly higher levels of educational attainment (World Economic Forum 2014).

Education of women has been facilitated in part by urbanization, which puts more Nepalis in closer proximity to schools. With new ease of access has come increased enrollment. Historically, isolated rural communities have been understandably unwilling and unable to send their children to higher levels of schooling that were often located 2-3 hours (or more) walking distance away. As women in the current University-aged and primary/secondary school-aged generations gain educational parity with their male peers, they expect to find work suitable to their skill level. Over the last several decades, women’s participation in the wage labor economy has been steadily gaining. For example, the 2013 World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum 2013) notes that Nepal is ranked highly (12th out of 136 countries) in
terms of women’s participation in the labor force (292). However, this figure includes women who participate in agrarian labor as their primary occupation. The concentration of women in low-paying agricultural labor is reflected in WEFGGR 2014 estimates of women’s national average annual income of $1,503 USD compared to men’s national average annual income of $2,873 USD (World Economic Forum 2014). As for participation in waged-labor, government statistics report that women account for 34.7% of the employed population outside of agricultural labor (Labor Force Survey 2008). However, the majority of this figure is comprised of women working in the informal economy, with its attending insecurity and poor remuneration.

The most recent national-level statistics on unemployment report an extremely low country-wide unemployment rate of 2.1% (Government of Nepal 2008). Yet, this figure is deeply misleading. Included in this calculation are the millions of workers “employed” in subsistence-level agriculture in Nepal’s rural countryside. In urban areas, unemployment is much higher at 13% and the underemployment rate for urban areas is a startling 49.9% (Government of Nepal 2008). For Nepalis not working as agricultural laborers, 70% work in the informal sector and must navigate the instability and precariousness associated with informal work (Ibid.). Thus, for both men and women in urban areas finding suitable work is a challenging endeavor and most struggle to find employment matching their educational attainment. Women’s unemployment in urban areas is higher than their male counterparts due to long-standing norms that discourage work outside the home. If a suitable job—that is a job which is deemed socially respectful—is not available, women will often opt to not work rather than work in a job that would expose her to moral censure (Brunson 2013; Zendel 2013).

41 1,462,000 women are employed in wage earning, non-agriculture or agriculture-related (e.g. milling, collecting firewood or water) activities (Labor Force Survey 2008).
**Political Disenfranchisement**

There are several areas in which Nepali women do not enjoy the same rights as Nepali men, including their right to citizenship. Before 2007, citizenship in Nepal could only be passed through the paternal line. To get citizenship, a Nepali had to have the signature of his/her citizen father or his/her father’s birth certificate, proof of father’s citizenship and death certificate if he was deceased. Citizenship could not be granted through the maternal line in any case.

Essentially, this left many Nepalis without access to their father’s permission or paperwork stateless. This system also explicitly institutionalized male supremacy by suggesting that Nepali women were not worthy of passing citizenship to their offspring. The 2007 interim constitution, which was drafted after the Maoists gained political legitimacy and the King was demoted to a figure-head, made an important change in the wording. The new wording stated that citizenship could be granted through the father “or” mother. However, implementation remained non-existent and it took a Supreme Court case in 2011 to reaffirm Nepali women’s right to pass citizenship on to their children. Although the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of the plaintiff who was suing to become a citizen through her mother, the ruling did little to change actual procedures. The process of becoming a citizen was and still is managed through a variety of gatekeepers who use bureaucratic tactics to unofficially discourage and subvert attempts to gain citizenship through the maternal line. Disturbingly, the new interim constitution currently under consideration has brought back the original wording, which states that approval of both
mother “and” father would be necessary to obtain citizenship. If this constitution is passed, women will once again be classified as partial citizens in word as well as deed.42

Discriminatory citizenship laws are just one part of the lingering “state patriarchy,” that defines the Nepali state’s relationship to its female citizens (Tamang 2001). For example, inheritance laws reflect a view of women as dependents of their fathers or husbands but never actually as individuals in their own right. Current laws prohibit a woman from inheriting land from her parents unless she remains unmarried past the age of 35. The rationale is that a woman will inevitably be married into another family and that the wealth of her maternal home should be divided among the sons of that family. However, if a woman is unmarried after 35 it is assumed she will not marry, and thus her maternal home has the responsibility to support her through inheritance wealth. Although cases have been fought successfully by women to claim some share of their parents’ wealth, such cases are rare because of the extreme social condemnation these women face. For example, Rankin’s (2004) ethnography of gender relations in an urban Newar township provides several chilling anecdotes of women facing total social ostracization for asserting their inheritance rights.

Besides citizenship and inheritance laws, numerous other discriminatory laws exist or have only quite recently been overturned. Marital rape was only declared illegal in 2002 and only after a protracted legal battle that went through the Supreme Court. In another recent example, the Nepali state has made it illegal for women under 30 to migrate abroad for work, and even those over 30 need the permission of their family (read: husband or father). These types of patronizing laws attest to the confusing and inconsistent messages women receive from the state. Women should embrace development but shouldn’t expect full citizenship, women should be

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42 The law should technically prevent both single fathers and mothers without the necessary documents from the other biological parent from obtaining citizenship for their children. However, it is only enforced for women seeking citizenship for their fatherless children (Tamang 2000, 2011).
gainfully employed but not before men, women should be leaders of the country but expect to receive less in matters of the family. Such contradictory messaging is, as discussed in the concluding chapter, a key source of anxiety for my informants.

Chapter Three Conclusion

A number of important moments in Nepal’s history as a state mark the ascendance and eventual destabilization of Hindu hegemony: the “unification” of Nepal as a Hindu kingdom in 1769, the first experiments with democracy in 1951, the People’s Movement of 1991, the Maoist insurgency of 1996-20006 and finally the troubled transition to a secular, federal, democratic republic from 2008 onward. Each of these pivotal moments engendered wide-spread political, social and economic change for Nepal citizens, culminating in the weakening of HCHH hegemony that had defined Nepal since its inception as a Hindu Kingdom. With the gradual weakening of HCHH dominance, laws constraining women’s movement outside the domestic realm were mostly overturned and norms disproving women’s public visibility lost some popular support, opening up space for women like my informants to enter the wage labor economy. These historical moments also precipitated trends such as rural out-migration, urbanization, expansion of the capitalist economy and increase in access to amenities like electricity, roads and schools, which radically re-structured the way many Nepalis live their lives. Such changes have opened up additional opportunities for women from diverse caste and class backgrounds to go to school, work and increase their personal mobility and autonomy. Simultaneously, the powerful state-sponsored discourse of development (bikaas) has often framed women as the needy recipients of development rather than equal participants in Nepal’s narrative of progress. In the midst of expanding opportunities lingering ideas about women as abikaasit (undeveloped) and
state-backed gender-discriminatory laws serve as a reminder of women’s second class citizenship.

It is in the context of waning Hindu hegemony and changing economic opportunity structures described in this chapter that women like my informants enter the public sphere of waged-labor. In the next chapter I describe my informants in detail, focusing on the day-to-day realities of being young, female and working class in urban Nepal. I also discuss the methods I used to access my informants and describe how data was collected and analyzed. Following the methods chapter I return to a discussion of development discourse. In particular, I further elaborate on the gendered meaning-making female guides employ to understand their positionality vis-à-vis development and modernity.
CHAPTER 4

METHODS

In this chapter I provide an account of my research population and describe the data collection and data analysis undertaken for this dissertation. The data were collected during 20 months of fieldwork conducted between 2012-2015. From August 2012-August 2013, I spent twelve months splitting my time between the cities of Kathmandu, where I refined my Nepali fluency with intensive language instruction, and Pokhara, where I accessed my informants. In July 2014-April 2015 I returned to Nepal and carried out follow-up focus groups and informal interviews with research participants. While conducting research I engaged several qualitative methods including participant observation, formal and informal interviews and focus groups.

The core of the data is drawn from over a year’s worth of participant observation, in which I worked and lived with female trekking guides. During high-tourist season I spent a month observing the everyday work routine of guides. This entailed backpacking for a month on a popular tourist route with my guide Devi, who would later become my key informant and introduce me to the day-to-day lives of female trekking guides. The remainder of fieldwork was spent interacting with guides in their urban residences. In the following sections I first provide a detailed account of my informants and situate them as working class women. I then give a description of my research site followed by a discussion of my entrance and immersion into the lives of my informants. The remainder of this chapter consists of additional sections on the specific methodologies employed to collect data, the justification for these methodologies and the methods used to analyze the collected materials.

Female trekking guides in Nepal
Foreign trekking tourists have typically relied on male porters and guides to organize and lead their trekking expeditions. However, in the early 1990’s, the first Nepali female guides began to appear after the founding of Shakti Trekking in Pokhara. Shakti Trekking was the first female-run trekking company in Nepal and quickly gained international attention because of the impressive mountaineering feats of the all-female founders. From its inception, Shakti Trekking instituted a free guide-training program for women, which has helped increase the number of qualified Nepali female guides over its 20 years of operation. Due to the success and international recognition of Shakti Trekking, female guides are now being trained and hired in many other guiding companies. As I discuss in greater detail throughout the following chapters, female guides are still an exception in the predominantly male trekking industry and their presence is met with a variety of reactions ranging from excitement to dismay. Although an exact estimate is hard to calculate, Shakti Trekking has over 75 female assistant guides and guides on its active roster and Shakti Trekking staff estimate that there are an additional 300+ female guides working out of Kathmandu and Pokhara.

The female guides I interviewed all entered their profession through Shakti Trekking’s twice-yearly guide training. Typically, women join the training after hearing about it through a friend or relative. The month-long course is designed to give trainees a sense of what guiding is like as a career as well as provide some basic-skills training. Trainees must pass a test on various job-related competencies like map-reading and emergency protocol before they can be hired. Women generally take the training 2 to 3 times over the course of a year or two before they receive adequate marks on the test. After they pass the post-training test, the participants can ask to be put on Shakti Trekking’s assistant guide roster. When booking trekking clients, the office rotates through the roster and assigns assistant guides to work with more seasoned guides while
they improve their English, learn the ins and outs of seasonal trekking routes, and master the cross-cultural competencies required to work with foreign guests. It is not uncommon for women to take the training but later decide that guiding is not a good occupational fit. For the women that do decide to pursue guiding as a career, they generally stay an assistant guide for 2-3 years (or about 4-6 trekking seasons) before they are promoted to guide.

Although the actual work of guiding takes place on the trail, both male and female guides generally live in urban areas where they can access the tourist market. Guides almost always receive work through guide agencies, which set up storefronts in tourism hot spots and arrange the logistics of a trek (such as route planning, permits, equipment rental) for tourists. It is not uncommon for guides to work for multiple agencies to maximize the amount of guiding contracts they receive in a season. While most guides work as individual contractors there are instances where more experienced guides are kept on salary with one guide company. At Shakti Trekking, when tourists arrive at the office looking to book a guide, the office staff select an appropriate guide for the trip based on the guide’s expertise on the particular trekking route, their experience, language ability, availability and number of working days they have received that season. The guide then arrives at the office, meets the client and makes arrangement for departure. On the departure day the guide and client will take a bus, taxi or even plane (depending on how much the client wants to spend on transportation) to the trailhead. From the trailhead the group will set off on foot and the guide will lead the group until they return to the office.

Assistant guides and guides are both paid industry standard by Shakti Trekking, which is approximately $10.00 and $20.00 per day, respectively. Assistant guides usually work 5-30 days

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43 Over the 18 months I was in Nepal I witnessed 4 training sessions. The attrition rate was fairly high and out of each class of 40 trainees, usually only 5-10 women went on to actually work as guides. Those who did not went into other working class positions. For example, several young women I taught English to worked as servers at Pokhara restaurants; another woman began working in a tourist clothing shop, and still others found work as a front-desk assistant at various hotels throughout Pokhara.
a season, whereas guides work 30-90 days. At the high end, female guides working for Shakti Trekking can make between $1,000-$1,300 USD/year (90 working days x 20$/day=$1,200 USD). For comparison, a working class salary for a single person in urban Nepal is about USD $100.00/month ($1,200/year). Guides thus earn relatively good money on a daily basis during the “on” seasons (September-December and March-May) that then must sustain them for the 5 months of “off” season (winter months and the summer monsoon months). Assistant guides must supplement their income with either family support, income from another job, such as working in a shop, or, they may petition Shakti Trekking for free room and board for 6 months while they work towards becoming a guide. Guides however, earn enough money to support themselves without another income source as long as they pool their earnings. This is accomplished by living with relatives and friends.

Guiding is seasonal, yet the majority live in the city during both the on and off season. During the on season, living in the city is necessary as they might be called by an office at any time to depart for a trek the next day. My informants stay in the city during the off season because, as they told me, they enjoy access to city amenities, they have friends in the city and, “baani bhaisakyo” (I’ve already formed the habit [of living in the city]). In addition, as I explain in further detail below, many guides continue to pursue higher education during the off season, which can only be accessed in Nepal’s urban centers.

_Migrating to the city: Education, earning and waiting_

Most guides, and indeed many young working class women, are rural to urban migrants. As discussed in chapter 3, a variety of push and pull factors have brought millions of Nepalis to urban centers in search of work and the promises of development. Of the women I formally
interviewed, over 94% (35/37) are first-generation rural to urban internal migrants. A Shakti Trekking staffer confirmed that of the guides they employ, around 90% were born outside of urban centers, but later migrated to the city alone or with family. For many young Nepalis, including my informants, a move to the city was their only option to pursue education beyond primary school (Carney and Rappleye 2011). Most guides I spoke with were able to attend local primary schools from their village homes, which still often involved a two hour walk to and from campus, but were simply too far from a secondary school to make the commute. I heard many stories about the closest secondary school being a “six hour walk away” or “two days away.” Because of this gap in education facilities, quite a few guides moved to the city as teenagers to live with relatives or stay in boarding schools while they finished their secondary education. Other informants who were able to complete secondary education in their home villages discuss migrating for education at the Bachelor’s level and thereafter staying to look for a job. This pattern of rural to urban migration beginning with a desire and need for better education and earning potential is a well documented pattern for both young men and women (Carney and Rappleye 2011).

Moving to the city to pursue higher education marked a significant break with their parents’ generation. Guides are almost unanimously the first generation of women in their family to receive any formal education. While a few women I met had mothers that had attended school through the 4th or 5th grade, this was an exception. 100% of the guides I talked to both informally and formally are the first women in their family to earn an education beyond primary school (grades 1-8). Thus, in addition to being first-generation urban dwellers, my informants are first generation students. Again, this life course trajectory is in line with the broader changes in
Nepal, particularly the increase in educational attainment and the opening of new commodity markets in urban areas.

The majority of guides come from agrarian families with little access to cash. 70% (26/37) of my informants note their parents’ occupation as farmer and 76% describe their natal home as a village in comparison to a city (6%) or semi-urban settlement (18%). As daughters from cash poor families it is not surprising that 100% of my informants attended government-funded primary and secondary schools, which have only nominal student fees. While government schools provide valuable educational services, they are notoriously underfunded and matriculate students who may have only a basic grasp on Nepali, let alone English, literacy. Despite the inadequacies of government schools, obtaining a SLC (the School Leaving Certificate received upon finishing secondary school) is important because it signifies a baseline educated social status. Earning a SLC differentiates those qualified only for menial labor (such as vegetable selling, carrying bricks or informal sidewalk vending of cheap goods) from those who can perform low-skill but tertiary/service work. The ability to do non-manual labor differentiates the working class from the urban poor.

After migrating from their rural natal villages and finishing secondary school, most of my informants began looking for work as they simultaneously pursued higher education. As they explained to me, once they finished their SLC they were expected to begin earning for themselves and their family. The burden of paying for schooling beyond the SLC level was also their own responsibility, which made earning a wage an immediate need. Many women I talked with initially worked in small shops selling tea or clothing, while others did simple piecework as seamstresses until they eventually began working at Shakti Trekking. As I detail in chapter 6,
guides’ wages go to a variety of expenses, but education is a priority for my informants, with 57% mentioning it as one of their top 3 spending priorities.

46% of the women I interviewed were currently studying for or had already completed a Bachelor’s degree. The high educational attainment of my informants may seem hard to reconcile with their working class status. Yet, in the Nepali context, earning a Bachelor’s degree or even a Master’s degree does not necessarily push one into the middle class. Higher education in Nepal is relatively accessible and cheap in urban centers like Pokhara and Kathmandu. There are innumerable for-profit campuses where annual fees are an inexpensive $40 or $80 USD/year and attendance is only mandatory on the last day of each semester for the final exam. Because of its relatively low cost, higher education is not a luxury commodity for the working class. It is extremely common for students to enroll in a BA program and only attend each course’s final exam. In essence, you can buy a BA cheaply in Nepal and people frequently do just that as the degree still imparts important social capital. Of all the guides I met who are currently completing or have already completed a BA, not a single woman regularly attends campus. Instead, they enroll each semester, read intermittently until a week before the exam then cram furiously with their classmates to memorize the answers to the test questions that freely circulate amongst students.

Female guides make just enough money to be working class, but their budget is tight. Below, in Table 1. Typical Monthly Expenses for Female Trekking Guides I give an example of an average monthly budget based on my informants’ spending patterns. The full time guides I spoke with made just about $1,200 USD per year guiding. An average annual working class salary is around $1,000 to $1,500 per person. As Table 1. Typical Monthly Expenses for Female Trekking Guides demonstrates, guides’ annual income affords them some leeway in spending but
not a lot. With basic expenses totaling approximately $800.00 USD per year, or two thirds of their annual salary, guides have limited disposable income.

Table 1. Typical Monthly Expenses for Female Trekking Guides

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical Expenses *</th>
<th>Approximate Expenses per person per month (in USD)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>$15.00</td>
<td>1 small room is $30.00 to $50.00 USD/month. Split between roommates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
<td>1 gas cylinder for heating and cooking for 3 months at $15.00 USD/cylinder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td>$4.00-$10.00 USD/month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>Paid for by landlord or use public tap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice/Flour</td>
<td>$4.00</td>
<td>3.5 kg rice and/or flour per person at $1.00/kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>$15.00</td>
<td>Daily vegetable shopping at about $0.50 USD/day/person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>$6.00</td>
<td>Monthly dairy collective for milk and yoghurt $12.00 USD split between roommates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking Water</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td>4.5-gallon jugs at $0.50 USD/jug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Fees</td>
<td>$10</td>
<td>Annual school fees from $80.00 to $200.00 USD depending on BA program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>Bus fares are approximately $0.20 USD per one-way trip within the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total monthly expenses</strong></td>
<td>$64.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual cost</strong></td>
<td><strong>$768.00</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not included are important additional expenses such as 1) Annual trips to visit family; 2) Annual gifts for family on ritually important occasions; 3) School supplies including books, notebooks and pens; 4) New clothes and shoes; and, 5) Sundry items such as soap and feminine hygiene products.

On the one hand, guides’ limited ability to save, perhaps send some remittances to their family and to annually purchase new clothing and a few consumer commodities separates them from the urban poor. On the other hand, they do not have enough disposable income that they can afford the larger purchases associated with middle class consumption such as a scooter,
refrigerator, television or brand name fashions (Liechty 2003). Importantly, the figures in Table 1. are based on expenses shared between multiple household members. $1,200 USD a year is a working class salary, but only if that income is pooled with other sources of money. Of all the female guides I met, 100% were living with either friends (46%) or family members (54%). Income pooling is a crucial strategy of working class Nepalis used to make a lean salary go further. In addition, and as I discuss in chapter 7, living with friends and family members is more socially acceptable for a young single woman than renting a room as a single occupant.

The subtitle of this section is “education, earning and waiting.” These three words describe much of the day-to-day experience of my informants. As I discuss above, opportunities for better education first compelled many female guides to urban centers from their rural natal villages. For those who didn’t migrate for education, opportunities to earn in a cash economy drew them to the city. The lure and necessity of earning a wage continues to keep female guides in urban areas as does the hope of improving their economic and social status. In chapter 1, I contend that my informants are part of the aspirational working class. They earn and educate themselves in the hopes of attaining a more stable and comfortable middle class livelihood. In the meantime, they wait. They wait for their twice-a-year exams and their exam results—which take a year to process through the exam board. They wait for more opportunities and for a job with a better salary. In short, pursuing education, earning a sufficient but small income, making reasonable purchases and finally waiting for a better opportunity are what define the working class habitus of my informants.

Research Site Selection
I chose to focus my research in the cities of Kathmandu and Pokhara for several reasons. First, they are the two largest urban areas in the country, with a population of about 2.5 million in Kathmandu, and a population of about 300,000 residing in Pokhara (Muzzini and Aparicio 2014). Second, they are the only cities with major airports, allowing a continuous transnational exchange of persons and goods. Third, they are some of the only cities where transnational brands of food and clothing are consistently available. The presence of a large airport and the availability of international brands mark Kathmandu and Pokhara as epicenters of transnational processes and symbols of modernization. Fourth, and related, they are the cities in which the sign-posts of development were first installed by the state; widened roads, electricity, sewage systems, zoning laws, and public universities (Whelpton 2005). Finally, these cities are the primary nodes of the tourist economy, which represents the principal means of contact with the West for many Nepalis. In spite of state-led efforts to disperse tourism throughout the country, tourists continue to travel mainly to Pokhara and Kathmandu. Kathmandu is the gateway to the rest of the country and the majority of Western tourists arrive via the capital’s international airport. Pokhara, where the majority of fieldwork for this study was conducted, is the entrance to the Himalayas for most tourists. Located at the foothills of the Annapurna mountain region, Pokhara offers easy access to a number of different trekking routes. Pokhara has become Nepal’s second largest city due almost entirely to the tourism economy. The city itself has two areas, the tourist area and the residential zone beyond. The tourist area is called Lakeside and borders Phewa Lake with innumerable restaurants, outdoor equipment retailers and souvenir shops. Ringing Lakeside is miles of dense apartments populated, for the most part, by Nepalis who make their living directly or tangentially off the tourism economy. As centers of the tourist
economy, Kathmandu and Pokhara are where most trekking guides, both male and female, reside. They are thus the best places for both tourists and PhD students to find guides.

**Entering the Field**

In the summer of 2011 I participated in a six week Nepali language course at Cornell University through a Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship. The summer FLAS program is designed to provide intensive language training in less commonly taught languages. This course was my first major introduction to the Nepali language and Nepal area studies scholarship. During this course, and in consultation with several Nepal area studies scholars, I began to think in earnest about a dissertation research project. Originally, my plan was to study the gendered impact of road construction on a particular section of the Annapurna Circuit, which is one of the most popular trekking routes in Nepal. Over the past decade road construction around the Annapurna Circuit has negatively impacted tourism flows in this area and it is women who are predominately in charge of managing the tea-shops and inns that have historically catered to tourists trekking along the Circuit. Thus, my proposal was to investigate how the decline in tourists due to road construction had a disproportionate impact on the socio-economic status of women working on and around the Circuit. I defended this proposal in fall 2011, and in spring 2012 received funding from a U.S. Student Fulbright to carry out the research. In summer 2012 I again attended a summer Nepali FLAS program, which allowed me to reach an intermediate conversational fluency. I arrived in Nepal in August 2012 ready to pursue my original research plan. I started my in-country research with 2 months of additional intensive language lessons based out of Kathmandu. My goal was to ensure that I could carry out the majority of my planned interviews without the direct assistance of a translator. After spending
two months focusing on language acquisition I felt comfortable enough to begin conducting preliminary interviews and relocated to Pokhara to start data collection in earnest.

As part of my funding stipulations, I had committed to working with Shakti Trekking over the course of my grant. Through email correspondence I had offered to assist in the free skill training offered twice a year to Nepali women hoping to work as guides. I had proposed to work with Shakti Trekking for several reasons. First, because I have worked as a trekking guide myself, I felt a personal affinity for the organization’s values and mission. I also felt that, given my significant technical background in guiding, I could offer training services that would tangibly benefit the company and its employees. Finally, with a plan to research the Annapurna Circuit, I knew I would want to work closely with a guide that was intimately familiar with the trekking route and the ongoing changes in the communities affected by road building. I hoped that after working with the guides at Shakti Trekking I would be able to find a research assistant to accompany me on my field site visits. Fortunately, the organizers of Shakti Trekking’s training were enthusiastic about my participation and asked that I develop and teach a course on wilderness first-aid.

I travelled to Pokhara to begin working with Shakti Trekking in October 2012. Shakti Trekking is located in the heart of Pokhara’s tourism center in a large 3-story building perched on the banks of Phewa Lake. The building is the home base for the trekking business as well as the non-profit branch of the company, which runs the free guide training as well as a children’s home for underprivileged and orphaned girls. Shakti Trekking is a well-established and profitable company that was the first business to train and employ female guides in Nepal. Because of its excellent reputation and well-trained guides, the front office is consistently bustling with foreign tourists arranging guided trekking trips throughout Nepal. On the second
story, there are three large classrooms used for the guide trainings. On the third floor, dormitory style beds accommodate over a dozen young girls who, because of various family circumstances, board at Shakti Trekking while they attend local schools. When I arrived, a staff member in charge of the guide training oriented me to the various aspects of the organization and introduced me to the new cohort of trainees who I would be working with closely over the month-long course.

Shakti Trekking’s training includes daily morning English classes, afternoon topical lectures and weekend hiking practicums. The curriculum includes topics such as “professionalism,” “women’s health,” “self-defense” and “self-esteem.” For the first several weeks I taught beginning and intermediate English classes to the trainees. Classes were an hour long each and I used detailed lesson plans that had been developed by a previous volunteer. In class, there were 4-30 students depending on who showed up each day. After class I would talk with the participants informally about their jobs, their decision to pursue the training, and their hopes for the future. Teaching daily English classes helped the guides become familiar with my presence and allowed me to feel more comfortable speaking with them about their lives. During this time I met frequently with the training administrators to develop a course module on wilderness first-aid that I would deliver towards the end of training.

At the end of the training session I led a three-day, first-aid workshop, which proved an important moment in breaking down the more formal teacher/student relationship that prevailed during my English classes. The workshop format involved many hands-on activities where students splinted each-other’s arms or treated fake wounds. The interactive nature of the workshop provided plenty of opportunity for informal conversations that were the start of several important friendships formed over the rest of the year. In the weeks following the end of the
course, I continued teaching English 2-3 times a week and gave the first-aid workshop two more times. During this time I spent most afternoons and evenings socializing and preparing meals with women I had befriended during the training.

On the Annapurna Circuit

After I had been in Nepal for 4 months I was ready to start conducting interviews on the Annapurna Circuit. The first trip would be 31 days of consecutive hiking winding up to the world’s highest mountain pass at 18,000 feet of elevation. There were several guides I thought I would work quite well with but due to their schedules and obligations they couldn’t accompany me for the duration of the month-long trip. A manager at Shakti Trekking, who I was now on quite friendly terms with, recommended I go with a guide I had only met once, Devi. I felt it was imperative to enter the field quickly, so after a five-minute meeting, Devi and I set out the next day for a month on the trail. I quickly realized that Devi was not only extraordinarily strong, competent and patient, she also had a very intuitive understanding of how my goals as a researcher were different than the trekking clients she usually travelled with.

On the trail Devi and I moved daily from one village to the next. We carried backpacks with all our personal necessities but depended on the food and lodging available at the guesthouses lining the trail. At each guesthouse I talked to the lodge owner or manager about the recent changes as a result of the road-building. Devi was invaluable for the formal introductions she arranged with all the lodge owners who knew her well. Devi would also report back on conversations she had with the kitchen staff or other local residents about the road. Yet, despite the interesting stories I was hearing, I was also hearing very frank statements like “we have already told this story,” or “this has already been done.” The lodge owners and residents along
the Circuit were not being rude; they were merely being honest that in the last year alone, 3 other research teams (to the best of my knowledge 2 NGO’s and 1 individual student researcher) had been conducting quite similar studies. In my planned field site, there was very understandable research burnout.

Devi and I continued on the Circuit, yet everywhere I went I heard similar statements. I felt the weight of an upcoming decision. Should I pursue my original research question when it was clear that my intended informants had stock answers waiting for eager researchers like myself? A “yes” seemed harder to justify the clearer it became that residents, while perfectly welcoming and hospitable, were simply tired of humoring research projects that in all likelihood would result in very little tangible change in their precarious economic situation. Ethically, I began to have serious doubts about my project. It was true that my research would probably lead to no improvement in my informants’ lives, so was it fair to ask them to participate knowing they would say yes out of a sense of hospitality while possibly feeling uncomfortable and put out? In addition, I questioned what scholarly contribution my project could make given that my research questions were already being answered. I finished the month long trek with these questions heavy on my mind.

Although the trek seemed to foreclose one research plan, it had planted the seeds for another. While trekking with Devi we not only taught each other every conceivable two-person card game, but also found ourselves talking about more personal topics such as parental expectations, education, marriage and love. I was deeply engrossed by what Devi had to say about changing norms and expectations for women and about her own sense of desire and fulfillment as a young woman in contemporary Nepal. These conversations convinced me that, at the very least, I wanted to look into some of these themes when I returned to Pokhara.
Finding New Research Questions

When we returned from our trek, Devi invited me to her home for lunch and then dinner. This turned into my daily pattern; mornings were spent writing field notes, meeting with a Nepali tutor and avoiding groups of young Nepali men eager to give me on a tour of Pokhara’s lakeside, while afternoons and evenings were spent at Devi’s apartment. Eventually I spent more time at Devi’s apartment than my own. The more time I spent with Devi and her roommates Binti, Kopila, Prakriti, Nanu and Sapan, the more affinity I felt towards a project centering on their lives. After consulting with my advisors and several Nepal area studies scholars, I decided to spend a month considering what a project on young working class women in urban Nepal might look like. My assignment was to simply listen and observe and think carefully about why this project might matter. Thus, I eagerly took up Devi’s daily offers to spend the evening with her and her roommates.

During this month, my field-site was a one-room flat that measured about twenty feet by thirty feet shared by six women. Devi and her roommates were all guides for Shakti Trekking, and three of them had worked as guides for five years or more. Devi, Kopila and Sapan worked exclusively for Shakti Trekking while Nanu, Prakriti and Binti worked for several other trekking companies as well. In their flat there were three twin size beds pushed against one wall, which the women shared. In the winter, when the concrete walls provided little insulation, they often slept three to a bed. In the hot summer months they spread out on the cooler floor. Any wall space between the beds was taken up by bookshelves stacked high with old school books. The walls were hung with framed pictures of the roommates together on various adventures as well as a small Hindu shrine for conducting puja (worship). In addition, against one wall was a six-
foot long table with an immaculately cleaned and meticulously organized kitchen that consisted of several pressure cookers, plates, spoons, cups and a two-burner propane stove. The rent of 3,000 rupees per month, or about $35.00 USD, was split six ways, as were apartment staples like gas, cooking oil and rice. To access water for cooking and cleaning, the women used a water tank outside the front door which also supplied the other apartments below. The toilet was two stories below and shared by several other apartments. Their apartment and living situation, though spartan by U.S. standards, was quite average for working class Nepalis.

As I spent more time at Devi’s apartment, I began to develop close relationships with her roommates as well. It was in the many hours of sitting, informally talking, cooking, eating, shopping and just passing time with these women that the ideas in this dissertation began to take a more formal shape. I was fascinated by the commonalities in their stories and the way in which they connected their own lives to broader socio-political changes ongoing in Nepal. As my month of observation concluded, I officially decided to re-shape my project into an ethnography of their lives.

After making the decision to change research directions, I continued to work closely with Shakti Trekking, which supported my proposed ethnography of their employees. I asked Devi if she would be my research assistant, and she graciously agreed. As my research assistant, Devi helped with the logistics of recruiting informants and scheduling interviews, especially during trekking seasons when guides were quite busy. Devi also assisted with on-the-spot translations during interviews. This was especially helpful when I interviewed women whose first language was not Nepali. In addition to Nepali, Devi was also fluent in Hindi and her local language Magar. She was thus quite familiar with some of the regional variations in spoken Nepali and was able to translate between my questions (spoken in a more formal Nepali) and some of my
informants’ answers (spoken in more colloquial Nepali). Finally, Devi helped me adjust and improve my interview schedule and advised me on which questions were falling flat and which questions I could probe further on. In addition to Devi’s more technical assistance she was a key informant and was (and is) a good friend.

I continued to spend the majority of my time with Devi and her peers, but my socializing took on new meaning as a core component of my research plan. In addition to participant observation, I slowly began initiating formal interviews, starting with the women I was on closest terms with. A critical factor in my ability to collect interviews with other guides was the friendship I developed with Devi and her roommates. Depending on this group of women as my key informants, I was able to use snowball sampling to conduct the majority of formal interviews. Once I began conducting interviews it was relatively easy to employ my informants’ existing social network to reach other potential participants. For the final six months of fieldwork I developed a daily schedule that involved translating and writing in the morning, spending afternoons with Devi, her roommates or other guides, and conducting interviews in the evenings. As I detail in the methodology section below, both formal data collection methodologies such as interviews, as well as more informal participant observation provided me with a wealth of qualitative data that inform the substantive chapters of this dissertation.

**Methodology and Data Collection**

I chose ethnographic research methods for their ability to provide rich, nuanced data and for their proven track record in similar research projects in Nepal (Bennett 1983; Ahearn 2001; March 2002) and elsewhere (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Freeman 2000; Gregory 2007). Because my research questions consider the intersection of global processes with local understandings, it was
important to employ a method that gave me the time and space to glean meaning from the
everyday interactions of my research participants. I quote Freeman (2001), whose ethnography
of gendered labor in Barbados influenced the development of my own research, as she explains
her own choice to employ ethnographic methods:

   Close and detailed ethnography has been an integral part of such local analyses, for in
   order to register and interpret the dialectics of local/global processes and ideologies one
   needs (quite literally) to have a sense of how, for example, money is made, relationships
   are fostered, politics are transacted, and goods and services are circulated on the ground.
   Feminist critiques…have made clear that macrostructural accounts are insufficient in
describing the lived realities of globalization (2001: 1011).

Freeman eloquently summarizes why ethnography is useful for the kinds of questions I am
asking, notably questions that interrogate how local empirical realities are the result of power
contestation on multiple discursive and material levels. Female trekking guides’ “lived realities
of globalization” cannot be approached from the top-down–that is, by looking only at national
and transnational level socio-political and economic shifts (Ibid). Instead, a nuanced look at my
informants’ lives requires a bottom up analysis that starts where they live, work, eat, sleep, and
also dream about local and global possibilities.

Participant Observation

The core of my data collection consists of the eight months I lived in Pokhara working
and living with female trekking guides. During this time I sporadically taught English classes,
participated in various Shakti Trekking events and maintained almost daily social interactions
with a group of about 30 women guides. Devi was my near constant companion and research
assistant, helping arrange and organize meetings with other guides at her own apartment where they would feel more comfortable. I conducted 2-4 formal interviews a week most weeks, though during the spring season, when many guides were busy working full time, I sometimes only managed one formal interview a week. Even when formal interviews were hard to schedule, I was almost always engaged in “time-pass” with a group of female guides. Time-pass is a borrowed English word that is closest to “hanging out,” and consists of lots of sitting, reading, studying, chatting, watching Bollywood movies and checking Facebook.

Certainly, simply being in the field and witnessing life as it unfolds is a widely recognized anthropological method (Geertz 1977). Ahearn (2001), in her ethnography of love letters and literacy in a semi-urban Nepali township, notes that researchers cannot overestimate, “the importance as a research method of spending hours, weeks, months, even years ‘just chatting’ (gaf garnu)” (34). For my project, participating in time-pass was critical for several reasons. First, it allowed me to gain a clear understanding of what everyday life for young working class women looked like in its mundane and minute aspects. Second, it allowed my informants and eventual friends to begin to think of me as someone who, although unlike them in many ways, did not need any special tending to. Because Nepali culture(s) emphasizes making guests comfortable and treating them with special deference, it was imperative for my research that I move beyond the role of honored guest. In short, I had to do enough time-passing to get Devi and her friends to treat me (almost) like another roommate. This happened in slow behavioral shifts. At first I was constantly offered tea, always served dinner first and given full attention even when I had nothing to say. Slowly, I began to be offered tea only when someone was making it for everyone, dinners were finally served in a random order and eventually we settled into long hours of mutually attending to our own reading or knitting or playing on our
mobile phones with natural punctuations of conversation throughout. This is not to say that I ever shed my outsider status, yet, participating in time-pass did allow me to reach a level of integration into my informants’ social lives that made my presence less remarkable.

Participant observation took the form of time-pass, but it also included accompanying my informants on various outings, such as occasional shopping trips to downtown Pokhara. As I discuss in further detail in chapter 6, such outings were particularly informative as they provided a chance to see my informants navigate public space. Whether with them in their apartments or in public, I was particularly interested in the contents of my informants’ everyday conversations. Most nights I spent considerable time writing in detail about the various topics covered in the day’s discussions. I consider participant observation the most important part of my data collection because it was through listening to my informants’ daily speech that I first began to notice the centrality of certain topics, which would later become my core analytic themes. Participant observation helped me contextualize the information gathered through formal interviews and importantly provided a subtlety of cultural understanding that simply conducting formal interviews could not provide.

**Interviews**

I collected both formal (n=37) and informal interviews in Nepali. I began formal interviews only after multiple months of participant observation. The themes I had heard discussed in innumerable casual conversations heavily influenced the questions in my interview schedule. For example, it was not until I heard several conversations about marriage that I incorporated a module of questions on attitudes towards marriage into my final interview schedule. In total, the protocol contained 102 questions (see Appendix A.). However, because of
the open-ended nature of the questions, during interviews I always probed for further information and asked relevant follow-up questions not included in the protocol. I consider only 37 interviews “formal” because I have full audio recordings of these conversations and because I employed the same specific question sequence for each. Included in the protocol were ten major thematic sections including basic demographic information and life course, becoming a guide, field experiences as a guide, lifetime work history, gender and social perception, caste/class/ethnicity, family and marriage plans, personal economy, style and comportment, and development and social change in Nepal. Each section contained a number of questions related to the broad section theme.

The 37 interviews range in length from 45 minutes to 2 hours, with an average length of one hour. In the interviews I was able to capture the full diversity of women working as guides. The interviewees range in age from 19-31 and have been guiding from 6 months to over 10 years. In Table. 2 Age of Informants the age range of informants is shown. As seen in Table 3, Caste and Ethnicity of Informants, the caste and ethnic diversity of guides is also well represented in the data set; 38% of the interviewees are Bahun/Chettri (high-caste), 8% are low-caste, 35% are from the closely related Magar or Gurung ethnicities, 16% are from Rai or Sherpa ethnic backgrounds, and 1 informant declined to state her caste (3%). While there is a high percentage of high caste Bahun/Chettri participants, there is an approximately equal percentage of the Magar and Gurung ethnic groups, who are of a lower caste status within Nepal’s HCHH cosmology. The diverse background of interviewees is especially important because, across such difference, similarities in how modernity, identity, work, labor and love are discussed suggest that working class women share significant common experiences including their experience of modernity in contemporary Nepal.
Table 2. Age of Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-29</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-33</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Caste and Ethnicity of Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahun/Chettri</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-caste/Dalit</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magar/Gurung/Tamang</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rai/Sherpa</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews were conducted in the location and at the time of the informant’s choosing, which was most often Devi’s apartment, their own apartment or my apartment. The majority of the interviews are with guides I had met on numerous previous occasions, although a few interviews were with women I met for the first time at the interview. With women I socialized with frequently, asking to conduct a formal interview happened casually through face-to-face conversations or over text message. With quite a few interviews, the scheduling was done spontaneously. For example, after spending an afternoon just doing “time-pass,” I would ask an informant “do you want to do your interview now?” This was usually met with enthusiasm as the interview, with all its attending formalities (the tape recorder, the notebook, the consent procedures), provided a break in the monotony of the day. To enroll additional interviewees I asked Devi to recruit interested participants from her large network of contacts. Devi then contacted her peers over phone and text, explaining my project and asking about their interest in
participating. Those that were amenable to the idea of a formal interview would schedule the
time and location with Devi, who would then tell me who and where I would be interviewing
next. After scheduling the interview in-person or over text, I would meet with the informant at
the pre-arranged interview location. I would describe the project and my goals as a researcher
and then go through the informed consent procedure. After consent for the interview and audio
recording was confirmed, I began the interview.

Devi sat with me at almost all of the first dozen interviews in case I or the informant
needed clarification or on-the-spot translation. As I refined my delivery and began to anticipate
where informants were most likely to find questions confusing, Devi stopped shadowing so
closely, though she continued to help with recruitment and was still present during most
interviews, usually attending to her own studies off to the side. Although most informants were
quite relaxed and conversational during formal interviews, several were clearly nervous about
saying the right thing. I did my best to put participants at ease, but the very nature of the formal
interview made a totally naturalistic conversation impossible. When the interview concluded and
the recorder turned off, dynamics between myself and those present immediately relaxed and
turned into less formal conversations, which I describe below.

Informal Focus Groups

Most interviews were not conducted in private but instead in the corner of a one-room
apartment with several other female guides reading, dying their hair with mehndi (a natural red
pigment) or making achaar (a condiment prepared fresh for each meal with a mortar and pestle)
on the other side of the small room. Interviewees would respond to my questions and then, as the
formal interview finished, the rest of the roommates would chime in with their own opinions,
disagreements and agreements. Although the practice of conducting individual interviews in a group context is well established as appropriate if the informant selects the venue, I was at first concerned about the privacy implications (March 2002). I looked to previous ethnographies of Nepal and found that other researchers had encountered a similar dynamic. For example, in her ethnography of Tamang village women in Nepal, March (2002) writes about this same challenge. March argues that in her research context, demanding private one-on-one interviews with her informants would have both alienated those not included in the conversation and made the interviewee highly uncomfortable. I felt a similar dynamic in my own project and during the few private interviews I did conduct, my informants were noticeably less comfortable than in the group context. I thus decided to continue with semi-private interviews.

Putting aside concerns for individual privacy that my informants clearly did not share, I learned to value the spirited discussions that followed each one-on-one interview. While keeping my interjections to a minimum, I would intermittently ask questions or request elaboration and clarification on things that were said in group conversations. In this fashion, these conversations functioned as informal focus groups on the topics canvassed in the interview. Although I put my audio recorder away during these conversations I kept my notebook out and asked those present if I could continue to take notes. I did not conduct an additional formal consent procedure for these conversations as those present were always either 1) the interviewee who I had just received formal consent from or 2) women who I had received consent from previously. My informants understood that my project was about their lives broadly conceived—not just about the specific questions in the interview protocol. In explaining my project and how I would collect data, I always included a description of how I used conversations and observations as part of my research. Thus, when those present nodded or verbally agreed that I could take notes, I am
confident they understood that I would draw on our conversations together as additional data. This was further confirmed when frequently, during lively conversations, someone present would turn to me and repeat what she said to make sure I hadn’t missed it.

The informal dialogue gave me an opportunity to see how interview topics were discussed in free-flowing conversation amongst peers. Such sessions were often more valuable than the actual interviews in providing a richness of detail about my research themes. In fact, post-interview conversations were some of the most fruitful and illuminating discussions I had on my research topics. While interviews provided concrete and illustrative examples of the core themes of my research, they were, by design, inorganic discourse. In interviews I asked informants to discuss abstract topics like modernity, development and identity in a manner outside the conventions of natural conversation. Complementing the purposeful nature of interview questions, informal focus groups were especially critical to my understanding of how such abstract concepts were talked about and done in practice.

Challenges of Fieldwork

Research related challenges provided important lessons on the complexity of conducting ethnographic research with a diverse population. One particular instance stands out and merits discussion. In the original interview schedule developed for female guides, I asked my language teacher Chandra for assistance in phrasing some of the more sensitive questions to ensure I did not mistakenly ask them in an offensive manner. Chandra, while an extremely talented teacher, was also a rather conservative, high-caste Hindu from the mid-hills in his mid 50’s. In the interview schedule I wanted to ask my informants if they had a boyfriend or if they had any
flirtatious correspondences over text and email with any young men.\textsuperscript{44} In retrospect, I can see that this question would have been, if not unthinkable, then something close to it for a person with Chandra’s background and personal beliefs. Chandra was married through an arranged marriage at a young age, as were most men of his generation and caste. The concept of boyfriend and girlfriend, or of casual dating, was simply not a part of his lived reality. In fact, casual dating is still rare, and the majority of Nepalis find their spouses through arranged marriages. Thus, when I asked him to help me with that particular question, the central concept of dating and flirting outside of marriage was lost in translation.

Chandra said that a good way to ask that question would be “kahile kahi baato maa hidda tapaai purus maanche sangha kura garnu huncha?” or “When you are walking on the path do you ever talk to men?” I understood the literal translation and assumed it was a culturally appropriate way of asking if they had a “special” male friend in their life. I was wrong. In fact, the literal translation is pretty close to the word-for-word meaning in English, basically, “do you ever talk to random men on the street when you are walking about?” After conducting about five interviews using this question and garnering giggles, incredulous looks and “excuse me?” each time, I asked Devi and her roommates for feedback. They gently informed me that my question was bizarre, if not mildly offensive. With assistance from Devi and her roommates I retooled my questionnaire to better reflect the patois and experiences of my young women informants. The revised question was certainly much easier to ask and direct, “boyfriend cha ki chaina?” (do you have a boyfriend or not?)! The “men on the street” debacle (as Devi and I jokingly called it),

\textsuperscript{44} I did not ask about any participants having same-sex sexual attraction or attachments. The social disapproval of same-sex relationships and the extreme invasiveness of the question in the Nepali cultural context made me reluctant to include this question. Although no one “came out” to me while I was there, several women made it clear that they had no desire to enter into any relationship with a man at any point in their life. A few of these same women tended to be extremely homosocial and it is my own personal belief that they may have identified as same-sex attracted, had that been a viable option in their social milieu.
starkly called my attention to the limits of language acquisition and cultural immersion. Further, as I discuss in chapters 5, 6 and 7, this experience illuminated some of the inter-generational shifts in understanding what the field of possibility for young women in Nepal is or could be.

**Data Processing**

After departing the field, I transcribed, translated and coded my interviews. I used the assistance of a professional transcriber to type all recorded interviews into the Nepali script. I then translated 10 interviews word-for-word into English. After completing these interviews and deciding that I preferred to code directly in Nepali, I had the remaining interviews professionally translated into English for use in later projects. Although I had full English translations, I continued to work exclusively with the Nepali transcriptions for coding purposes.

Although my analysis of the data does not constitute orthodox grounded theory (Charmaz 2014) per se, it does borrow many elements from this methodology. In particular, grounded theory emphasizes letting the data dictate the eventual analytic categories, which I attempted to do while engaging with my own data. This methodology was especially important to employ, given my status as a cultural outsider asking questions about identity and subjectivity. With a “ground-up” analysis in mind, I read and re-read the Nepali transcripts to get a sense of the themes my informants returned to, and noted what words and phrasings seemed to resonate across my transcripts, field notes and recollected conversations. I did not use qualitative data processing software. Instead, I developed a codebook based on the emergent themes in my notes and transcripts, and, using hard copies and highlighters, coded the Nepali transcripts by hand. Because the codes in my codebook far exceeded what could be discussed in one dissertation, I narrowed my analysis down to include only codes within three major themes:
1) Spatial Language

2) Promises of Modernity and Development

3) Navigating Conflicting Identities

These themes were selected because they appeared most frequently and were discussed with the most energy by informants. After choosing which themes to focus on I re-read the transcripts to explore the nuances within each major theme. I recoded sections under the three major themes to eventually end with 8 sub-themes. The three major themes and their corresponding sub-themes were as follows:

1) Spatial Language (chapter 5)
   a. Spatial Metaphors
   b. Narratives of Progress and Mobility

2) Promises of Modernity and Development (chapter 6)
   a. Commodity Consumption
   b. Continuing Education
   c. Delaying Marriage

3) Navigating Conflicting Identities (chapter 7)
   a. Being a Good Sister
   b. Remittances
   c. Not Being “Over Modern”

Once the Nepali transcripts were coded for the sub-themes, I created documents for each sub-theme where any relevant field note or interview excerpts was collected. I then referenced these documents while writing the applicable sections.
Positionality

Conducting ethnography across difference, especially when that difference consists in real imbalances of social and economic power, requires thoughtful implementation. I realized before entering my field site that I would be working with and depending upon people with much less access to the privileges afforded to me as a result of my race, nationality and class. As a white woman and an academic from the global North with the means to travel internationally for research, I was (and am) in a social location that my informants recognized as privileged. Given the power dynamic inherent in my interactions with working class Nepali women I felt it incumbent to let the data speak for itself to the fullest extent possible. For this reason I consciously attempted to center the experiences and words of my informants throughout data collection, data analysis, and finally in writing this dissertation. However, the data are inevitably filtered through my own lens and the translations used are ultimately my own.

While I have made all attempts to rigorously check my own presumptions and my own wishes for what the data might reveal, I acknowledge that the content of the substantive chapters must in some way be a reflection of my priorities. In the chapters that follow, I do not in any way “speak for” the informants; rather, I attempt to bring my own analytical skill set to bear in the hopes of amplifying the important though often under-heard voices of working class Nepali women.
CHAPTER 5
SOCIAL CHANGE AND SPATIAL METAPHORS:
IDENTIFYING WOMEN’S ‘PLACE’ IN MODERN NEPAL

In the fall of 2012, Shanti, a 28 year old Chettri woman worked as an administrative assistant for a Pokhara-based trekking company. In this capacity she met a young man from an English speaking country who was as smitten with her as she was with him. One evening, when they were strolling together on a very popular and scenic lake-side boardwalk, they passed by a group of three Nepali men walking in the opposite direction. The men muttered some disparaging comments about the interracial couple but otherwise kept walking. Moments later, this same group of men turned around and walked purposefully back to where Shanti and her friend were talking. The men ordered the couple to sit down while they drunkenly lectured Shanti on the ills of walking with foreign men at night. When Shanti, frustrated and offended by the lecture proceeded to stand and leave, one of the men grabbed her by the arm and aggressively ordered her to sit back down. Shanti’s male companion intervened and attempted to wrest Shanti’s arm free from the stranger’s grip. At this point the three men began to beat both Shanti and her friend. During the attack Shanti was kicked in the face, leaving her with a cut lip and a black eye.

Several days later, when I talked to Shanti about the incident, she was less angry about the assault than about the reaction from her family. Her relatives, though relieved she was not

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45 The irony of this “safety” lecture was double and not lost on Shanti. First, the danger to Shanti was not from her foreign male friend, but from fellow Nepalis. Second, every morning on the very same walkway there were usually a dozen young Nepali men cruising for the attention of a foreign woman. Much like the “sanky pankys” (Padilla 2007) and beach boys described in other tourist hot-spots of the global South, Pokhara has developed a culture of young local men who actively and often aggressively seek out relationships with foreign women. It was quite common to see couplings of foreign women and young Nepali men enjoying each other’s company at lakeside restaurants and cafes in the afternoon and in the lounges and hookah bars at night. Regardless of the motivations in any of these relationships, the Nepali men who participated in them certainly did not view them as dangerous or morally problematic.
more seriously injured, had lectured her on the dangers of “going out” and imposed more stringent restrictions on her after-dark movements. While Shanti was adamant that the position of women in Nepal had advanced considerably in her own lifetime, she recognized that this incident was indicative of the strong ambivalence and even animosity directed at Nepali women who pushed the boundaries of acceptable public visibility. It seemed to Shanti that the contestation around women’s place in Nepal was far from settled.

This chapter will look at how informants articulate their own relationship to social change using spatial metaphors and how these metaphors speak to the gendered politics of space in Nepal. I employ the term “spatial metaphor” to describe the explicitly spatial words such as inside, outside, forward, and backward used frequently in the speech of female trekking guides. I label these words as metaphors because, as I demonstrate below, their connotations extend far beyond a strictly literal description of location in time and space. Spatial metaphors are used as shorthand phrases that reference a binary understanding of Nepal’s past and present. As mentioned in chapter 3, official representations of Nepali history have promoted a linear model of progress, which clearly delineates between the ‘undeveloped’ past and the ‘developed’ present and future. Within this binary understanding of Nepali history, social change, and in particular the gendered implications of social change, are described by informants using explicitly spatial terminology:

UT: In my opinion [women] must go outside. What can you understand by staying inside like that? You can’t understand anything. If you go outside then you can study many many things... If you’re only inside it’s not available, if you are outside it’s available.
(Usa Tamang, 21, Tamang)
And why do some people think negatively about women who leave the house or village?

Why do they think that? In our custom it’s like that. For girls, if they leave from the house to go outside then people think badly it’s said. Even still today, old fashion people haven’t gone [out] in the village, that’s why. (Nirjana Gurung, 21, Gurung)

So, in your opinion, why are guides usually male?

Anyway, in Nepal it’s a man’s country, they are forward aren’t they? Nepali women aren’t educated, right? Only now they have been, that’s why probably. It’s slow. It take’s time, that’s why. (Sila Roka, 24, Chettri)

As evidenced in the above quotations, binary terms such as inside/outside and backward/forward are used to describe both the experience of modernity in opposition to non-modernity and the experience of Nepali womanhood in opposition to Nepali manhood.

Female guides speak of inside/outside or backward/forward in order to invoke well-worn cultural tropes that tell a particular story about Nepali history and Nepali gender norms. Informants relate inside/outside to backward/forward through the social category of gender. They explain that when women are exclusively “inside” it is a “backward” way of being. To come “forward” women not only should but must come “outside.” The gendered subtext of the spatial language used by informants complicates their meaning significantly as inside/outside and backward/forward are no longer purely physical or temporal descriptors. Instead, these terms signify gendered archetypes of Nepaliness, with each term unavoidably linked to a multiplicity of normative images of Nepali femaleness or maleness. Below, Table 4. Discursive Binaries

46 All bolded words were spoken in English in the original. Although in this dissertation I don’t explore why particular words were spoken in English as opposed to others, it would be a fascinating topic for further study.
summarizes the common binaries used by informants. In the left column, the terms associated with hegemonic (Nepali) maleness are listed, and in the right column are the terms associated with hegemonic (Nepali) femaleness. While this chart is a simplification of gendered understandings of space, it usefully distills the terms that structure the debate about who belongs in what kind of space and how that space is ideally occupied.

**Table 4. Discursive Binaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male (<em>Purush</em>)</th>
<th>Female (<em>Mahila</em>)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outside (<em>Bahira</em>)</td>
<td>Inside (<em>Bhitra</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward (<em>Agaadi</em>)</td>
<td>Backward (<em>Pachaadi</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed (<em>Bikaasit</em>)</td>
<td>Un-developed (<em>Abikaasit</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk/Wander/See (<em>Gumné, Hidné, Herné</em>)</td>
<td>Stay/Sit (<em>Basné</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sphere (<em>Ghar bahira</em>)</td>
<td>Domestic Sphere (<em>Ghar bhitra</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Wage labor, Travel</td>
<td>Household, Housework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Fulfillment (<em>Ichchha</em>)</td>
<td>Filial Duty (<em>Dharma</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern (<em>Adhunik</em>)</td>
<td>Non-modern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What this table succinctly demonstrates is the idea of the “Nepali woman” as an identity in need of development.

Female trekking guides consistently invoke spatial metaphors to describe how the last several decades have fundamentally altered the social landscape of Nepal. It is important to understand the centrality of spatial metaphors in my informants’ discussions of social change for several reasons. First, the recurrent use of spatial metaphors illuminates both the ideological and material components of HCHH gender norms that exert considerable influence on all Nepali citizens. As I show below, spatial metaphors may be deployed to bolster hegemonic HCHH understandings of gendered space, but they may also be used to articulate new structures of feeling around gender, modernity and place. Second, exploring the gendered implications of
spatial terms in everyday speech shows guiding to be a unique working class occupation for women, which particularly challenges the gendered politics of space and place in Nepal. Finally and most importantly, any discussion of how modernity is understood by young working class women must engage with how modernity is spoken about colloquially. This entails an investigation of the common, everyday ways that the modern and non-modern are signaled in speech using spatial metaphors.

Without exception, informants assert that Nepal has undergone a rapid reordering in the last three decades; however, the meaning of this reordering for the state, families and individuals is less clearly articulated. Informants interpret the normative implications of social change, that is, whether such change is good or bad for women or Nepali society, in fairly diverse terms. However, there is a striking similarity in how this change is described, in the language and specific terminology used to express what rapid social change means for Nepali women. Within the everyday speech of female guides, the coupled terms inside/outside and backward/forward have become key sign-posts for discussing the changing politics of gender in Nepal. In the following pages I first demonstrate how the spatial language used by my informants has historically affirmed an idealized, gendered division of space and place based on HCHH norms. Second, I show that guides repurpose this same spatial language to their own advantage. Third, I show how informants use spatial metaphors to articulate their social location in comparison to earlier generations of Nepali women. Finally, I explain how paired terms such as inside/outside and backward/forward are used by informants to express what development and modernity mean to them within their changing social framework.

Inside/Outside, Forward/Backward: Binary Understandings of Time and Space
The paired terms inside/outside (bhitra/bahirā) are used by informants to make a clear delineation between the “inside” sphere and “outside” sphere of society. According to dominant HCHH gender norms operating in Nepal, women are associated with inside, whereas men are associated with outside. The Nepali usage of inside/outside is similar, though not identical, to the private sphere/public sphere binary seen in Western feminists’ discussion of gendered space and place (Gerson and Peiss 1985; Scott 1986). In Western feminist analyses of complementary spheres of influence, women are relegated to the domestic sphere of child rearing and reproduction of the household, while men’s domain is the public sphere of work, higher education and politics (Marshall 1986; Kerber 1988). Western scholars have shown that this understanding of gendered space has significantly influenced social ordering in a variety of institutions including government, education and the workplace (Marston 1990; Jacobs 1996; England 2011). In Nepal, although ideas about the proper gender of inside(domestic) and outside(public) space mirror Western conceptions of the public and private sphere, the two are not equivalent. The gendered politics of space in Nepal are much more closely related to other South Asian gender regimes, for example, those seen in Northern India and Bangladesh (Jacobson 1975; Miller 1982; Kantor 2002; Anderson and Eswaran 2009).

As in other South Asian communities, in Nepal, ideals of female domestic seclusion take on particularly religious undertones (Delap 2001; Kantor 2003; Banerjee 2003). While the private/public sphere separation of the West was fomented in secular liberal democratic discourse (Landes 1988), the inside/outside distinction in Nepal is firmly rooted in Hindu cosmological understandings of space and place (Agarwal 1994). Further, understandings of gendered space in Nepal are mediated by the complexity of caste hierarchies. Although scholars have shown that Western conceptions of who belongs in the domestic sphere versus the public
sphere are highly racialized (Collins 2000), racial stratification differs markedly from caste stratification in that the latter is based in religious doctrine (Berreman 1960; Slate 2012). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the way the terms are used in everyday language is representative of the larger problem of cross-cultural translation in ethnography (Clifford 1986; Asad 1986). As I will discuss in greater detail below, the English dyads of public/private, inside/outside, backward/forward and developed/undeveloped lack the specific cultural connotations these words have accrued in Nepal. Thus, Western conceptions of the public and private sphere cannot be simply mapped onto the Nepali context. Instead, my informants articulate an understanding of gendered space that uniquely reflects the socio-historical context of Nepal.

**Gendered Space and Place in the Nepali Context**

Many informants describe their life in terms of being able to go “outside.” To understand why this is, it is important to critically engage the few texts that have discussed gender and space/place in Nepal. Lynn Bennett’s (1983) ethnography of high-caste Hindu women, which focuses on the politics of gender and religion within a rural Hindu village, is particularly important to engage with because it is ubiquitously cited in discussions of gender, caste and religion in Nepal. Bennett’s (1983) monograph reveals that the normative gender ideology in Brahmin and Chettri families encourages women to constrain their physical movement to a small domestic sphere. Bennett writes that traditionally, “Brahman and Chettri women tend to spend

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47 The differences between racial stratification and caste stratification are complex and extend beyond the religious foundations of caste versus race. For a fuller discussion of the differences between the two, see especially Slate’s (2012) monograph comparing the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States with India’s independence movement of the 1950’s.

48 The debates about the difference between space and place discussed most frequently by cultural geographers remains outside the scope of my discussion. I use the terms interchangeably throughout the text. See Agnew (2005) for a succinct discussion of how geographers articulate the difference.
most of their time in their own houses and courtyards,” and that a great insult to a woman’s character is that she “goes where she likes” (3). The equating of a woman’s free movement with loose morals is further highlighted when Bennett asserts that there are few public arenas in which a woman may legitimately be present, and those that do exist explicitly center a woman’s domestic status as bride, wife or mother. Bennett goes on to show that the overall low status of women within HCHH communities is a reflection of an ideological construction of femininity as a dangerous force that, while necessary for procreative purposes, ultimately disrupts the Hindu ascetic ideal of worldly transcendence (1983: 128). Domestic seclusion, Bennett argues, is one way that women’s dangerous sexuality is controlled.

As Bennett (1983) explains, in Parbatiya communities, the high-caste Hindu gender ideology specifies particular roles for men and women.⁴⁹ Within this cosmology, women’s place is inside the home. A woman’s life cycle is defined by several stages including daughter, daughter-in-law, wife, mother and female head of household. Within each of these stages, a strong imperative to remain within the home is closely tied to filial and religious duty.⁵⁰ Ideally, daughters are kept inside the home to be protected and also trained as shy and deferential future daughters-in-law. Daughters-in-law are expected to stay inside the home to worship their mother and father-in-law and contribute to the household economy. Wives are secluded to protect them from their own dangerous sexuality, which if given free reign could undermine the purity of the patriline. Mothers are expected to limit themselves to the domestic tasks of raising children and contributing to household reproduction. Even senior women stay inside the home to keep a

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⁴⁹ As mentioned in chapter 3, Parbatiya or ‘hill people’ is the name for the Indo-Aryan language and ethnic group that came to dominate Nepal politically and culturally in the 18th century.

⁵⁰ In one striking example, in the popular myth of the marriage of the God Siva and the Goddess in her human incarnation Sati Devi, the bridegroom exclaims to the bride, “Never having crossed the threshold of your courtyard, you have grown up like a flower in your parents’ hands.” (Swasthani text qtd. in Bennett 1983, translation by Bennett). This quotation expresses the expectation that ideal daughters have quite literally never stepped outside the enclosed courtyard of their natal home until their marriage.
watchful eye over their own daughters-in-law. Together, these archetypal roles create an overwhelming demand on women to stay closely tied to the domestic sphere in every stage of the life-cycle. The consequences of venturing out are nothing less than the undermining of the social structure and its sacred antecedents.

The HCHH cosmology articulates the importance of women’s presence in the home through other means as well. Vedic\textsuperscript{51} mythology clearly demonstrates the ideal Hindu woman as a domestic woman.\textsuperscript{52} For example, in the two most important Hindu women’s festivals in Nepal, Tij and Rishi Pancanami, women reaffirm their most important social role as wife and mother through a combination of fasting, bathing, and husband worship.\textsuperscript{53} The annual women’s festival of Tij is a nationally celebrated Hindu holiday and perhaps the most publicly visible consideration of the female identity in Nepal. Tij consists of fasting for the health of one’s future or current husband. During the day-long fast women gather together and dance in wedding regalia. In Kathmandu, tens of thousands of women clad in the traditional red saris, bangles and sparkling hair-pieces of brides wait for hours on end to enter the most sacred Hindu temple, Pashupatinath, so they can do puja (worship) in honor of their husbands’ continued health and longevity. As Bennett (1983) points out, the extreme public spectacle and visibility of women during Tij is made culturally appropriate only because the holiday reaffirms a woman’s primary role as wife and mother.

\textsuperscript{51} Vedic refers to a particular period of religious Hindu texts usually dated between 1500 BCE-500 BCE. Vedic texts are the cornerstone of Hindu mythology and the stories that comprise the scriptures are omnipresent in the architecture, national holidays, place names and calendar of Nepal.

\textsuperscript{52} Interestingly the sacred female is dichotomized in the double form of the Goddess as both universal mother and destroyer of men. This is most clearly seen in the Parvati/Kali divide. Parvati is the ideal wife to Siva, one of the three main deities in Hinduism as practiced today. Parvati is not only the devoted mother of two sons, she is beautiful, passive, retiring, patient and chaste. In contrast, in the fierce incarnation of the Devi (Goddess), Kali is topless, wearing a garland of severed male heads, hair unkempt, standing suggestively astride her slain husband. Despite this duality, it is Parvati and similarly passive representations of the divine feminine that women are instructed to actively worship (Bennett).

\textsuperscript{53} See Bennett’s (1983) detailed discussion of the annual Tij and Rishi Pancanami rituals performed by Hindu women.
Despite Bennett’s (1983) thorough interpretation of how Hindu religious practice influences high-caste village women’s behavior, my own argument differs in two substantial ways. First, I emphasize that the spatial cosmology that sacred Hindu texts proffer works in conjunction with the official discourse propagated by the Nepali state—historically led by HCHH men—to influence how both Hindu and non-Hindu, high-caste and low-caste women think about different types of space. The spatial cosmology of HCHH offers countless divine examples of the feminized private sphere and the masculinized public sphere as the ideal toward which all Hindus should strive. Although, as Bennett explains, HCHH women may participate in practices of female seclusion out of religious piety, this does not explain why Nepali women who are not high-caste Hindus have historically subscribed to these ideals rhetorically if not in practice. So why do non high-caste and non-Hindu women recognize female domestic seclusion as an ideal? Here, the Gramscian (1971) concept of cultural hegemony is useful in understanding why low-caste Hindu women, ethnic minority women, and/or Nepali practitioners of a minority religion have recognized the ideal of female domestic seclusion. Gramsci’s explanation of hegemony helps make sense of the process through which the norms, values and beliefs of high-caste Hindu elites have become the dominant and normative ideology of Nepal. The cultural hegemony of HCHH is seen in the framing of high-caste Hindu women as the ideal Nepali woman in government produced media (e.g. Pigg 1992) as well as popular culture films (e.g. Liechty 2003), magazines and radio programs. Hindus and non-Hindus alike are consistently exposed to images and texts that reiterate a particular type of high-caste Hindu femininity as desirable.

54 For example, in the Tamang ethnic community, where young women enjoy a fair amount of freedom to roam around unsupervised, the ideal of the purely domestic woman remains strong, as do negative connotations for women who are ‘too free’ (March 2002).

55 Though Hinduism is the major religion practiced in Nepal, according to the Nepali government (which, as a former Hindu monarchy has a vested interest in minimizing non-Hindu responses), the current religious make-up of Nepal is: Hindu 81.3 %, Buddhism 9.0%, Christianity 1.4% and Islam 4.4% (2011 Government of Nepal). Christian groups in Nepal argue that these numbers are highly inaccurate and that Christians actually comprise 8%-10% of the population.
The cultural-religious dominance of HCHH gender ideology has been strengthened and buffered by decades of legal enforcement. As mentioned in chapter 3, Nepal was founded as a Hindu monarchy and Nepali subjects were historically ruled by a legal code known as the *Muluki Ain*, which codified Hindu doctrine into state law. First implemented in 1854, the *Muluki Ain* applied to both Hindus and non-Hindus, and explicitly monitored and policed gender and sexuality. Until 1963, punishments for infractions, including sexual infractions, were punished according to the caste and gender of the offender, with women and lower-caste subjects receiving harsher punishment. The *Muluki Ain* formally institutionalized “state patriarchy” and high-caste Hindu gender norms (Tamang 2000, 127). Through both cultural and legal avenues, all Nepali citizens have been confronted with a particular group’s gender ideology as the ideal. Groups outside of the ruling class have to a greater or lesser degree internalized high-caste Hindu gender norms into their own gender politics.56 Consequently, the behavioral norms of high-caste Hindu women, including domestic seclusion are supported as normative throughout Nepal’s diverse populace. Although female mobility outside the domestic sphere varies by caste, class, region, ethnicity and religion, the ideal of female domestic seclusion remains present in nearly all communities.

Second, Bennett’s (1983) discussion of space and place both within religious texts and in the lives of real women remains a taken-for-granted backdrop to the drama of gender politics rather than a central organizing principal of everyday social interaction.57 That is, Bennett’s ethnography focuses on ritual meanings within micro social interactions, but she does not expand

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56 See Tamang (2000) for a discussion of how state policy has historically targeted marriage and family planning practices not in line with HCHH gender ideology—especially those found in marginalized ethnic minority groups. In essence, as part of its larger homogenizing effort, the Nepali state has (and continues to) enforce a specific vision of gendered social organization that effaces and suppresses other forms of gender in practice.

57 Feminist geographers in particular have identified this same weakness in many anthropological and sociological accounts of social organization. See especially (Massey 1994) for examples of how space and place are organized in explicitly gendered ways.
her analysis to include how ritual actions occur within a specific episteme of space and place that structure the lifeworlds of her informants (Habermas 1987). I agree with Bennett that Hindu religious texts are influential in shaping the everyday behaviors of Hindu Nepali women. However, unlike Bennett I argue that female domestic seclusion does not simply follow from Hindu precepts about women’s role in society. Instead, I suggest that female ideals of domesticity are part of an internalized understanding of space and place that orders both interpersonal interaction and internalized understandings of the gendered self. Below are two examples of informants relating space to larger themes of social organization and identity:

*BGT:* In your opinion why are guides usually men?

*JS:* From the beginning only men have walked. Women had to work only in the house and take care of the children. They had to take care of parents. Women were not allowed to walk anywhere. ‘They get ruined, become bad.’ Those things were said. Women were dominated, that’s why there’s more male guides.

*BGT:* So if women go outside does their honor also go?

*JS:* Yes, People think their honor leaves. That’s why. They don’t give [women] permission to go [outside], older and younger brother don’t give little sister permission. After a woman has already married, her husband, one’s own husband doesn’t give permission to walk outside. In that manner only husband walks, only men walk. (Junu Shershan, 26, Pahadi)\(^{58}\)

...  

MK: You said how was my mother’s life when she was 21?

BGT: Yes.

\(^{58}\) Declined to state ethnic background beyond ‘Pahadi’ which means mountain region. It is a reasonable assumption that she is referring to one of the ethnic minority groups of the hill region; Rai, Limbu, Sherpa, Magar, Gurung or Tamang.
MK: In my mother’s age then, at that time she didn’t even know what studying was. At that time, daughters didn’t leave from the house. They didn’t wear these pants (points to her own jeans). They wore [traditional dress] and walked with their mouths closed. They could only work in the house, if they spoke with anyone outside, if they laughed then people would speak badly about them, that’s how it was at first. It’s really different, compared to before. It’s become 100% different. (Megaa Keshi, 21, Brahmin)

In the above quotations it is clear that being outside or inside is not just a matter of following religious proscription. Instead, being inside or outside is intimately tied to matters of gender differentiation, honor, and hierarchical kinship relationships that define the life course.

Illustrative of the powerful cultural and institutional forces that have historically tethered women to the domestic sphere is Kathryn Rankin’s (2004) ethnography of an urban Newari community. The Newari ethnic community pre-dates the Parbatiya community as the ruling elite of Kathmandu Valley, and unlike most other ethnic minorities in Nepal, the Newari community has its own caste system that approximates the Parbatiya caste categories. Rankin’s (2004) ethnography interrogates the manner in which social stratification in terms of gender and caste is built into the physical environment of urban Newari communities. As a geographer, Rankin (2004) pays particularly careful attention to the use of space and place in constructing and maintaining social order. In this sense her work uniquely emphasizes the importance of public versus private space in the Newari gender system. Specifically, Rankin contends that female isolation in Newar communities is enforced through strict maintenance of spatial

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59 The Newari community is technically an ethnic minority. However, unlike the other ethnic minority groups of Nepal, this community has historically lived in the Kathmandu valley and has also historically experienced both high social status and economic success. The Newars are considered a merchant caste and for many centuries controlled much of the lucrative trade between Tibet and India. The Newars are also renowned artisans, whose metallurgy and wood carving are responsible for the unique Kathmandu aesthetic. Newars practice Hinduism and Buddhism and have their own caste system that rivals the Indo-Aryan Hindu caste system used by the Parbatya groups. In 1864, when Nepal was unified into its current geopolitical configuration by Pritvi Narayan Shah, many aspects of Newari culture were assimilated by the new leaders.
boundaries that define the acceptable parameters of female movement. Domestic space is understood as female while space outside the family courtyard is considered a masculine domain. Although strict domestic seclusion of women is reserved for high-caste Newar families, Rankin writes, “the high-caste norm of restricting women’s movement outside the household only to limited occasions… expresses the dominant ideology of women’s seclusion to which most households aspire” (148).

Although in agreement with much of her analysis, a key part of Rankin’s argument is that women’s obligation to perform time-consuming household labor “lend[s] practical force to ideologies of seclusion and together they virtually preclude opportunities for outside employment” (150). I contend that because Rankin’s argument is based on ethnographic work in a fairly self-contained and ethnically homogenous urban township in the 1990’s, her findings miss emergent dynamics present in the current generation of young working class Nepali women living in ethnically and caste diverse urban centers. The rapid and profound urbanization experienced in and around Kathmandu and Pokhara offers a different context than the one Rankin describes. Further, the working class population now has access to new kinds of services and commodities available in cities such as plumbing and propane stoves. Access to these domestic technologies profoundly change the temporal commitment to the domestic sphere previously expected of women. During the months I lived with my informants, I was able to witness firsthand the extent to which such technology saved women enormous amounts of time and effort while opening up opportunities to pursue paid employment and continuing education.

Over the course of fieldwork, I observed women performing normal household labor in rural, semi-rural and urban households. Due to technological differences between the three settings, the time it took to prepare the typical Nepali meal of lentils and rice varied from over
two hours to half an hour. While staying in a rural Tamang village about a two-hour walk from the closest motorable road, cooking rice and lentils was done over a small clay stove built into the floor of a mud-walled cooking room. Total cooking time, not including the year-round agricultural labor required to grow the grains and vegetables, was around 1.5 hours. In a semi-urban Chettri village, where all the houses had electricity, and were within twenty minutes of a market and bus route, cooking time was just under an hour not including the agricultural labor of cultivating the home-grown vegetables used in each meal. In my informants’ urban apartments, where two-burner propane stoves and store-bought grains and produce were used, a meal for 6 was ready in just over a half hour. The substantial reduction in time spent on domestic reproduction in urban settings suggests the limits to Rankin’s (2004) argument that “women’s obligation to perform time-consuming household labor” can be responsible for continued ideological force of female domestic seclusion (150). Instead, persistence of the domestic seclusion ideal for women far removed from Rankin’s research population points to the deep influence HCHH norms have had on popular understandings of gendered space. While shifts in domestic technology are facilitating new structures of feeling around gender labor and public space, ideals of female domestic seclusion persist.

Rankin (2004) and Bennett (1983) demonstrate the gendered and binary understandings of space that are central to hegemonic HCHH culture. In the dominant Parbatiya ideology, the domestic sphere is firmly associated with the feminine, while all that lies outside the home is associated with the masculine. Though Bennett and Rankin have outlined the various socio-cultural institutions that have crafted and maintained dominant understandings of space, their

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60 This time doesn’t include farm labor, which would realistically add at least another hour of labor to every meal. Rural households that grow their own grains put considerably more time investment into every rice meal than city dwellers who buy pre-husked rice that is ready to cook. Further, city-dwellers use store-bought vegetables, eliminating from their daily schedule the time consuming task of growing vegetables.
research reflects Nepal as it was a decade or more ago. In the intervening years of guerrilla war, political revolution and urbanization, a sea change has occurred that has dramatically shifted both the organization of social space and common understandings of who belongs where. While so-called traditional understandings of space and place continue to exert substantial influence on the thoughts and behaviors of informants, guides also explicitly challenge the long-held assumptions about women’s association with the private sphere. In the next section I delve further into informants’ use of spatial metaphors and examine what these terms can tell us about shifting ideologies of gendered space.

Ways of Being in Time and Space

When female guides refer to “inside” it is almost always within the context of “inside the house”, or “inside the family courtyard,” whereas “outside” refers to all things, places and institutions ‘outside the house.’\(^\text{61}\) Thus, the term “inside” has a fairly constrained meaning, while the term “outside” has much wider and diverse connotations. To be inside refers first to the physical parameters of a family dwelling. Inside also refers to the domestic duties associated with women’s work. Depending on a woman’s geographic location, status within the household and socio-economic and caste status, a woman’s domestic duties could vary from light chores to daily farm work and meal preparation for a large household.\(^\text{62}\) In rural Nepal, to be confined to “inside the house” may actually involve a good amount of travel to and from agricultural fields or a grain mill. Nevertheless, if this type of travel occurs, it is utilitarian in purpose and generally

\(^{61}\) Although there is variation between ethnicities, a patrilocal and patrilineal tradition predominates in Nepal. In this arrangement women leave their natal house upon marriage to live with their husband’s family. A typical family unit will consist of a compound that houses all the sons of the patriarch and the son’s respective families.

\(^{62}\) For example, daughters may be given lighter chores than daughters-in-law, a typical division of labor representing the higher status of blood-related females within a household.
performed under strict familial surveillance. Ideally, for a woman to be “inside” would consist of quite stringent domestic seclusion (Rankin 2004).

Unlike the term “inside,” the term “outside” refers to a wide variety of non-domestic arenas. Pursuing education, participation in the wage labor economy or simply venturing outside the family compound for personal enjoyment and fulfillment are all implicated in the term. Thus, “outside” has a distinctly non-spatial aspect in its colloquial usage. When informants talk about “going outside,” they are discussing a way of being with specifically modern connotations. One informant noted that in the past:

SR: “[people] thought badly [about female guides]. ‘It’s not women’s work.’ As for women going outside the house people say in the Nepali situation if a girl goes outside then she’s broken, they say and think that.”63 (Swasta Rawal, 24, declined to state)

However, this same informant passionately stated, “women shouldn’t only be staying just inside the house now. They shouldn’t be doing only housework. They also have to take all the knowledge of outside.” In both these statements, inside and outside are used less as descriptors of material space and more as adjectives describing a particular type of person. Importantly, inside is used to refer to how Nepali women used to be, while outside is used to refer to how a modern Nepali woman should be. The usage of these terms reflects both acknowledgement of long-held beliefs about women’s proper place in the domestic sphere and also direct challenges to this understanding of space.

The second set of paired terms, backward/forward (pachaadi/aghaadi), are closely aligned with the first set of terms. “Backward” is used to describe the past, but also a way of being and thinking that is distinctly non-modern. For example, “backward” is used by informants

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63 I return to the use of the term “broken” to signify women who have trespassed normative boundaries of mobility in chapter 7.
to describe those archetypal individuals lacking the signatures of development such as poor farmers (see Pigg 1992), young uneducated brides (see Ahearn 2001), unemployed and (assumed) drunken young men (see Liechty 2010). These stereotypes of Nepali “backwardness” are revealing for what they lack. In these tropes, one can see what informants perceive as critical preventatives against being backward; education, a particular kind of capitalist productivity, and acceptance of new social roles for men and women. As one informant put it:

\[ KT: \ \text{Modern western women have so much \textbf{freedom}, for them it’s easy. From before a lot of change has already occurred [in the West]. In Nepal it has just, just now slowly change has occurred, that’s really \textbf{challenging}. It must be done, we must walk, but many people speak backwards. (Kopila Thapa, 26, Magar) } \]

In this quotation, speaking “backwards” is speaking against social change, women’s education and women’s participation in the workforce. In her comments, Kopila flips the script on who is “backward.” It is not women, but the people who assert that women belong “inside” who are “backward.”

To be “backward” represents a particular type of Nepali who is tethered to old ways of living and being. Specifically, a peasant life of subsistence agrarian labor, a life tied to the rhythms of planting and plowing and confined to the parameters of a family field. The widespread association of backwardness with rural domesticity links this term to Nepali womanhood, which is similarly perceived as tied to the home and hearth (Pigg 1992). The “backward” Nepali becomes gendered as female in the trope of the illiterate female peasant tied to her domestic role and excluded from development. As the antithesis of “backward,” “forward” is used to connote a modern, developed and contemporary way of being. Being forward is linked to education, urban dwelling and capitalist productivity, which are all gendered male:
**BGT:** In your opinion how could Nepal be different in 20 years?

**DP:** In my own opinion, according to the time and the situation, 20 years before… Now if you look at 20 years ago in Nepal not very many people had been educated. Now it’s around 50 percent have been educated, Nepali men and women. And in that way, if we go, 20 years forward in Nepal all the women will be educated probably, and all the women will be able to walk in freedom. And women, whatever they like to do, whatever kind of job they want to do, according to that they will be able to stand on their own feet. That’s how I feel. (Devi Pun, 30, Magar)

As the above quotation makes clear, going forward involves not only the passing of time, but the passage into a new set of norms and expectations that propel women further into previously male-dominated and explicitly public spaces.

As scholars of Nepal have pointed out, Nepali women have been conceptualized by the Nepal state and by INGO development initiatives as the archetypal undeveloped “third world woman (Tamang 2002a; Pigg 1992).” Research by Pigg (1992) and Tamang (2000, 2002) illuminate how this trope of Nepali womanhood is reified through state-level discourse and policy. Pigg (1992) analyzes government funded development propaganda in the form of radio skits and textbooks produced in the early 1990’s and demonstrates that through these materials, an archetypal image of the developed (urban) versus un-developed (rural) Nepali citizen is carefully crafted. The ideal Nepali citizen is portrayed as male, Hindu and educated. In promoting development, the official discourse of the Nepali state reinscribes gender, ethnicity, caste, religious and regional hierarchies that place certain types of Nepalis closer to

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64 Tamang (2002a, 2002b), and Pigg (1992, 1993) have effectively illustrated the process through which both the Nepali state and INGO’s have constructed ‘Nepali women’ as a singular population in dire need of ‘development.’ The ubiquity of this construction in government discourse, educational materials and INGO programming helps explain why informants so rapidly bring this trope to bear in discussions of gender and development.
development. The most “backward” Nepali citizen is personified in the rural, ethnic minority woman. Nepali women are not portrayed as agents of development; instead they are depicted as the passive beneficiaries of development. Such depictions, though ostensibly designed to trouble gender inequity, lend force to the legitimacy of gendered understandings of space and place that place women “inside” and “behind”.

In her research, Tamang (2000, 2008, 2011) addresses the process by which the Nepali state has targeted women and ethnic minorities for development and the connection such policies have to the vast and powerful INGO complex steering Nepal’s development projects. Nepali state and INGO actors work in tandem to create the social policy and programming that constitute a developmentalist agenda focused on bringing women “forward.” Tamang criticizes this framing as promoting the “the development of separate gendered spheres of the feminine domestic realm of the private and the masculine of the public” through policies that aim to bring particular practices like sexuality, marriage and child birth under the purview of development programming (2000: 127). She continues, “the gendering of the public and private spheres and the emergence of gendered citizenship is inextricably linked to the manner in which Nepal became incorporated into the global relations of production - via the international project of development” (Tamang 2000: 152). What Tamang means is that because the ‘third world woman’ has been singled out as the needy recipient of development funding for ‘women’s issues,’ Nepali women are framed as particularly backward and outside of modern Nepal. Tamang notes that Nepali women—especially poor, low-caste and ethnic minority women—are subject to programming on their behalf, which may in fact worsen their marginalized position.

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65 The tension between on the one side tropes of “backward” Nepali womanhood and high-caste Hindu gender norms of appropriate femininity and on the other side discourses of progress, modernity, development and gender equity that exhort women to come “forward” and “outside” is a theme woven throughout the following chapters and taken up in detail in the conclusion.
She argues that as Nepal’s new democratic regimes become more interventionist in promoting development, comparatively rigid gender roles meant to protect women may be foisted onto unwilling recipients. For example, laws outlawing polygamy may in fact undermine women’s networks of mutual support that polygamous marriages have provided in some ethnic communities.

Although writing nearly a decade apart both Tamang (2000) and Pigg (1992) conclude that, in alignment with HCHH ideals, the Nepali state has ‘placed’ Nepali women firmly in the domestic sphere. Ironically, although state discourse and state policy promote women’s development, the continued reiteration of women’s backwardness serves to strengthen the ideological link between women and the private/domestic sphere. In this discursive context, women are seen as having a social role that perpetually places them “behind” Nepali men socially and spatially. Spatial metaphors are used to explain the cause of Nepali women’s ‘undeveloped’ status in terms of their inability to come “outside” and move “forward”. The following quotation from Kamila Baarati, a 27 year old Brahmin guide exemplifies how these gender dynamics are articulated using spatial terms:

*BGT*: Why were you surprised, that women were going [trekking]?

*KB*: In our *culture*, in the village … people, in the village one never gives one’s own sons and daughters outside of the house. In our *culture* girls shouldn’t go outside, shouldn’t stay outside. Only sons can go out says our *culture*. That kind of thing was on my mind. That’s why I was surprised and why I wanted to go. I discovered I could also do it, like this I found out, I discovered how to do it [be a trekking guide]. (Kamila Baarati, 27, Brahmin)
The use of spatial terminology in Kamila’s replies reveal the persistence of a bounded definition of what a Nepali woman’s ‘place’ in the home and in society has been. This place remains an important, yet contested point of reference for the informants in interpreting their own relationship to modernity. In the following section I explore how female guides, as highly visible ‘public’ women, describe and define their position within a new Nepal by reclaiming the same spatial metaphors historically used to keep them in place.

The Spatial Dynamics of Guiding: Going Outside for a Living

While some women have always been visible in the public sphere of Nepal, outside of court royalty, there have been very few socially legitimate and respectable public roles for women. Ten years of violent conflict, and ensuing democratization, urbanization and a shift to a wage labor economy with a burgeoning service sector has opened up a variety of relatively socially acceptable public roles for women. Yet, as we have seen, ideals of female domestic seclusion still operate, even as popular opinion continues to shift incrementally toward acceptance of increasing public visibility for women. Guiding is a particularly compelling example through which to approach the shifting gendered politics of public space because of the extreme publicness that is intrinsic to the work itself. If staying “inside” is what women have historically been expected to do, and women going “outside” is a symptom of Nepal’s modernity, then female guides are at the extreme vanguard of Nepal’s modernity project.

Importantly, much of women’s movement into more publicly visible roles has relied on two major demographic shifts. First, has been a dramatic rise in rates of female education. A 2008 government of Nepal census reveals that in 1998/1999 75.4% of females reported never attending school at any level, whereas only 58.2% of women reported never attending school in

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66 See especially Rana (2012) for a fascinating discussion of the women rulers of the Rana dynasty.
2008 (Government of Nepal 2008). However, profound gender disparity remains, as evidenced in the 2008 literacy rates; 70.7% of men 15 and older were considered literate, while only 43.3% of women 15 and older were considered literate (Ibid.). In the 2011 census, this gap had somewhat closed, with a reported 75% of men age five and older literate and 57% of women age five and older literate (Government of Nepal 2011). Second, a shift in Nepal’s labor market via industrialization and urbanization has opened up new public spaces for women in non-agrarian formal and informal sector employment. The 2008 labor census reports that in just 10 years, between 1998 and 2008, a 29.3% increase was seen in non-agricultural informal employment. This tremendous expansion is explained in part by the influx of millions of Nepalis displaced by the Maoist conflict into major urban areas such as Kathmandu and Pokhara. The resultant urbanization has created a need for wage laborers, including female workers, in all employment sectors.

Women have benefited from the rapid expansion of cities and the accompanying need for manufacturing and service workers. However, women’s employment has been concentrated in particular careers, which tend to be quite compatible with a woman’s domestic role. For example, female shop clerks, NGO workers, administrative workers or teachers can still return home by late afternoon to cook, clean and care for children. Rankin (2004) compellingly argues that a key reason teaching was one of the very few acceptable professions for high-caste Newari women was that it both mirrored the traditional mothering expected of women and that it allowed women to be home in time to cook for the family. Rankin (2004) wryly notes that teaching “is considered acceptable for women not only because it extends their role in social

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67 Non-agricultural informal employment was defined as “paid employees with informal job conditions,” meaning no social security benefits or paid leave. This encompasses the vast urban service sector and informal sector in which working class women tend to be employed.
reproduction, but also because it enables women to return home by mid-afternoon to prepare the evening meal” (150).

It is clear from the responses of informants that working in an appropriately feminine job such as teacher or social worker is a common desire. Over half of informants note teacher or social worker as the career they aspire to. Although female trekking guides participate in a rather unconventional form of work, they nevertheless express a desire to find future work in the archetypal appropriate profession of middle class and historically high-caste Hindu women. The following three quotations illustrate the uniformity of responses to a question about potential career paths:

*BGT*: If you hadn’t been a guide what would you be doing now?

*KB*: If I hadn’t been a guide then now I’d be teaching children in some school probably…

(Kamila Baraati, 27, Brahmin)

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*BGT*: If you weren’t guiding what would you be doing?

*KT*: What would I be doing? If I wasn’t a guide I would probably already be married, otherwise I would be teaching maybe. Because the subject I’ve studied is **teaching**, that’s what I’ve studied and after studying what work can you do, if I were doing other work it would be teaching.

(Kopila Thapa, 26, Magar)

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*BGT*: So if you weren’t a guide what would you be doing now?

*SR*: Me, I feel like NGO, INGO work, social work probably.

(Swasta Rawal, 24, declined to state)
As these responses illustrate, there was great consensus amongst guides that if they were not guiding, they would prefer to work in one of the positively sanctioned professional careers historically available to high-caste Hindu women. Although they express a desire to work as teachers or social workers, most guides are not qualified for these positions yet, which require a completed BA or MA. In addition, hiring within the education system and state bureaucracy is notoriously nepotistic. It is highly unlikely that my informants will be able to secure these sought after jobs easily. Nevertheless, they continue to doggedly pursue the required degrees and training in the hopes that the cultural capital they accrue will help them eventually secure a post. Further, perhaps because guiding is “tinged with immorality,” female guides hope to associate themselves with the favorable appraisal directed at teachers, social workers and NGO workers by ostensibly studying to become a professional in one of these culturally approved careers (Liechty 2010: 79).

Unlike the ideal forms of female labor that allow women to maintain their domestic role, a female guide quite literally walks out on her own, removed from any kinship circles and in the company of foreign strangers. The job description of a female guide reads like a description of what respectable Nepali women do not do. Paradoxically, male guides have historically been associated with bringing honor, prestige and western culture to Nepal through international mountaineering expeditions. Thus, female guides maintains an uneasy grip on respectability. Informants are cognizant of both the perils and perks of guiding’s overt publicness and spoke frankly about the negative connotations surrounding female guides as women who went “outside” and were therefore morally suspect. However, they also directly referenced this same mobility as a primary draw of the occupation:

*BGT: Why [is it hard to meet a good life partner]*?
SDP: Because in Nepal, now usually for women there’s not this freedom. That’s why I have gotten into this trekking profession. In this way we walk in freedom. For us we would like to stay with this freedom. And those men will say to us, ‘don’t do this occupation’ then they will get mad probably. And according to the man, you must follow the husband’s voice. You must follow the words of your husband’s mother and father. That’s why it’s a bit… (Devi Pun, 31, Magar)

For many informants, guiding provided a unique opportunity to walk, wander and explore outside the confines of their natal or marriage home.

BGT: The first time you heard about [female guides] how did you feel? Were you surprised?

MMP: I was surprised because in the village there’s no record of any of the girls leaving the house and going far. (Man Maya Pun, 20, Magar)

KK: I went [to Shakti Trekking] at first. I heard that there they give an education in many things. So I went there. And the first reason is that that we get to roam, I went there first because we get to roam and after that because I was a student I had a shortage of money.

We earn money as well as get to roam. That is why I went. (Kabita Kharki, 25, Chettri)

Guiding offers young, working class women the ability to live independently, earn an income and see Nepal in a manner unheard of fifty years prior. Not only do the women venture outside the domestic realm, they venture outside their own city, district state or region. Such mobility is rare even for most working class Nepali men. The luxury of traveling as a guide to Nepal’s most famous natural and cultural landmarks was a great appeal of the job according to many informants. Yet, because of this uniquely public aspect of their work, female guides were hyper-aware of their mobility and the negative connotations associated with it. As the next section
demonstrates informants frequently discuss their work and lives in terms of mobility and the social friction such mobility creates.

Walking, Wandering, and Working: Narratives of (Im)/mobility

In the formal interviews I conducted as well as the everyday conversations I participated in and observed, the paired terms inside/outside and backward/forward are used to signify both personal experiences and larger cultural narratives about “Nepali women” writ large. In conjunction with these spatial metaphors, the themes of mobility or lack thereof appear frequently. Spatial metaphors are often deployed as part of complex narratives of mobility. Narratives of mobility are the stories used by informants to describe shifts in women’s physical, social and economic mobility over time. In female guides’ narratives of mobility, the past is generally portrayed as a time of immobility for women, a time when women “couldn’t walk,” and “couldn’t wander.” Conversely, the present is described as a time of increased mobility in which women are able to find opportunities to walk, wander and see outside and beyond the domestic sphere. Informants frequently juxtapose women’s mobility in the past versus the present to highlight their own position as women with greater physical and economic freedom than previous generations. For example, when I asked Swasta Rawal, a 24 year old woman originally from an extremely remote region of Nepal, how the last 50 years had changed women’s role in society, she replied:

SR: For women, before in my mother’s age, daughters couldn’t go outside the house. Having married, they had to stay in the house. And they thought she must manage the house. Now, coming to my age, they don’t have that negative thinking. Education has been made available to daughters also. They have walked outside the house. They have
done their own work. It’s really different, before and now. (Swasta Rawal, 24, declined to state)\textsuperscript{68}

It is clear from Swasta’s reply that she views her own life in terms of its increased mobility. Swasta asserts that women are now allowed to “walk outside,” whereas previously, such movement would have been constrained by norms of female domestic seclusion.

Swasta’s sentiment is similarly expressed by Binita Shahi, a 20 year old Chettri guide who details a number of differences between her life and that of her mother’s generation:

\textit{BS}: A woman’s life is very different at present than [before]. At that time woman had to cover their face with the end part of their saari. It was not considered good to go in front of a boy. They didn’t use to think it was good. They used to say like this girl is a grown woman (e.g. not chaste). Now it is free. To be able to go and do work, at present it is very good. Before it was like women couldn’t even have proper food. While dressing up also woman had to dress up a certain way only. And women were not allowed to go to community events. It’s said that culture was like that before. Nowadays it’s free. Wherever you want to go, whatever you want to do, now at least for female it’s better than at that time. We are allowed to talk, and going anywhere we are allowed to do our own business. Now we are allowed to develop ourselves. And we are allowed to study and write on our own. And girls have become employed on their own. It is so good these days. (Binita Shahi, 20, Chettri)

Binita’s quotation sets up the past and present as almost adversarial. According to Binita’s description of her mother’s generation, women’s mobility was multiply constrained. Further,

\textsuperscript{68} Swasta originally chose Swastika as her pseudonym though I shortened it to Swasta to avoid confusion for Western readers. Swastika is a word derived from the Sanskrit term for health. The swastika is an Indo-Aryan symbol still popularly displayed in South Asia connoting good-luck and auspiciousness. The negative connotations many westerners associate with the swastika because of its purposeful appropriation by the Third Reich are not present in the South Asian context.
women’s freedom to “study and write,” to “become employed,” and to “go to community events” were all obstructed. It’s telling that these activities are the very things that mark a person as modern; education, capitalist productivity and public visibility. In Binita’s narrative of mobility she gestures to the fact that she has been able to participate in the promises of modernity. Binita’s quote is referencing a past defined by particularly strict interpretations of HCHH gender ideology. For example, when she notes that women “couldn’t even eat proper food,” she is referring to the HCHH custom of wives eating their husband’s leftovers after the rest of the family had been fed. In her quotation Binita also discusses a woman having to cover her face with her sari lest she be thought immodest. Binita uses this example of high modesty to juxtapose her own freedom more starkly. Not only is she not covering her face with a Sari, she’s not wearing a Sari at all.

An important component of female guides’ narratives of mobility is the use of verbs such as “to walk” (hidne), “wander/explore” (gumne), or “see” (herne) in both a literal sense, as in the physicality of trekking, but also in the metaphoric sense of seeing the world and gaining knowledge beyond the family compound. Informants frequently use terms connoting mobility such as walk or wander to describe the process of moving beyond the confines of the home and natal village. These terms also connote the broader experience of living a life outside the domestic sphere. This makes sense given that women’s domestic role is often described using the verb basne, meaning to both stay or sit. For example, informants often describe women’s social role as ghar basne or bhitra basne, which means to sit/stay in the house or sit/stay inside. In its usage, basne is domestic and feminized, while gumne and hidne are associated with the public

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69 This practice has led to significant differences in health indicators between men and women as girl children and adult women receive less food and less nutritious food than their male family members (Gittelsohn et al. 1997; Uprety 2014)
sphere and masculinity.\textsuperscript{70} The connotation of walking and wandering with public visibility is echoed in the following exchange between myself and Nitu Century, a 25 year old woman from the Dalit community:

\textit{BGT}: Do you feel that guide work is appropriate for women then?

\textit{NC}: I feel good about that, because really right? In various new places, walking around is available right? There’s also income. For these reasons I feel really good about this for women.

\textit{BGT}: Are there negative things said about female guides?

\textit{NC}: It could be right. People aren’t all of the same opinion. For some from little education right, those people see with a bad eye. Because, it’s said to us women that we are meant to be only staying in the home. And while women are going from the house leaving and doing work in some people’s point of view it could also be bad. (Nitu Century, Dalit, 25)\textsuperscript{71}

Just as going “outside” represents a particular way of being a modern and developed Nepali, walking and wandering represents a particular, and historically masculine, way of doing Nepali modernity. To walk, to wander, to see “outside” connotes an ability to freely participate in public institutions that signify modern Nepal; government, higher education, wage labor and city living. Because these spaces have typically been reserved for men, informants use of the words walk, wander and see suggest a purposeful appropriation of the verbs of masculinity and public

\textsuperscript{70} I use the term feminized in the purely discursive sense. In Nepali, there are no modifiers such as ‘the’ or ‘a’ that would gender nouns as in Spanish (eg. \textit{el} vs. \textit{la}). Verbs are similarly gender neutral, though nouns and adjectives can be gendered, like many English words, for example \textit{bhag} (tiger) \textit{bhagini} (tigress).

\textsuperscript{71} Formerly known as “untouchable” the Dalit community is the lowest caste in the Hindu cosmological understanding of caste hierarchy. They are considered ritually impure and thus untouchable by members of higher castes. As in India, Dalit rights movements have made considerable effort to remove the stigma of untouchability with limited success. A legacy of discrimination continues to pervade public institutions although official policy has mandated Dalit inclusion in all levels of public governance.
visibility. Informants are asserting their own modernity by pairing their life experiences with these gendered terms.

Although narratives of mobility highlight newfound freedom of movement, informants are quick to point out that perceptions about women’s place in society are still mixed. Kopila Thapa, a 26 year old Magar woman reveals the continued prevalence of a binary spatial ideology that places women squarely in the domestic realm:

_BGT_: In your opinion, why are guides usually only men?

_KT_: Hmm, now usually in Nepal whatever work is done is usually done by men. As for women, the house’s food, cooking, clothes, cleaning, they take care of that and stay. They care for the babies. If the work is done then they also go to school. They should stay only in the house [it’s said]. (Kopila Thapa, 26, Magar)

Although Kopila recognizes this ordering of social roles as part of the taken-for-granted truth of gender norms in Nepal, her own life hardly reflects this ideal. Kopila is a lead guide and during her 6 years of guiding experience she has earned the respect of her colleagues for her competency and tenacity. Given the disconnect between what she describes as the traditional gender division of labor and her own successful and rewarding career as a guide, I asked her to elaborate on how she saw her own life within Nepal’s larger modernity project:

_BGT_: How can female guides be useful in Nepal’s development?

_KT_: In Nepal’s development female guides are very useful. Being a Nepali women, like [we can show] this is what guiding means, like this you walk, one can walk. First, in Nepal women who went outside, people didn’t think well [of her], now a little change has been brought. (Kopila Thapa, 26, Magar)
As Kopila suggests, a “little change has been brought,” but ideals of female domestic seclusion, especially within older generations, remain present if not strong. An ongoing challenge for female guides is to stake an equal claim to the linguistic signifiers of modernity while maintaining a respectable identity as a young, Nepali woman.

**Chapter Five Conclusion**

Informants use spatial metaphors to tell a story about social change in Nepal. The shifting politics of gender are described by female trekking guides using the paired terms inside/outside and forward/backward. Inside and outside connote particular ways of being, with each term reflecting both hegemonic high-caste Hindu ideals as well as emergent structures of feeling about modernity, gender and development. The terms inside and backward are associated with domesticity, lack of education, agrarian economies and femininity, while the terms outside and forward are associated with masculine participation in public institutions such as government, education and the wage labor market. As urbanization and industrialization continue to change opportunity structures for urban-dwelling, young, working class women, spatial metaphors take on new meanings that contest hegemonic understandings of gender and public space. Specifically, informants deploy spatial metaphors to protest restrictions on women’s public visibility by associating such views with “negative, backwards thinking” and also to reiterate how far “forward” they have come compared to earlier generations. Thus, depending on how informants use spatial language in their everyday speech, these terms may reiterate traditional and hegemonic understandings of gender that support female domestic seclusion or conversely advocate for women’s increased visibility in the public sphere. In either usage, these terms remain powerful stand-ins for complex cultural narratives.
Spatial metaphors are the building blocks in informants’ narratives of mobility. Narratives of mobility are stories of progress that help informants contextualize their own comparatively public lives to those of earlier generations of Nepali women. Female guides describe their own lives in terms of their ability to walk, wander and see “outside” in a way their own mothers never experienced. Narratives of mobility strengthen a binary understanding of time, space and movement that bolster female guide’s self-identification as women who have come “forward” into modernity as opposed to women who remain “backward” and are still in need of development.

Spatial metaphors and narratives of mobility are discursive techniques used by my informants to position themselves as modern subjects. Beyond the ways guides talk about themselves as modern are a number of material practices guides use to signal their modern subjectivity—that is, the things my informants actually do on a day-to-day basis that indicate their modern subjectivities. In the following chapter I move beyond the discursive and discuss how my informants show that they are “forward” through particular ways of being “outside.” I explain why wage earning is central to guides’ sense of self and demonstrate how guides affirm their modern subjectivities through consumption choices made possible through their earning power.
CHAPTER 6
ENTERING PUBLIC SPACE AND CLAIMING MODERN IDENTITIES:
WAGE LABOR, FREEDOM AND PURCHASING POWER

As discussed in chapter 5, the gendered nature of development and modernity discourse and practice in Nepal must be understood within the cosmological underpinnings of high-caste Hindu gender norms that continue to shape understandings of public and private space (Bennett 1983). My data suggest that while such hegemonic norms still abound and exert considerable influence on public discourse and informants’ conceptions of gendered space and place, they are also held up by female guides as at variance with their own role in Nepal’s development projects. For example, as demonstrated in chapter 5, informants associated the HCHH ideal of female domestic seclusion as “backward” and from “before.” Guides use spatial terminology like inside/outside and backward/forward to help mark the tangible changes in women’s experiences of public space during the last decades. My informants attempt to validate women’s place in the public sphere by reiterating women’s emergent public visibility as an indicator of Nepal coming “forward.”

The discursive strategies used by guides to legitimize their place in the public sphere are one aspect of cultivating a modern identity, but beyond merely speaking about new opportunities, new freedoms and new roles, what do my informants materially do as modern women? What are the practices that constitute a modern Nepali subjectivity in line with a discourse of progress and bikas (development)? Female participation in the wage labor economy is a relatively new phenomenon and a powerful symbol of women’s contribution to non-domestic arenas of social life. But, being a wage earner is not the zenith of “being” modern for my informants. Other material practices are emphasized as important hallmarks of their
modern subjectivity. In particular, their role as consumers (enabled through their wage earnings) in various markets—sartorial, education, marriage—allows them to assert their modern identity in ways they find particularly meaningful. In this chapter I show that via participation in the wage labor economy, female guides leverage their income to increase decision-making power around personal economy, education and marriage. I conclude by arguing that informants frame their increased purchasing power as central to their modern subjectivities.

**Consumption Choices and Making Modern Selves in Nepal**

With a few notable exceptions processes of globalization and experiences of modernity in Nepal have yet to be explored from the point of view of young women who are increasingly on the front-lines of development projects (Ahearn 2001; Liechty 2010; Pettigrew 2012). Liechty (2010) comes closest in his research on urban youth and consumer culture in Kathmandu. His research engages with the relationship between gender and modernity as he details the particularly modern masculinities his male informants construct through their pastimes, comportment and consumption. Liechty (2010) does gesture to the importance of purchasing power in solidifying a *female* and modern subjectivity yet, as Liechty himself notes, his discussion of “modernity on the periphery,” is mostly about young Nepali men, who, because Liechty was a male peer, were more accessible for ethnographic research (1).

Nevertheless, Liechty’s (2003; 2010) research remains quite relevant particularly because it recognizes modernity as a practice, rather than a location. For Liechty’s informants, modernity is constantly being crafted through an iterative process of consumption. Liechty (2003) notes, “people in Kathmandu recognize a new kind of materialism in their midst, one associated with the new highly monetized economy and changing modes of cultural capital” (97). In response to
these changes, classed practices of consumption are “not simply about using things to create social distinction but about reimagining what it means to be social, or about being social in new ways” (Liechty 2003: 107). For my informants, new opportunity structures allow them to be “social in new ways,” particularly through material practices that signal their modern identity (Ibid.).

If development—a key arbiter of modernity—is heavily mediated by gender as an intersectional aspect of identity it follows that the tangible practices that signify development are also gendered (Pigg 1992; March 2002; Tamang 2002b; Hertzog 2011). Ahearn (2001) provides a compelling example of what this can look like in the Nepali context. In her ethnography of love-letter writing, Ahearn addresses how the particular social practices of literacy, letter writing and romantic courtship reflect her informant’s broader social concern with cultivating an identity as a modern and developed young woman. As Ahearn notes, writing love letters is one way that correspondents (both male and female) quite literally inscribe their developed identity. Love letters are proof of education, literacy and even more, contain the professions of romantic love that Ahearn shows are deeply connected to ideas of being westernized and bikaasit (developed). What Ahearn’s research underscores is the way modernity is an ongoing process, iteratively done through practice, rather than a stable status that is fully reached or achieved.

Ways of Being Modern

Informants desire to destabilize the association of the feminine with the domestic, uneducated, backward, passive and immobile, and in the process point to new modes of conduct and material practices as representative of their own modernity. In relating a story about her
decision to become a guide, Devi Pun, a 31 year old Magar originally from the Terai articulated it thusly:

_DPV_: There was one village sister, my caste sister. That sister, before I came [to Pokhara], one year before I came, she went to Shakti Trekking. She trekked and showed us photos, and she said trekking is this and that. Before that I didn’t know anything about trekking. And while that sister was speaking I was surprised. And that sister…. [her] clothing…. Before in the village we [girls] had to wear _kurta surwal_ (traditional tunic and pants)... And sister was wearing **pants**, carrying someone else’s bag in the mountains and walking. And in those mountains, those white mountains, looking at those we felt so much that we wanted to come too. Further, time passed. I was staying [at home]. I wasn’t studying, I was thinking I couldn’t study with my father and mother’s income. Because my father only does farm labor there isn’t money right? And I didn’t want to marry then. [If I married] I would also have to leave schooling. At that time, my caste sister was going [back to Pokhara] and she said to me ‘go’. And so me and another village friend we came. (Devi Pun, 31, Magar)

Devi links her decision to guide directly with her desire to partake in the material practices of modernity exemplified by her “caste sister.” Devi mentions “wearing pants” as opposed to traditional _kurta surwal_ and “walking” in the “white mountains” as indicators of a particular type of embodied autonomy not available in the rural context of her parent’s home. Devi’s mention of “pants” points to the economic autonomy—in the form of consumer commodities like western-style pants—she understood her wage earning friend as having. Devi’s use of the term “walking” connotes both the physical mobility and broader personal decision-making power she recognized.

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72 Specifying the woman Devi met as her “caste sister” was for my benefit. As I discuss in detail in Chapter 7, the term for sister is applied to a variety of close and distant female relatives and acquaintances. Thus, Devi was letting me know that this “sister” was from her community but was not a blood relation.
in her “caste sister.” Devi also mentions that at the time of her friend’s visit she had hopes to continue her education, yet feared she would be unable to do so because her “father only does farm labor and there [wasn’t] money.” Finally, while considering whether to leave her village, Devi explicitly juxtaposed marrying to the alternative of continuing her education and working as a guide. For Devi, marriage was (and is) incongruent with her other goals, which included participation in the “outside,” public spheres of wage labor and education.

As one of the most senior guides, Devi reflects back fondly on her decision to depart from her natal village for work in Pokhara. For Devi, guiding is a chance to see beyond her family compound and an opportunity to earn enough money to support her own educational goals. Specifically, working as a guide has given her the ability to delay marriage, pursue secondary education, see beyond the confines of her village, and to partake in the commodity marketplace. In aligning her choices to pursue education, work in the public sphere and delay her marriage with progress and Nepal’s modernity project, Devi legitimizes her entrance into spaces that have previously excluded women.

Devi and other informants frame their decision to participate in the wage labor economy as reflective of social progress in which women continue to move “forward” by going “outside.” As the above quotations make clear, there are particular ways of being that informants reiterate as part of a modern and developed Nepali identity. Higher education, earning an income through a particular type of capitalist productivity and, as I show later, independent decision-making around marriage are central to informants’ sense of their own incontrovertibly modern selves. The following three sections detail how informants engage the promises of modernity by leveraging their position as wage-earners to make decisions within the realms of personal
economy, education and marriage. I conclude the chapter by arguing that their decision-making power can be understood as the appropriation of modernity for themselves.

‘You Don’t Have To Beg’: The Power of Earning

This section details how informants talk about their participation in the wage labor economy and how they leverage their discretionary income in ways that reiterate their self-identification as modern Nepali women. In chapter 4 I describe a typical working class salary for urban Nepal as $1,000 to 1,500 USD annually. Assistant guides may make just a few hundred dollars a year but full time guides can earn upwards of $1,300 USD/year. By pooling their earnings, guides share the expenses of rent, gas, and food, leaving them with a small sum of disposable income. As a reminder, Table 5. Estimated Earnings and Expenditures shows a typical annual budget for my informants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Estimated Earnings</td>
<td>$1,200 USD/year; $20 USD/day for 90 days of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Estimated Expenses</td>
<td>$800 USD/year: Including split cost of lodging, food and utilities as well as individual school fees, clothing and transportation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposable Income</td>
<td>$400 USD/year: ($1,200-$800=$400) Sum for personal expenditure including annual expenses for sundry items, travel to natal village, gifts on ritual occasions etc…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When I ask informants if it is important for women to earn their own money, the answer is a unanimous, resounding and emphatic yes. But what is their reasoning? Again, informants have similar answers. Nitu Century, a 25 year old Dalit woman states:

“It’s really important because after they earn their own money [women] are free (swatantra), right?! The things they want are available (paunchan), the places they want
to go are available. To dress [how one likes] is available, that’s why.” (Nitu Century, 25, Dalit)

In Nitu’s reply we can see the association of income with being “free.” As Nitu explains, freedom is defined as the ability of a person to go where they like, dress how they like and buy what they like. While translation into English may make Nitu’s examples seem somewhat superficial, she is in fact articulating profound shifts in Nepal’s gender politics. To argue that wage earning allows women to go to “the places they want to go,” is a direct response to long-held norms about women’s domestic role. To assert that wage earning allows women to “dress” how they like disrupts notions of women’s disproportionate responsibility to wear modest, traditional garb in lieu of more modern attire. In Nitu’s quotation one finds an explicit rebuttal to more conservative ideas about where women can go and what women can or should do.

Nitu makes a direct correlation between purchasing power and more generalized decision-making power. Kopila Thapa, a 26 year old Magar woman reiterates Nitu’s sentiments:

“If women earn on their own then they don’t have to beg for anything. To buy even basic things you need to ask others. If you earn on your own then, even if you’re not earning a lot, but only enough for yourself, then that’s really great.” (Kopila Thapa, 26, Magar)

Kopila’s quotation implies that wage earning doesn’t just engender decision-making power for consequential life decisions like schooling and marriage. Wage earning also spares informants the everyday indignity of having to “beg” for “basic things.” As Kopila suggests, financial independence can mean the mundane capacity to buy “basic things” for oneself, but this ability can translate to a profound sense of personal freedom.

73 Nitu identified as belonging to the “sano jaat,” which literally means small caste, but is an expression used to compare her caste background to “thulo jaat” or big (e.g. high) castes.
Importantly, earning signifies freedom on a financial, physical and personal level. On the several occasions I went on shopping excursions with informants, it was clear that, much like the shopping done by myself and my Western peers, clothes were carefully picked out to meet practical considerations and the parameters of a budget, but also to suit current trends and personal style. At one shop for denim jeans, the particulars of “skinny” versus “bell bottom” cuts and “dirty” versus “plain” washes was weighed for at least a half hour. After styles were selected, price was negotiated, re-negotiated, and finally settled on. This process was repeated for sandals and tee-shirts, which were also on the list.

Although a scene of young women shopping for clothes at a mall on a weekend may not seem particularly foreign to a Western audience, in the Nepali context it signifies rapid social change in which first, urban shopping centers have developed that cater to the modern tastes of young women, second, that women have enough physical autonomy outside the domestic sphere to go shopping independently, and third, that young women have disposable income enough to fuel a market for “skinny” and “bell,” “dirty” and “plain” jeans. In these shopping excursions, the pleasure of purchasing power is more than simple consumerism. Through discretionary spending, informants are publicly displaying that they too have an equal part in the capitalist productivity proffered by the state as evidence of modern Nepal.

In a less material sense, purchasing power was also a more subtly fulfilling experience that conferred a sense of physical autonomy more broadly:

*DP:* When you earn your own money, after you earn on your own, whatever you want to buy, whatever you want to earn, to wear, it’s available. And wandering (*gumne*), walking

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74 These descriptors were used in English in the original by both informants and the sales clerks, suggesting that these words have been incorporated into contemporary fashion discourse.
(hidne), after you have your own money wandering and going is available. For me, I want
to wander and go to some places. (Devi Pun, 31, Magar)

Without her wages, Devi would not be able to “wander” or travel to the extent that she is now
able to. Devi’s quotation illustrates how wages are equated with an ability to fulfill deeply
personal desires not always accessible to many Nepali women. Specifically, the ability to move
freely beyond the domestic sphere is central to Devi’s sense of freedom. It is not surprising that
Devi mentions the ability to walk and wander, as these activities have traditionally been
considered antithetical to women’s domestic role. This rhetorical strategy is subtle but quite
meaningful in the message it confers about the close relationship between female mobility and
modernity.

Traveling for pleasure (gumne) is a term associated with men. In recent decades, it has
become quite popular for groups of young men with some disposable income to gumne (travel)
to popular destinations for site seeing. It is much less common for women to gumne, although
this is slowly changing as women have more access to wages that can fund such adventures.
While living in Pokhara I had the chance to gumne with several guides when we spent the day in
a local forest bird-watching. We woke up quite early, caught a local bus for $0.20 USD, and rode
for an hour to a small patch of forest outside of Pokhara. We then spent the afternoon wandering
through the trees looking and listening for local birdlife. On another occasion, a half dozen
guides pitched in to share a paddle-boat and spent the day on Pokhara’s Phewa Lake. Later that
year several guides made a short religious pilgrimage together to a nearby temple. These small
and quite inexpensive outings are what Devi is talking about when she states she wants to
“wander and go to some places.” These experiences are possible because the money my
informants earn engender economic independence, which translates into the ability to come and go, to “walk” and “wander” at their leisure.

Affective ties and freedom to spend

Wage earning confers a type of personal autonomy that extends to kinship relationships and affective ties. Prakriti Gurung, a 30 year old senior guide remarks:

BGT: So in your opinion is it important for women to earn their own money?
PG: It’s really important. As for that, I really support that.
BGT: Why is that so?
PG: Oh, because from that you can, on your own feet, you can stand on your own feet. If you earn for yourself on your own then from your own earnings [you can stand]. It’s so nice, and to [be able to] give money to others. To get by with someone else’s money it doesn’t feel good to me. With your own money, whatever you want to do it’s available to spend it on. (Prakriti Gurung, 30, Gurung)

According to Prakriti, because she earns her own wages she is no longer beholden to the decision-making of others. Along with several other informants, Prakriti uses the phrase “aphno kuto mai ubhina sakchu” (I can stand on my own feet) to describe how wage earning engenders a sense of independence within social relations. Prakriti finds immense personal satisfaction in supporting herself, not just because she can buy what she likes, but because economic independence is part of her identity as a modern woman. Importantly, Prakriti emphasizes that earning independently allows her to spend her money without the guilt that accompanies spending “someone else’s money.” Similarly, Junu a 26 year old guide responds to my question about earning thusly:
BGT: In your opinion is it important for women to earn wages?

JS: Very. Because with your own earnings you can utilize it in the right place. If I ask for money from my parents they will ask ‘why do you need the money?’ and ‘how much do you need?’ They will say like that. That’s why with your own earnings you can spend it in your own way and you can use it with freedom. How much and which place you want to spend it. Whatever you want to eat, whatever you want to wear, nobody will pressure you about it. (Junu Shershan, 26, Pahadi)

Because Junu does not have to ask anyone or answer any questions, she can spend her money with much more self-determination than a financially dependent daughter ever could and also do it with less guilt. Junu emphasizes that in the minutiae of day-to-day decision-making about what to eat and what to wear there is an affective component deeply connected to ideas of filial duty. Junu can avoid the “pressure” of parents and relatives because her wage enables her to make those decisions without having to defer to their authority.

The pleasure my informants took in making small purchases for themselves was made clear one evening while I was socializing with Nanu, a 25 year old guide from the Gurung ethnic group. While sitting in her room she opened up a small jewelry box and showed me a recent purchase. It was a set of stick-on nail decals in bright patterns, sold at street-corner beauty parlors for $1.00 USD. Danu was excited to try the different looks on and we took turns peeling the decals on and off and commenting on which suited (suhaucha) our personal tastes and which did not. As an independent wage-earner small, non-essential purchases like this did not have to be justified to parents and also conferred a real sense of pleasure. Informants like Nanu could make such relatively frivolous expenditures without the guilt they felt about spending their parents’ limited money.
Wages as a wife and daughter-in-law

Across ethnic, religious and caste differences, daughters-in-law are considered the lowest status member of the household (Cameron 1998; March 2002; Rankin 2004). Being a daughter-in-law is associated with being subservient to all other members of the husband’s family and with having little to no authority in any household decision, including spending. My informants, though mostly unmarried, also talk about earning in terms of the personal autonomy it provides women within marriage as spouses and daughters-in-law. For example, Sila Roka, a 24 year old Chettri woman states:

It’s important for women to earn their own money. You don’t have to live with another’s support. Even if you marry will the man give [money] or not? If you earn on your own then, if a man gives you suffering, then to you it’s nothing, if you earn on your own. (Sila Roka, 24, Chettri)

Several informants recount tales of unhappy daughters-in-law who have to beg for the smallest amount of money from their husband or mother-in-law. Informants agree that earning gave a married woman more freedom from both her husband and her in-laws. Notably, the type of freedom that Sila is speaking about is one based on purchasing power within a marketized economy.

When I asked Kopila, a senior guide and a particularly spirited informant, to explain further exactly why earning an income was so central to women’s autonomy, she replied:

So, when women don’t earn money and when you compare those women who don’t earn versus women who do earn, it looks very different. Women who earn, when they want something they have freedom to use it, non-earning women have to beg, and [their
family] doesn’t give them time. After that, ‘why do you need it?’ ‘why do you do that,’ they say, it’s a little hard, you must **convince** them to do it. (Kopila Thapa, 26, Magar)

What is important to notice about Kopila’s response is the way she juxtaposes women “who earn” versus “women who don’t earn.” Those who earn have “freedom,” while those who don’t earn “have to beg.” Not only does working allow everyday discretionary spending, it also results in a much more profound sense of independence—freedom from begging, freedom to go where and do what one likes. As the next section explains, informants use their status as wage earners to gain entry into Nepal’s other public spaces and in so doing further cement their status as modern women.

‘**Without Studying There is Nothing**’: Funding Education

According to guides, women’s expanded access to education is an important catalyst of increasing gender equity in Nepal, especially as it opens once primarily male public spaces to women and girls. In fact, when asked what they spend their disposable income on, informants rank education as only slightly below the most basic needs of food and shelter. In the history of Nepal as a state, women have traditionally not been sent to school. The emergent accessibility of this historically male space to women is a significant change reflected in the education levels of my informants. All but a few guides have completed their Plus 2 education and most are enrolled in Bachelors programs at local universities. The university system in Nepal makes it possible for guides to simultaneously enroll in coursework while working full time.

Why are informants so singularly committed to using their purchasing power to continue their education? As Netrika Achaaye, a 29 year old Chettri informant explained:
**Netrika Achaaye, 29, Chettri**

Netrika’s quotation references the traditional HCHH gendered division of public and private space in which women and girls “worked in the house and stayed,” while boys and men occupied the public spaces of education and wage labor. Netrikaa ties education back to the linear understanding of Nepal’s history discussed earlier, in which education is a marker of a developed nation and a developed identity. Women were not educated “in the beginning,” but now women are becoming more “equal” to boys, in part because of their access to higher education.

Netrika’s comments also reflect the ubiquitous development discourse of the 1970’s through today, which reiterates that the path to women’s empowerment and development is increased education (Ahearn 2001). While informants prioritize education for a number of reasons, including pragmatic assumptions that a higher level of schooling facilitates upward mobility and personal desires for self-edification, they also prioritize education because it is part of a larger identity management project in which they situate their own lives within Nepal’s narrative of progress. Pursuing education is a marker of a modern and developed identity. As one informant states:

**NC**: Education is really important for women because without studying then [women] can’t do any kind of work. The outside type of work they can’t do. They aren’t knowledgeable. And they don’t have any freedom from the house, and that’s why
education is really important for women. Only after becoming educated... Only after that can women come outside and work. (Nitu Century, 25, Dalit)

Several things stand out from this quotation. First, Nitu argues that without education women are unable to participate in “the outside type of work.” The language of “outside” work refers to employment beyond domestic and agrarian labor (women’s work), that is, capitalist wage labor in Nepal’s urban public sphere. Spending money on education provides informants with the cultural competency and social legitimacy necessary to stake a claim in the public sphere as an educated, respectable, professional woman. In this sense, education legitimates women’s presence in the public sphere of wage labor. Nitu reiterates that education is a kind of gateway to other public space when she notes “only after becoming educated...only after that can women come outside and work.” Reciprocally, working and earning enables higher levels of education, which engenders better wages in a positive feedback loop.

Second, Nitu considers education important because without it, women are consigned to an exclusively domestic life with no access to knowledge. Nitu’s quotation starkly juxtaposes the trope of the undeveloped and uneducated “third-world woman” to its inverse; the modern, educated citizen who participates in productive capitalist labor. For guides, pursuing higher education is a way of countering the stereotype of the poor, illiterate peasant woman that the Nepali state and INGO complex has targeted for development (Pigg 1992; Tamang 2000). Informants reject an identity as the needy recipients of development projects and instead offer their commitment to education as evidence of their thoroughly modern selves. Finally, Nitu pointedly describes education as a means of acquiring “freedom from the house.” This powerful phrase implies that education is one avenue through which guides can evade normative pressure

75 While the act of guiding takes place in rural areas, female guides must maintain an urban residence to participate in the training and professionalization process.
The equating of education with freedom is echoed in an exchange with Kanchana Neupane, a 19 year old guide from a Brahmin family:

*KN*: And why is education an important thing? A lot [of money] must be given constantly towards education.

*BGT*: And why is education important for girls?

*KN*: Education shouldn’t only be for boys. After studying, girls can also do anything. It’s for them as well. (Kanchana Neupane, 19, Brahmin)

Kanchana notes that “after studying, girls can also do anything.” Kanchana’s phrasing directly links education to autonomy in the broadest sense, that is, the ability to “do anything.” Certainly, Kanchana is not implying that education allows girls and women to disregard all cultural mores and any semblance of gendered socialization. Instead, “anything” refers to opportunities previously denied to most women whether by law or societal norms. In the Nepali context, Kanchana is referring to the freedoms she has experienced in her own life such as wage earning, and travel outside the domestic sphere. It is also important to note when Kanchana says “girls can also do anything,” her use of the word “also” has significant implications insomuch as it implicitly references another group—men and boys—who have already been able to “do anything.”

Her comment speaks to a narrative of progress for women in Nepal, a narrative in which new opportunities should be and increasingly are equally available to men and women. Informants discursively couple female education with freedom and in so doing link their own academic achievements to ideals of progress and development. By asserting their status as educated
women, informants legitimate their relative freedom, their presence in the public sphere and ultimately their identity as modern Nepali women.

‘One Shouldn’t Marry Without Love’: Choices in a Marriage Market

In addition to financial independence and the ability to continue their education, wage earning gives informants a sense of increased autonomy in matters of love and marriage. Similar to practices in other South Asian countries, in Nepal women are generally expected to marry and have children as part of a normative life course (Agarwal 1994; Kantor 2002; Anderson and Eswaran 2009). Across caste, class and ethnic differences, marriage is a matter often arranged between prospective in-laws with little input from the bride and groom. In addition, marriage is usually patrilocal, meaning daughters leave their natal home to live as daughters-in-law with their husband’s parents. In a typical arranged marriage in Nepal, spouse selection is carried out by sets of parents with the assistance of a matchmaker. The arrangement is set, and only after this point are the boy and girl formally introduced to each other in a short meeting. This meeting is usually the only time they will meet before the wedding.

Arranged marriage is the most common form of marriage in Nepal but it is not the only type. Elopement is also common and can take many forms, but usually involves a young man and young woman marrying in secret without their parents’ permission. After elopement many married couples attempt to get retroactive blessings from each set of parents as it is considered very unfortunate and inauspicious to not receive this approbation. Inter-caste marriages are much more likely to be elopements as are marriages where differences in wealth or religious practice between the bride and groom might cause the parents to object to the match. Another type of marriage frequently discussed is the “love marriage.” Love marriages have been gaining social
acceptance and frequency in the last several decades. A love marriage implies that the couple know each other and have decided to marry on their own accord. A love marriage does not necessarily imply an extended courtship. In fact, love marriages can be based on quite short acquaintances. A love marriage may or may not have parental approval but it is done with more ceremony and less secrecy than an elopement. In arranged, love and many elopement marriages, after the marriage is completed the new couple lives with the parents of the groom and the bride takes on a new social role as daughter-in-law.

Although the situation of a new bride varies from household to household, the status of daughter-in-law is considered quite low. Scholarship has shown that the lower social standing of daughters-in-law holds true across ethnically and caste diverse households as well (March 2002; Rankin 2004; Bennett 1983). The inferior rank of a daughter-in-law combined with the lessening appeal of marrying an unknown partner are consistently mentioned by my informants as the most compelling reasons to delay or avoid marriage. Female guides explicitly frame the financial independence gained as wage workers as a strategy to delay marriage and the accompanying decline in status that becoming a new daughter-in-law entails. By earning their own wage and supporting themselves independently, informants no longer feel as compelled to enter into a marriage on their parent’s preferred timeline. Further, informants suggest that a self-selected marriage partner would be more amenable to their life goals, such as continuing their education and working outside the home.

Of 37 informants, two were married, one was divorced and the remainder were unmarried. When asked about marriage, most informants profess little desire to marry and many articulate an outright aversion to the idea. Devi, a 31 year-old never-married guide describes her ambivalence about marriage thusly:
DP: About marriage, about women. Now, for some they find happiness then it is... eh it’s good I discovered. Marriage is like this in my mind. For some there is a lot of suffering. Her husband drinks liquor, hits her. ‘Why did I marry?’ ‘Why does he hit [me]?’ Staying with a man I felt like that [could be a possibility]. In our Nepali culture, after you marry once, with that man, with that husband even if he hits you, you must keep staying with him. Forever, for life, that’s the rule. In your foreign system, if you don’t like them then you divorce. (Devi Pun, 31, Magar)

Devi’s response to marriage is typical of other informants. As Devi states “for some” there might be “happiness,” but in an arranged marriage, one’s happiness seems almost entirely a matter of chance. If someone is unlucky in their marriage partner, they could be tied “forever” to a man who “drinks liquor” or “hits” them. Devi would rather avoid marriage than enter into a lifetime commitment to an unknown entity. Devi continues:

Now in Nepal that custom [divorce] is also coming a little bit. If you don’t like it then ‘[you can say] I won’t stay with you, I will give you a divorce,’ it’s available. Girls say that. But still, women are afraid to do that. To do that… Even if I do that, the villagers will think poorly of me. Being afraid that the man will be angry, she will still stay with him…When I see that I feel so sad. (Devi Pun, 31, Magar)

Devi notes that norms are changing slowly regarding divorce, but points out that remaining unmarried carries less stigma than marrying and later divorcing. Rather than risk such social censure, Devi uses her income to support herself and avoid marriage all together.

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76 Both men and women can legally file for divorce in Nepal without the permission of the other spouse. However, to complete a divorce both parties must agree. Until 2002 women were not guaranteed any right to property if they were divorced by their husband. In addition, reforms of 2002 allowed both men and women to divorce on grounds of infidelity, whereas previously this right had only been for men.
The pain of unhappy or abusive marriages and the difficulty of ending such a marriage is a strong disincentive to marry for many of my informants. The women I spoke with imply that ambivalence toward marriage is a very commonly held opinion among their peers, but that most women do not have the financial independence necessary to delay or avoid marriage. Female guides connect their economic solvency directly to an ability to decline what would be otherwise unavoidable parental requests to marry expediently. That is, wage earning directly empowers some women to postpone marrying by allowing them to financially support themselves, so they feel less obligation to marry at their parents’ request. A similar dynamic has been observed by feminist political economists carrying out research in Malaysia (Ong 2010[1987]), Java (Wolf 1994) and Sri Lanka (2007). For example, in her ethnography of rural Malay women, Ong (2010[1987]) shows the relationship between earning and decision-making power in choosing a marriage partner. She states, “single working women can and have deflected pressures from their families and asserted their own individuality in consumer behavior and choice of spouse” (Ong 2010[1987]: 134). In another example, Wolf’s (1994) informants are young, rural Javanese women who parlay their economic independence gained from employment in factories into a greater role in brokering their marriage. In her analysis of her informants’ marriage patterns Wolf writes, “Javanese women's control over economic resources may strengthen their position in other decision making processes, particularly when their marriage, sexuality, and fertility are at stake. Industrial capitalism, through the various changes it incurs, appears to set processes in motion that encourage women to choose their own spouses” (Wolf 1994: 229). What these two other case studies demonstrate are some of the important commonalities of experience that women in the global South often face as they transition from agrarian to cash-based livelihoods. Despite similarities between Ong’s (1987), Wolf’s (1994) and my own project, there are
important differences. Notably, in Ong’s (1987) and Wolf’s (1994) field sites, divorce is a common and accepted practice. The profound stigma attached to divorce in Nepal makes the social stakes of finding a marriage partner even higher for my informants.

In interviews, several guides emphasize how the money they sent back to their natal home impressed their parents enough to quell their exhortations to marry quickly. By spreading the benefits of their wages beyond their own spending, guides insulate themselves from familial pressure to marry, though of course, not entirely. Again, this same pattern has been seen in other regions of Asia. In Wolf’s (1994) monograph, she notes, “factory workers' families received economic benefits from their working daughters and did not push them into early marriage as Javanese parents might have some years before” (214). Similarly, in Nepal, while sending money to their family was certainly part of informants’ deep affective ties to their natal home, numerous guides explicitly connected their remittances to a decrease in parental requests for their marriage. However, pressure to marry still existed, as evidenced in the following quotation from 24 year old Chettri guide Sila Roka, “I will marry for my mother and father. They ask a lot. ‘You are already an old woman, you must marry’ they say.” Thus, wage earning is only part of the equation. For example, over the course of a year of fieldwork several of the women who expressed a reticence to marry in their interviews were betrothed in arranged marriages. These women were able to parlay wage earning into a temporary postponement, but immense parental and societal pressure as well as changing personal desires also influenced their eventual marriage.

*Love and Arranged Marriages*
When asked what type of marriage they would prefer (arranged, elopement or love), a typical response was similar to Nitu Century’s answer, “For me, I’d like love and then after that arranged. Both.” This exchange illuminates one challenge of cross-cultural ethnography where as a cultural outsider, I posed a question that assumed arranged, elopement and love marriages to be discreet categories (Asad 1986). Nitu, along with other informants correct this misapprehension in their responses, which do not draw sharp boundaries around types of marriage. What then is a “love and arranged” marriage? Informants describe this type of marriage as one in which the bride and groom know each other and have varying degrees of romantic contact before they decide that they will marry. The pair then asks their respective parents to arrange the marriage. In this sense it is a love marriage because partners are self-selected. It is also an arranged marriage because the marriage is formally brokered by the parents before the ceremony occurs. Informants almost uniformly insist that a “love and arranged” marriage is their preference for romantic partnering.

“Love and arranged” marriages combine the best of both worlds for informants in that they involve substantial latitude in choosing a partner while also honoring family tradition and religious strictures. In the following exchange, Kamila Baraati and I discuss why the “love and arranged” answer was so common:

*BGT*: What kind of marriage would you like, love or arranged or elopement….?

*KB*: Love and arranged.

*BGT*: And why do you want a love marriage?

*KB*: Why? Because they can understand your things. They will know about you…Now with an unknown person how do you do things? How do you talk? (Kamila Baraati, 27, Brahmin)
In this exchange it is clear that Kamila wants to have input on who her future spouse is, which a traditional arranged marriage would prevent by design. Kamila values a love marriage because it aligns with her expectations of having more personal autonomy in selecting a marriage partner. A preference for knowing one’s partner before marriage is, in part, an expression of informants’ desire to have choice in all arenas of their life—commodity consumption, education and intimate partnerships.

As Ahearn (2001) has pointed out, in Nepal, the concept of a love marriage is closely tied to ideas about development, modernity and expanding rights and opportunities for women. It is also related to the idea of free choice within a marketplace of partners. Just as informants value their ability to choose commodities, the ability to choose a spouse is a type of “purchasing” power enabled through wage earning. Expanded choices in the marriage market parallel the expanded choices informants have in the commodity and education markets discussed earlier in the chapter. A similar dynamic is seen in Ong’s (19867) research site in rural Malaysia. In Ong’s discussion of her informants increased decision-making power in choice of spouse she writes of a new emphasis on the “personal aspirations and acquired interests” of her informants “within an expanding marriage economy” (1987: 116). In this sense, Ong is not suggesting that marriage only be looked at as a market but that her informants do consider marriage options within a market logic in addition to other romantic or socio-cultural considerations. The “expanding marriage economy” described by Ong in her field site is a useful way to conceptualize how marriage is considered by my informants as a site of decision-making power that is homologous to the purchasing power shown in other arenas.

To prefer a love marriage is more than an idiosyncratic preference, it is also a reflection of a constellation of ideas about women’s role in contemporary—that is marketized, globalized,
democratized society. On the other hand, an arranged marriage is valued in that it engenders the approbation of family, community and custom. An arranged marriage ensures that daughters are fulfilling their duty to honor and respect the wishes of their parents. Informants describe the arranged aspect of their marriage as a move to placate both their parents and their own sense of obligation to family wishes and cultural expectations. As Devi describes:

More than anything I would like a love and arranged marriage because that’s the best. Because after doing a love marriage you can understand each other. The husband and the woman will understand their own goals and ambitions, right? And in the [parent’s] house, after discussing they do an arranged [marriage]. After an arrangement, after discussing in the house, the mother and father on both sides, the boy’s mother and father, the girl’s mother and father also feel happy. Then it’s good. If you do that kind of wedding plus arranged marriage then it is really successful, that’s how I feel. I feel life will be happy. (Devi Pun, 31, Magar)

According to Devi, a marriage that is only love could face problems, “If we just do a love marriage then only the boy and girl will be happy. The houses, the boy’s house will not be happy and it’s really hard.” Even though most informants prefer to have some say in their marriage partner, they also expect to move into their in-laws’ house if and when they marry. Thus, Devi recognizes that a marriage that is “only love” could compound the trials associated with being a new daughter-in-law. In this sense, it is clear that guides are happy to have the freedom and autonomy afforded to them as single women, but they realistically expect such personal leeway to decrease once they have entered into the more “traditional” roles of wife, daughter-in-law and eventually mother.
Importantly, the increased decision-making facilitated by wage earning is described as part of a modern woman’s prerogative. In contrast to the uneducated, rural, child-bride trope frequently trotted out in state and INGO development projects, informants present themselves as mature, informed and independent in their discussions about love and marriage. Preferring a love marriage, delaying marriage or hoping to avoid marriage altogether are different life choices informants are able to more easily make because of their status as wage-earners. Speaking about marriage in terms of love and insisting on their right to have at least some say in their marriage partner is one way informants assert their status as modern Nepali women.

Chapter Six Conclusion

How can the material practices of female trekking guides tell us something about gender, modernity, and subjectivity in Nepal? The empirical example of female guides elucidates the processes through which wage earning is leveraged by some working class women to increase their decision-making power in matters of personal economy, education and marriage. In this sense these women can parlay economic independence into other forms of power, for example, the power to continue their education or to avoid an arranged marriage (at least temporarily). By engaging in the very things held up as modern, such as capitalist economic productivity and education, women like my informants are able to make-good on the promises of Nepal’s development narrative.

I suggest that guides construct a modern subjectivity by leveraging their purchasing power as a type of freedom. My informants assert that wage labor increases their freedom, but the freedom they describe is a particularly marketized concept. In an expanding capitalist economy, access to disposable income has allowed informants a degree of economic and social
individuation not available to previous generations of women in Nepal. Thus, wage labor has allowed female guides to become autonomous economic units in some sense. Guides use their disposable income to construct their identity as modern Nepali women through their consumption choices in a diverse set of markets. Making sartorial choices is just one example. Equally, if not more important, are their decisions in the ‘marriage market’ and ‘education market.’ Although the metaphor of a marriage market—which reduces potential partners to commodities and marriages to a consumption choice of sorts—can certainly be problematized, female guides do in fact express greater decision-making power in this context in a way homologous to their increased ability to buy consumer goods. The education market is more clear-cut, as guides may choose from a variety of educational commodities—different schools, vocational trainings, and degrees—because of their access to income. Discretionary spending on educational commodities is a double act of modernity in that it both confirms the ability of the buyer to make personal spending choices and, unlike other commodities, enables the buyer to accrue the cultural capital of formal education.

Guides directly articulate their consumption choices as a type of freedom—that is, the freedom to be modern. Critics of neoliberal economic policy—myself included—find freedom via consumption a troubling solution to the historic exclusion of a majority of women from full participation in public life. However, such ideological leanings should not prevent recognition of the very real importance of wage earning and subsequent spending for informants. While freedom through increased purchasing power does not necessarily translate into other forms of socio-political power, guides nevertheless experience their income as an integral part of securing increased personal autonomy, which is itself the cornerstone of their modern subjectivity.
Thus far I have looked at what guides say and do to craft their modern subjectivities. In chapter 7 I explore the tension inherent in guides’ attempts to be modern. Guides must navigate between the competing gender ideologies of historically dominant HCHH discourse and emergent understandings of women’s place in Nepal. Chapter 7 further explores the concept of respectable Nepali womanhood by looking at the techniques my informants use to affirm their social prestige in spite of their status as public women.
Devi looked distressed and was speaking in hushed deferential tones to the lodge owners, a husband and wife. We had been trekking for two weeks and were staying at a fairly large guesthouse on the busy Annapurna Circuit. When Devi returned to our dinner table I asked her what the lodge owners had said. Apparently, a guide from Shakti Trekking had stayed there the night before and had been very loud and boisterous and stayed up late playing cards, joking and even swearing with her guests and other guides. The lodge owners were afraid she wasn’t a “good type of girl.” They warned Devi that her company’s reputation would be hurt if the guides acted like that. I later asked Devi what she thought about the situation and she answered:

DP: Yes, some sisters don’t understand, right? Even though they are good people. We also have to speak well for the sake of others. Even though we are good people we can’t turn and show ourselves behaving in an arrogant manner. We have to stay/sit (basne) nicely. (Devi Pun, 31, Magar)

Two things struck me about her reply. First, in this quotation translating between Nepali and English is particularly difficult. In Nepali, Devi used a compound verb that most closely translates to (“to speak”)+ (“to do for someone else’s sake”). So when Devi says “speak well for the sake of others” it is actually just one verb. The action of speaking is secondary to the action of doing it for someone. In this phrasing, there is a sense of dharma (duty) to “speak well.” This nuance is important in understanding the emphasis she places on how her behavior is explicitly for the benefit of others, rather than her own benefit. It is an affirmation that Devi is painfully aware of how her behavior, as a public woman, is particularly open to judgment, commentary
and censure. Second, when she affirms that women have to “stay/sit nicely” she is using the same verb that is repeated over and over again to describe women’s archetypal domestic role. As we have seen, the verb basne means to sit or alternatively to stay, and informants reiterated time and again that women’s traditional role was to ghar basne (stay in the house), bhitra basne (stay inside), or simply basne (stay), while men enjoyed seemingly every other verb! It is telling that Devi invoked this word within the context of describing proper comportment for women while on-the-job. When Devi says “we have to stay/sit nicely,” she is calling attention to the fact that even while pushing the boundaries of women’s acceptable public visibility as a guide, she and her peers must give deference to norms of female domesticity. The use of basne is a powerful example of the balancing act female trekking guides manage between being public, working women and affirming their identities as respectable didi/bahini (sisters).

In the previous chapters I examine how guides use spatial language and specific consumption practices to affirm their modern identity. In both chapter 5 and 6 I note that guides craft their modern subjectivities within particular limits set by persistent hegemonic norms about women’s proper role in contemporary Nepal. In this chapter I elaborate on the particular anxieties guides face as they chart new territory as wage laborers in the public sphere. I contextualize this anxiety within the broader “honor economy” that influences how guides understand their own behavior as part of a larger normative community (Liechty 2003: 83). I end with a discussion of the strategies used by my informants to counter negative stereotypes about “over modern” and “broken/ruined” girls. Such strategies include rhetorical maneuvers as well as material acts of impression management, such as dressing the part of a good girl and sending remittances home to their families.
Accruing *Ijaat*: Honor as a Commodity

The concept of *ijaat*, or social honor, is one term Nepalis use to conceptualize prestige, status and reputation. *Ijaat* has a specific meaning when applied to women, which relates to their respectability as good girls/women in relation to HCHH hegemonic norms that expect women to be chaste, docile and pious. A woman’s comportment in Nepal is not just reflective of her individual character, but also a reflection of the character of her family. Thus, Nepali women bear the burden of maintaining their *ijaat* for both themselves and their wider social network. Liechty (2003) notes that *ijaat* functions as an economy in the sense that *ijaat* can be earned as well as lost. *Ijaat* can thus be understood as cultural/social capital that requires investment and careful guarding. For my informants, accruing and maintaining *ijaat* is carried out through behavior deemed respectable by culturally dominant HCHH standards.

Many scholars of gender in Nepal have noted the centrality of *ijaat* in shaping women’s decision making about a range of topics including marriage, comportment and mobility (Bennett 1983; Rankin 2004; Liechty 2003). For example, Rankin (2004) notes that fear of losing *ijaat* profoundly constrains high-caste Newari women from leaving their husband’s house or making sartorial decisions without the approval of their parents-in-law. In conjunction with the HCHH norms that pervade everyday life in Nepal, social surveillance and social sanctions enforce the gendered *ijaat* economy that defines the boundaries of women’s acceptable place in society. In her ethnography of high-caste women in rural Nepal, Bennett (1983) argues that “the ideal image of Hindu women has symbolic ramifications as well as social and emotional implications for the lives of actual village women” (274). Bennett’s statement is also true in the urban context of my research site. Departing from the “ideal image” puts one’s *ijaat* at risk, especially through

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77 Here it is worth noting once again that in the diverse communities of Nepal, what constitutes respectable behavior for women does vary considerably in practice, even as HCHH norms forward a dominant archetype of the ideal Nepali woman. Within Nepal’s urban centers, HCHH norms predominate.
networks of gossip and ridicule (Ibid.). Rankin (2004) confirms that the power of gossip and social censure in her research community is powerful enough to push some women into fairly strict self-imposed domestic seclusion. She writes, “women of any married status can assume themselves to be an automatic and special focus of public discussion whey they are in the public domain” (Rankin 2004: 148). *Ijaat* is thus both a thing that can be earned and lost as well as a concept that structures the social field through which working class women move.

Liechty’s (2003) monograph on middle class culture in urban Nepal deals explicitly with *ijaat* as a fundamental instrument of social control. He describes *ijaat* as “prestige, dignity, respectability or honor” (83), He explains that accruing *ijaat* is critical in “maintain[ing] a legitimate social identity” (85). *Ijaat* exerts social control by threatening those who don’t conform to normative expectations with social censure, gossip and exclusion. Liechty notes that the U.S. colloquialism that a reputation takes a lifetime to build but only a moment to lose is homologous to the social function of *ijaat* within communities. This is especially the case for women, whose *ijaat* is much more easily depleted by minor infractions such as saying or doing something that is deemed *beijaat* (dishonorable) by her community (Rankin 2004). Echoing Devi’s sentiment at the outset of this chapter, Kulung Rai, a 20 year old guide from the Rai ethnic group notes:

If one [woman] does bad things, then people think that everyone does bad. So if a girl from [Shakti Trekking] goes as a guide and doesn’t look after the guest properly, and if she walks with other men, then that girl's actions will apply to all other girls from the office. That happens. (Kulung Rai, 20, Rai)
For women working in the public sphere, the “bad” behavior of one woman can sully the *ijaat* of all women in that profession. Consequently, it becomes all the more important for guides to prove their respectability as a defensive maneuver against possible aspersions on their character.

As I show in chapter 6, capital in the form of wages is important to female guides’ sense of autonomy. Earning an income allows informants the pleasure to buy goods and services at their own discretion and also conveys a broader sense of personal freedom. However, purchasing power has its limits and cultural capital furnished by *ijaat* and social approval remains a concern for guides. *Ijaat* functions as cultural capital in that having *ijaat* elicits respect from others. A woman with *ijaat* is deserving of praise, whereas a woman without *ijaat* is open to ridicule and perhaps worse. Previous research in Nepal has similarly shown that financially independent women continue to be monitored and to self-monitor their behavior in alignment with familial and/or community norms. For example, in her ethnography of gendered space in an urban Newari township, Rankin (2004) notes that although some of her female informants earned significant money (e.g. through money-lending) it did not necessarily destabilize gender stratification within the community. Her case illustrates how merely earning capital is not enough for many women to feel comfortable participating in public life. *Ijaat* must also be considered.

Although in general my data support and are supported by Rankin’s (2004) findings, the bulk of her fieldwork was conducted in the mid 1990’s. Considering the profound changes that have occurred in Nepal in the intervening two decades it is not surprising that there are some intergenerational differences between how her informants speak about *ijaat* and how it is considered by my own informants. Most notably, while Rankin found little evidence of women actively pushing back against social constraints, even in highly urbanized areas, my data suggest
this has changed. The narratives of mobility discussed in chapter 5 are evidence of this shift. As Kabita, a 25 year old Chettri guide states:

*KK*: My mother, when she was my age couldn’t make a decision of her own. And she was also scared [to do so]. She didn’t even have proper conversations with my father. To decide something she had to ask my father or with elder people. And I am really free. At that time mothers were not free. Father and mother were not free in their decisions because they were under their elders. We are also under many people, even still, we are free in many things. We can even make our decisions on our own. At that time [before] it wasn’t like that. (Kabita Kharki, 25, Chettri)

In this narrative of mobility, Kabita calls attention to the fact that she is comparatively “free” to the generation of women interviewed by Rankin (2004), yet she is still “under” many of the same constraints. By “under,” Kabita means that as a young woman she is still expected to follow the rules of accruing and maintaining *ijaat* even as women’s access to public space has expanded considerably over her lifetime. In the next section I examine how guides’ attempts to accrue and maintain *ijaat* are part of a strategy meant to convince the “many people” that women like Kabita are “under” that they are good girls.

**Broken Girls: Anxieties of the ‘Over Modern’**

Each year in the Nepali month of Phagun (March/April) the festival of colors or Holi is celebrated. During Holi, family and friends celebrate in their family courtyards by throwing brightly colored powder and water at each other, creating a messy and kaleidoscopic scene. In village centers gangs of children run around attempting to smear the most color on each other

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Nepal uses the lunar calendar, which begins in mid April.
while avoiding the water balloons, squirt guns and buckets of water tossed around by adults and children alike. The atmosphere is distinctly jubilant. In cities, Holi has taken a darker turn as it has become common for people to mix oil, eggs or even urine into water bottles that are thrown at passing cars, cyclists and pedestrians. Public areas have become crammed with young men who are known to drink heavily, fight and sexually harass and assault women on the street.

While in Pokhara, I was told repeatedly to avoid public places during Holi. My female acquaintances and friends, both working class, middle class and wealthy, assured me that they too would confine themselves to their homes and apartments during the holiday.

With their warnings on my mind I went to a Holi celebration in the center of Pokhara. When I arrived around mid-day there was already a crowd of several hundred revelers. About 80% of the crowd was Nepali and the rest were tourists. Of the Nepali crowd there were 10 men to every woman. Both Nepalis and tourists were drinking heavily. While observing the crowd I witnessed several foreign women being aggressively groped by men—both foreign and Nepali—under the pretense of smearing colors on the women’s faces and shirts. After an hour I left to return to my own room and take field notes. The next morning I went to Devi’s apartment and asked her and her roommates how they spent Holi. They affirmed that they hadn’t left the apartment at all, but had watched the events from their window. They then told me a story about seeing a white woman who was clearly inebriated walking home in the evening. Two Nepali men stopped next to her on a motorbike and offered her a ride home. The woman accepted and the three rode off together. Devi and her roommates seemed deeply disturbed by the scene and kept repeating “poor girl,” as if there were little doubt that she had been taken advantage of by the men. They concluded the story by reiterating that unlike their Western peers, young Nepali women in cities didn’t go outside during Holi, or after dark for that matter. Not only would doing
so put them at risk of assault, but it would also open them up to all manner of accusations of impertinence, promiscuity and moral failing from their neighbors and larger communities.

Devi and her roommates felt sympathy for the woman they saw, but they also recognized in her a reflection of many of the negative stereotypes associated with Western women. Importantly, while reviewing the events, Devi and her roommates were careful to describe how their own behavior differed from the woman’s. As Nepali women with social honor (*ijaat*) to maintain they would not dare go out at night, drink publicly or socialize with young men in a way that could be construed as romantic or sexual. Such behavior would be deemed “over modern.” The term “over modern,” which is spoken in English, describes Nepali women who, through real or imagined behavior, have pushed the boundaries of respectability to the breaking point. “Over modern” crystallizes much of the anxiety surrounding young women’s entrance into the wage labor economy, particularly fears that they will become too Western, lose their *ijaat* and undermine the morality of Nepali society.

Several months after Holi, during an interview, 25 year old guide Kabita reflected on the difference between Western and Nepali women:

*KK:* One thing is that for those people who have not been in tourism areas, for those people they believe that tourists are *open*. They are *open* in everything. And they have come from abroad and they eat anything (e.g. cow). Like, if [Nepali] women go with them then they will become like that only. They are *free* with alcohol abroad. And they are free in *sexual relationships*. If we women *engage* with you people, they [Nepali women] also learn these things, and it will *hamper* our culture. I feel that some have understood it in this negative sense. (Kabita Kharki, 25, Chettri)
Kabita’s quotation juxtaposes a negative stereotype of foreign women with the cultural ideal of the chaste, docile, pious Nepali women. The ideal Nepali woman doesn’t smoke, drink or eat cow meat and she certainly doesn’t engage in “open” sexual relationships. More than describing a trope of the over sexualized Western woman, Kabita’s comment speaks to a deep anxiety of what could happen to Nepali women should they become “over modern.”

An “over modern” girl is said to have forgotten her culture, and worse still, adopted the troubling habits of foreign culture laid out so plainly in Kabita’s earlier quotation. The end result of being “over modern” is being bigrie ko. Bigrie ko means both broken and ruined, and when applied to a woman it has a distinct sexual connotation. Binita Shahi, a 20 year old Chettrti woman, notes her parents’ particular concerns about her living and working in the city and consequently becoming broken. She says, “my parents keep worrying too much that I might get spoiled (bigrie ko) or do the bad/wrong kind of work.” The “bad kind of work” is a reference to work that could threaten Binita’s chastity—not just sex work, but also work in cheap roadside canteens, dance bars or other places that good girls simply would not work. 79

Binita’s parents’ concerns about their daughter reveal the generalized anxiety over working women’s morality and their role in a changing Nepali society. As the historic exclusion of women from public work is eroded, many Nepali express a fear that working women are hastening the degradation of traditional Nepali culture and participating in morally suspect behavior. A working woman can more easily become “broken” because she has access to the capital, consumer goods and mobility that define being “over modern”. Similar parental concern and general social anxiety about working women have been noted by other feminist political

79 Dance bars are popular in urban Nepal. Dance bars can be extremely high-end restaurants where women in traditional ethnic garb perform chaste cultural dances. They can also be cheap “canteens” where scantily clad women dance more eroticly. For the most part they are not strip clubs, that is, women don’t publicly display nudity. However, in some dance bars (both high and low end) women dancers may also perform various degrees of companionship work or sex work.
economists. For example, in her ethnography of young rural Javanese women entering the wage labor economy through factory work, Wolf (1994) notes, “factory workers are perceived in this predominantly Moslem society as sexually loose and immoral, a situation that creates sexual identity conflicts for these women, who are caught in the struggle between Islamic patriarchy and ‘modernity’” (9). Wolf goes on to explain that the negative connotations associated with factory women are shared by parents of these young female workers, “most parents of factory workers felt that factory experience, particularly wage earning, had affected their daughters’ decisions and behavior, making them more independent. Several mothers complained about their daughters’ increasing independence as manifested in their decisions to do as they wished, to buy what they wanted, to go steady without parental permission, and even to go against parental advice” (1994: 246). Wolf’s description of parental and social concerns about working women bears strong resemblance to the concerns circulating about young working class Nepali women becoming “over modern” and “broken.”

Aiwha Ong’s (1987) ethnography of Malay women negotiating their transition from rural peasant livelihoods to wage labor based livelihoods also notes the tensions around young women’s incorporation into the cash economy. As in Wolf’s (1994) monograph, Ong uncovers a persistent worry about the morality of women workers. Ong (2010) [1987] writes of the “heightened sexuality attributed to Malay female workers by the Malaysian public,” which evidences “a society intensely ambivalent about the social consequences of industrial development” (4). In both Ong’s (1987) and Wolf’s (1994) ethnographies, working women become symbols of cultural change that are met, in part, with suspicion and disease. In both case studies, women’s sexual morality is questioned as wage earning allows Ong’s and Wolf’s informants increased autonomy. In the Nepali context, similar anxiety about what working
women mean for Nepali society are expressed in words like “broken” and “over modern” that have connotations of sexual impropriety.

Kulung Rai explains the root of anxiety over “broken” girls as a fear of cultural degradation and abandonment:

KR: I feel like we shouldn’t abandon our culture. To accept another’s culture means we should reject the bad sides and accept the good side. We should learn from them and reject the bad parts of our own culture as well and accept the good parts. (Kulung Rai, 20, Rai)

In this quotation, Kulung is addressing how she personally balances her own culture with Western influences. Her quotation exemplifies a common discourse amongst informants that certain facets of social change are good—infrastructure, education, technology and increased autonomy for women—but that these things have an acceptable limit. The term “over modern” implies taking social change above and beyond, that is “over,” a culturally appropriate limit. An “over modern” and “broken” girl has neglected to “reject the bad sides” of foreign culture and has thus abandoned her own culture.

**Looking the Part: Fashion and Respectability**

In describing what marks a woman as *bigrieko*, Binita comments, “as for fashion, if *over fashion* is done then it is bad.” “Over fashion” like “over modern” suggests a woman has forgotten her place and her culture. “Over fashion” might mean a variety of things including wearing heavy makeup, wearing revealing or tight clothing and high heels or having a short hairstyle. Being “over fashion” is opening oneself up to criticism that perhaps personal style isn’t the only area in which one has become too modern. A girl or woman who does “over fashion” is
tempting gossip that she doesn’t heed any boundaries of respectability, perhaps she also drinks or “walks with boys.” To combat the idea that they are doing “over fashion,” guides adopt particular styles of comportment that suit both their desire to wear contemporary styles of clothing and their desire to avoid any suggestion of beijaat (dishonorable) behavior. Issa Rai, a 24 year old guide from the Rai community commented on what she prefers to wear on a day-to-day basis:

IR: We can’t wear short shorts and open dresses because people in the village and our parents don’t like that. And we also feel uncomfortable. I don’t wear those open clothes. Shirt and pant are fine for us. (Issa Rai, 24, Rai)

It is no coincidence that Western culture and more revealing dress are both referred to as “open.” There is also a subtle sexual connotation in the term “open.” A woman who wears “open” clothes is perhaps “open” to sexual activity. Issa’s insistence that “shirt and pant are fine for us,” is an attempt to articulate a happy medium in which her sartorial choices reflect personal style within the boundaries of respectability.

Dressing the part of a good girl extends beyond city life. Most guides do return home annually and these moments are critical in affirming their ijaat to their family and community. Like many guides, Kabita notes that while in the city she has more leeway with her clothing selection, but when she returns to the village she wears traditional clothing (kurta surwal) to appease the conservative gender norms of her natal village:

KK: When going to the village I wear kurta surwal. Daughters don’t wear pants there. And boys over there also taunt you by saying you wear pants. It is uncomfortable if we wear pants and then everything is tight (gestures to tight clothing). And that is why I feel uncomfortable to wear [that type of clothing] in front of my father. If I wear kurta surwal,
then it is dress that we have traditionally worn, that is why we like this. (Kabita Kharki, 25, Chettri)

Kabita explains that dressing appropriately and avoiding the “over modern” label is contextual. In the city, jeans and a t-shirt that aren’t too “open” will suffice. When returning to the village, traditional clothing such as *kurta surwal* (tunic and loose pants) is necessary to maintain the appearance of a girl with *ijaat*. Kabita’s quotation exemplifies Liechty’s (2003) assertion that, “the ijaat economy is never only a moral economy or only a material economy. It is always both” (84). Kabita is aware that although she may have disposable income to buy a range of clothing styles, her material choices are constrained by the moral implications therein. Simply wearing comparatively conservative clothing does not suffice in establishing guides’ *ijaat* and status as a good girl. The public nature of their work makes the effort of impression management a constant task.

Kabita also gestures to the social consequences that being seen as “over modern” can provoke when she mentions that “boys over there also taunt you.” While teasing from village boys can be innocuous, my informants consistently mention teasing from men as something to be assiduously avoided. They note that teasing could escalate and importantly, being teased is seen as something that invites further gossip. People may wonder what a girl has done to provoke such behavior. Whether in the city or the countryside, working in the lodges or walking on the streets of Pokhara, my informants consistently discuss “teasing” (*jiskine*) as a dangerous and negative reaction some men have towards women regardless of how “well” they behave according to normative standards of propriety and demureness. Behaving with *ijaat* is a strategy to minimize teasing, but it does not eliminate this behavior entirely. Although Nepal has fairly high rates of gender inequality and gender-based violence, my informants were loathe to speak
about such topics unless under the broad and comparatively innocuous umbrella term of “teasing.” (UNDP 2013) Sexual violence is an extremely taboo topic and it is unlikely that my informants would disclose instances of serious harassment or assault despite our close relationship.

Several times throughout my fieldwork I would hear stories of “teasing,” that suggested much more serious levels of gender-based violence, though this was never explicitly stated nor confirmed. For example, one evening as I sat with a group of senior guides, one woman recounted a story in which a drunken male guide pounded on her door all night long whispering obscenities. The woman recalled that no one came to help as she was housed in an isolated out building where no one could hear either her or the man. When I asked “and then what happened?” the woman became quite and said “he went away after a time.” She then quickly changed the topic to something much more light. Although there is no way to know what actually occurred that night, I heard many stories that were similarly vague or glossed over. Such serious stories are rare in comparison to the very casual way teasing is talked about as a constant low-level form of harassment faced in public venues. In its common form, teasing materializes as rude and lingering stares, a namaste (hello) said in a lascivious manner, tongue clicks, a hand brushed across one’s neck, arm or back or a tug at one’s hair. Guides note that such small indignities are part of being a woman in public and they usually discussed these incidences with an eyeroll and dismissive hand gestures.

Even for guides who spoke of teasing as a mild annoyance, the very fact that it exists as a taken-for-granted fact of a woman’s public existence points to the difficulties in maintaining ijaat. Tellingly, guides express a feeling of responsibility for their own comportment as well as

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80 I am leaving out her name, age and caste for additional anonymity given the sensitive nature of her story.
the comportment of those around them. For example, Netrika, a 28 year old Chettri woman, relates a story in which, after trekking to a crowded lodge with a client, she was obligated to sleep in a room with other male guides:

\[NA\]: If they do something then my honor will go. Even if they don’t do anything and people hear this rumor then it is like saying ‘oh this girl has done like this.’ I feel my honor will leave, sometimes I also feel scared. …If something little also happens then my honor will be erased. And I feel like what can I do at that time? I feel scared. But up till now nothing like that has happened. (Netrika Achaaye, 28, Chettri)

Like the teasing mentioned earlier, women are often seen as provoking gender-based harassment, gossip and even violence. That Netrika would feel responsible if something such as harassment or assault occurred is indicative of the pervasive opinion that it is women alone who are tasked with maintaining their *ijaat*. This is similar to “victim blaming” logic in Western cultures (Belknap 2010). Notably, Netrika references the power of rumors in undermining her reputation. Even a rumor of impropriety would “erase” her *ijaat*. Netrika’s fears underscore the extreme fragility of women’s *ijaat*, especially for working class women whose public visibility exacerbates their exposure to *beijaat* (dishonorable) situations.

In terms like “over modern,” “over fashion,” and *bigrieko*, there is a fear that “traditional” Nepali culture(s) will be undermined in favor of a monolithic Western culture stereotyped as “open” to all manner of morally questionable behavior. Another way guides contradict any suggestion that they are “over modern” or *bigrieko* is through aligning themselves with the culturally revered archetype of the good sister. This can be quite effective because, as Bennett (1983) points out in her monograph of high-caste gender relations fittingly titled, *Sacred Sisters, Dangerous Wives*, the role of sister is sacred in HCHH social organization.
A Good Sister

Part of having *ijaat* is being recognized and labeled by the wider community as a good sister (*raamro didi/bahini*). Across the diversity of cultures and languages in Nepal, the use of kinship terms like brother/sister is universally important in organizing social interaction (March 2002). Within the staggeringly complex kinship naming system, the terms for younger sister/elder sister and younger brother/elder brother are especially important. First names, or the equivalent of Sir/Ma’am, are much more rarely used than in English. Instead, the terms brother and sister, shown in *Table 6. Kinship Terms* below, are used for both a variety of close and distant relatives as well as strangers on the street.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Didi</td>
<td>Elder sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahini</td>
<td>Younger sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhai</td>
<td>Elder brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhai</td>
<td>Younger brother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Referring to someone as a brother or sister is a baseline indicator of respect because it invokes familiarity. To be a good *didi/bahini* (sister) is thus an important aspect of playing a respectable and culturally intelligible part in social relations.

Importantly, calling someone a brother or sister is an immediate signal that the relationship is asexual or familial. While in Kathmandu translating and coding my data, an exchange with my acquaintance Sita illuminated the importance of these terms. Sita, a 26 year old woman who, like my guide informants, is a first generation rural to urban migrant, wage-earner and college student, told a story about her neighbor. She recounted with revulsion how her neighbor, another young woman, was secretly dating a boy while publicly referring to him as
dhai (elder brother). Because Sita knew of the romantic relationship, anytime the boy and girl addressed each other publicly as dhai/bahini (elder brother/younger sister) she recoiled at the incestuous undertones. According to Sita, this woman had lost her ijaat, not only for engaging in pre-marital sexual relations but also for flouting the socially accepted meaning of the terms elder brother/little sister as an asexual relationship. Sita repeatedly and emphatically told me “it’s their own business, but you don’t do that (e.g. use the terms Dhai/Bahini in a romantic relationship).

Although Sita kept her neighbor’s secret, she confessed she could no longer look the woman in the eye or call her a friend. Sita’s recounting of this story highlights the social import of these terms in that she was willing to sever a social bond over the improper use of them by her neighbor.

Affirming fictive kinship links through the use of brother/sister terms is a routine part of everyday social interaction in Nepal. For women, the importance of establishing such links is magnified as these terms serve as cues to others about how they should be approached—as respected sisters or as public women who may have lax moral standing. Kinship terms such as didi/bahini take on special significance for guides and other working class women because the public nature of their work frequently takes them out of their actual kinship networks. Within their natal villages, guides have identities as this person’s daughter, that person’s cousin, etc… Guides report that in the village, the deep respect for kinship is a preventative from disparagement of their character or harassment. Kinship ties within the village insulate them from the type of unsubstantiated gossip that single women dwelling in cities are subject to. This is because there is much less anonymity within a village where a woman’s place within kinship networks is generally well known.

81 This is not to suggest women’s lives in the village are idyllic. Research shows that violence against women is pervasive in rural Nepal (Crawford and Kaufman 2008).
Outside the village, in urban settings, and while trekking from one village to the next, guides have no actual relatives to vouch for and reiterate their status as good girls. Thus, guides are quite conscious of cultivating a good reputation through their behavior and speech. This is made clear in the careful way they manage their public appearances in their urban communities. For example, in their urban homes they never give their neighbors reason to doubt their “sister” status; they never go out after dark, they always travel together, they speak deferentially and never wear clothing or makeup that might be considered questionable or “over modern.” While working they always stay in guesthouses that know them or other Shakti Trekking guides. The purpose of choosing known guesthouses is not only for quality control, but also so they are under the protection of the fictive kinship ties assiduously maintained with lodge owners.

As the chapter’s opening vignette suggests, one reason guides are so intent on being perceived as good girls is the very real danger of being labeled otherwise. A fear of gossip, ostracism and even violence pervade young women’s accounts of impression management. Being viewed by their respective communities as a good sister is understood as an important mechanism of maintaining ijaat.

**Remitting Respectability: Love, Money and Filial Duty**

Though described briefly in chapter 5, it is worth discussing in detail here how the practice of sending wages back to their natal family, a behavior common among my informants, is tied to discourses of filial duty and respectability. Nepal is a remittance-based economy. In 2013, 28% of Nepal’s GDP was from remittances, making it second only to the Kyrgyz Republic for remittances as a percentage of GDP (World Bank 2014). The majority of remitters are men, and more specifically, young men. There is a long historical precedent of young men leaving
their village to earn and support their family from afar, starting in the nineteenth century with Gurkha soldiers enlisting in the British colonial army (Whelpton 2005). In present-day Nepal, male migrants travel across the globe to work mostly as low-wage workers in the service and construction industries. Even in menial jobs they can out earn Nepali wages for comparative work. Evidence of remittances is everywhere and it is a very typical story to hear about someone’s son building them a new house with wages sent back from the Gulf, Malaysia or elsewhere. In addition to transnational remitting, it is also quite common for young men to migrate internally to large urban areas like Kathmandu and Pokhara and send their wages back to their parents residing in the rural hinterlands.

As in other South Asian cultures, it is expected that sons will economically support their mother and father as they age. Daughters are expected to leave the natal household to live as a daughter-in-law, thus the presumption of financial support from daughters is quite low. Supporting one’s parents is a matter of filial duty (dharma) that is deeply engrained in Nepali culture(s) across ethnic and caste differences. It is one reason why having only daughters is considered a misfortune; the assumption is that no one will be there to take care of the parents once the daughters leave to be daughters-in-law. Taking on the responsibility of financially supporting parents is thus, in many respects, taking on the mantle of the male heir.

The practice of remitting wages is tied to honoring one’s parents and accruing honor as a good son. When a daughter engages in this activity she also earns ijaat. Importantly, remitting is not a private activity. The wellbeing of a household, especially within more insular rural communities, is a point of pride. A son’s economic contribution is often physically manifested in home renovations, the purchase of non-necessary commodities, or the ability to send younger generations to expensive boarding schools (Thieme and Wyss 2005). In villages, it is usually
quite well known which household is receiving financial support from a son and which
household is unfortunate not to have such a resource. The public nature of remitting wages
makes it an especially useful way for guides to affirm their respectability within their immediate
household and within their natal community.

In her research on young rural Javanese women participating in wage labor for the first
time, Wolf (1994) shows that remitting by her informants plays an important role in securing the
approval of parents for their daughters to work in factories. She notes that when her informants’
wages contribute to their families’ daily subsistence needs, parents describe their daughters’
work in terms of altruism and responsibility. In Nepal, when guides remit wages home, it sends a
number of signals to their family and community. First, when guides send money back to their
parents, they are fulfilling their filial duty and demonstrating that, as good daughters, they omit
spending their earnings on “fashion,” in favor of more respectable expenses. Second, it verifies
that they are working in a respectable profession. Although in practice this is not necessarily the
case, the assumption is that a daughter engaged in a “dishonorable” profession would be too
ashamed to send that money to their parents. Third, remitting dispels fears that a working
daughter might be “over modern” by proving that the daughter still respects “traditional”
hierarchies between parent and child.

Many guides report remitting their earnings to their families as a priority. When asked
what they typically spend their wages on, guides usually mention the basics of food and rent first
and then immediately mention education and family as the most important expenses. Issa Rai’s
discussion of remitting money to her family is typical:

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82 From my own experience working on human trafficking, it is clear that Nepali women engaged in sex work still
remit to their families, though they go to great lengths to conceal the source of the income.
*IR:* I use [my earnings] on my studies and also look after my mother and elder sister. Lots of expenses go to my studies. (Issa Rai, 24, Rai)

In this quotation, the prioritization of education discussed in chapter 6 is seen. However, Issa also reports supporting her family as equally important. Similarly, Binita states:

*BS:* Now there are parents too. I have to help my parents too. There are sisters; I have to help them too. There are my studies too; I have to help that too. I need for myself for eating, dressing and for living. (Binita Shahi, 20, Chettri)

In the following excerpt, Binita clearly articulates the connection between supporting parents and other family members and being seen as an “important” and respectable person.

*BS:* [My parents] may ask for something from my work. ‘Our daughter will give us something by working. And she will help all these younger sisters too. And after that she might become a good person.’ They think like this. They also say ‘daughter do like this, take care of these younger sisters, give them an education and after that do a good job.’ They keep saying ‘become an important (thulo) person and when we become old people then take care of us.’ (Binita Shahi, 20, Chettri)

When Binita’s parents use the term “important person,” (*thulo maanche*) they are employing a term reserved for highly respected people. A *thulo maanche* is reserved for the most important and prestigious members of a community, those with the most *ijaat*. To be likened to a *thulo maanche* is a direct acknowledgement of social prestige earned via remitting.

In addition to their reported spending, I also asked guides a hypothetical question about how they would spend money if they won the equivalent of $2,000 USD in the lottery. Many responded similarly to Issa:
IR: I would give half to my mother, and I would pay for college and the rent for the room.

(Issa Rai, 24, Rai)

Issa’s response that she would give half her winnings to her mother reflects her deep commitment to provide for her family. In addition to financially supporting aging parents, many guides report that their remitted wages go to school fees for their younger siblings. As discussed in chapter 1, my informants all attended government schools, which have a notorious reputation for poor quality teaching. Remitted wages are used to send younger siblings to boarding schools where they can receive better instruction in all subjects, especially English. In this sense, wage earning allows guides to ensure their siblings have more cultural capital when they eventually enter the wage labor market. Guides are part of the aspirational working class, and these aspirations extend beyond their own lives to the lives of their family members.

As mentioned in chapter 6, remitted wages also act as a pressure valve of sorts by helping to alleviate familial pressure to marry quickly. Many guides note a decline in exhortations to marry once their families realize that their daughters’ wages can benefit the family’s economic status. When I asked Kabita what her parents thought about her working as a guide she replied, “They think well because we have been looking after our parents. We also have to send money home.” Kabita and other guides note that parents who were at first worried about their daughters working in the city are appeased through remittances. Thus, remitting money has numerous practical benefits beyond signifying *ijaat*. The implication is not that remittances are divested from affective ties. The point is that in addition to genuine investment in the well-being of their families, guides are well aware that their wages can be deployed strategically to support their desires for increased autonomy.
Chapter Seven Conclusion

This chapter has asked several questions: what is at stake in claiming a modern identity? What can be lost if one becomes “over modern”? How do guides navigate the knife-edge of social respectability? In Ong’s (1987) account of “neophyte factory women” in Malaysia, she asks similar questions. Of her informants she claims, “in their changing positions within the family, the village, the labor process, and wider society, they devise counter tactics for resisting images imposed on them and come to construct their own images” (4). Similarly, my informants have devised a number of “counter tactics” to dispute any claim that they are “over modern” or “broken” girls (Ibid.: 4). In doing so they “construct their own images” of themselves as good Didi/Bahini (sisters) (Ibid.: 4).

In this chapter I discuss the gendered politics of respectability that my young working class informants face as public women. My informants participate in a material economy, but also an honor economy where social honor (ijaat) can be quickly lost if social mores are not accommodated. Through careful acts of impression management, guides affirm their respectability. Guides avoid being labeled “over modern” by wearing appropriate clothing that is not too “open.” They also moderate their appearance and behavior to appeal to a discourse of being a good sister while trekking, while living in urban areas and while back in the village. Guides send remittances to their families to prove that they are good daughters. Remittances act as evidence to a women’s family and community that she is taking part in respectable work and that, although she has moved beyond the confines of the family home, she has not forsaken the traditional parent/child hierarchy. They do all of these things to avoid the gossip, social censure and perhaps worse that “broken” (bigrieko) girls are said to invite upon themselves.
As guides make abundantly clear, there is quite a bit at stake in claiming a modern identity. In the following chapter I offer some concluding thoughts about how my informants navigate the multiple tensions between developmentalist discourse, historically dominant gender ideologies, and their own desires to be modern.
In this dissertation I explore what it means for young, working class women in urban Nepal to “be” modern. In this concluding chapter, I first review some of the key findings to emerge from this inquiry before turning to a discussion of the theoretical implications of this research.

The core questions of this dissertation are: In what ways are the roles of women changing in Nepal, particularly in regard to their presence in public space?; How do female trekking guides, as young, working class women, assert their modern subjectivities through particular consumptive practices?; What are the tactics used by guides to maintain their claims to social respectability in light of their public visibility? These questions are timely in light of rapid social change that has re-organized historical patterns of social organization in Nepal. Recent decades of political unrest and transition as well as the rapid urbanization, expansion in universal access to education and marketization of the economy contribute to new possibilities for (some) women to participate in Nepal’s modernity projects. Of particular import are the last 30 years of political transition in which Nepal experienced a struggle for democracy during the Janandolan (1990-1991), and a ten year Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) resulting in the dissolution of the Hindu monarchy. These geopolitical transitions, in addition to Nepal’s increasing global engagement, have undermined historically dominant gendered patterns of social organization.

While still a Hindu monarchy, Nepal was governed by laws based on Hindu cosmological understandings of social hierarchy. Although Hindu doctrine is no longer the law of the land, its influence remains strong in the cultural dominance of HCHH gender norms. Within HCHH
gender ideology the ideal woman is docile, subservient, silent and chaste. Further, women’s role is understood as exclusively domestic as a daughter, then wife and finally mother-in-law.

According to HCHH, in each of these roles, women’s mobility should be limited and domestic seclusion should be enforced. HCHH strictures against women and girls venturing outside the domestic realm run deep and public women are still regarded with suspicion. Norms limiting women’s public visibility and mobility have thus butted up against the increasing presence of young women in Nepal’s public sphere, including their participation in the wage labor economy. HCHH dominance is slowly losing ground. Not only political changes, but infrastructural changes and the opening of opportunity to previously isolated communities have irrevocably altered traditional patterns of social hierarchy based on caste, religion, language and gender. Women in Nepal have made substantial strides towards gender equality, especially in terms of primary school education and maternal health indicators. Nevertheless, gender discrimination is still prevalent and HCHH gender norms continue to exert a strong influence in Nepal at both the national and local level.

In recent decades the state itself has promoted gender equality and urged women to come out of the house and into the workforce. Such exhortations are part of a larger discourse of development put forward by the Nepali state over the last several decades. The discourse of development is everywhere in Nepal; in government policy, in educational materials, and on radio and TV programs. Development discourse uses a particular vocabulary that places some Nepalis closer to development than others such that development and modernity are exemplified by the urban, highly educated male participating in capitalist productivity. The counterpart to this archetype of development is the trope of the uneducated, poor, rural peasant woman who is everything that is not bikaasit (developed). Thus, while development discourse may urge women
to come forward into modernity, it does so by suggesting that Nepali women—especially low-caste, peasant, ethnic minority women—are defined by their lack of development.

In articulating the relationship between gender and development, spatial metaphors, words like backward, forward, inside and outside, are used frequently in Nepali. HCHH culture has historically described women’s social role as inside the home, whereas outside the home was the domain of men. In contemporary Nepal being outside refers to visibility in public spaces including higher education and the wage labor economy, which are also signifiers of modernity. Women’s traditional role as “inside the house” thus discursively marginalizes them from taking part in Nepal’s modernity projects. In response to this, my informants re-purpose spatial terms to counter claims that they belong inside or that they are backward. Guides describe their public visibility as part of Nepal coming forward and in this way align their public visibility with notions of progress. Informants also use narratives of mobility, which are stories guides tell about their own public visibility and mobility compared to earlier generations of Nepali women. Narratives of mobility draw on a linear discourse of progress that frames women’s public visibility as a positive step in Nepal’s development. Both spatial metaphors and narratives of mobility are important techniques used by guides to articulate their social location.

In addition to speaking about themselves in ways that align with narratives of progress, my informants construct their modern subjectivity through material practices enabled by their wage earning. Specifically, guides use their wages to increase their decision-making power in personal consumption choices, education and marriage. The increased autonomy facilitated by wage earning is central to guides’ sense of self. In terms of personal consumption, guides articulate their ability to spend at will as a sign of their independence and freedom. They compare themselves to women who “have to beg” their parents or parents-in-law for even small
s, guides also leverage their wage earner status to fund their continued education. For my working class informants, education is an important investment. They express a desire to parlay the social capital of an academic degree into a more lucrative career that might even push them into the middle class. Finally, in the marriage market, wage earning gives my informants additional decision-making power in the timing of their marriage and choosing a marriage partner. Guides note that because they can independently support themselves, they are insulated from family pressure to marry. My informants suggest that their economic autonomy will make their preferred “love plus arranged” marriage more feasible.

Guides participate in a number of markets, both literal public markets where commodities are bought and sold, as well as the education and even marriage markets. Importantly, as wage laborers, my informants have purchasing power in each of these areas that non-wage earning women do not have. With their wages they construct a working class habitus—an amalgamation of behaviors that include specific sartorial choices, pursuit of higher education and preference for love marriages. Earning and spending in a cash economy are part of my informants’ modern subjectivities, but so is maintaining an identity as a good woman in line with HCHH standards of respectability. In Nepal, a woman’s respectability hinges on her *ijaat*, or social honor. In culturally dominant HCHH gender ideology, social honor is quickly lost if women are seen as too ‘public.’ Because they are highly visible in the public sphere of wage labor, guides are quite aware of the dangers of being labeled as *beijaat* (dishonorable). My informants articulate a particular fear of being labeled “over modern” or “broken,” words which connote both an abandonment of Nepali culture and lax moral standing. Being “over modern” implies that a
woman has forgotten her place and her duty. From “over modern” it is a slippery slope to being labeled “broken/ruined,” which has clear undertones of sexual promiscuity.

Guides engage in a number of impression management strategies to confirm their identity as “good sisters.” Drawing on the importance of kinship terms in everyday parlance, guides try to position themselves as “good sisters” in their communities through dressing modestly (although in contemporary styles), staying in after dark and maintaining a deferential public persona. In addition, my informants gain social prestige through sending their wages to their family members as remittances. Remitting to support parents and younger siblings is a traditionally male activity and is linked to being a good and honorable son. By remitting, guides establish their respectability through taking up the mantle of the male heir and proving to their natal family and larger community that they are employed in a respectable profession. Further, remitting wages reaffirms a commitment to traditional parent/child hierarchies, thus dispelling any hints of being “over modern.”

The lengths that guides go to position themselves as modern but not “over modern” suggest a deep ambivalence about what it means to be a working women. My informants acknowledge the contradictory messages they receive about their role in contemporary Nepal: Should they come forward? Should they stay inside? Are they backward or are they equal participants in Nepal’s newly democratized public sphere? In the section below I further explore the sense of unease my informants articulate within the context of transition, uncertainty and social change.

Discussion
In the lives of my informants there is an undercurrent of tension between what modern women can and cannot do and should or should not do. In the previous chapters I have shown how this tension variously manifests; in the way informants use spatial narratives to discursively combat ideas that they are “backward”; in the way guides prefer a “love and arranged” marriage that both grants them autonomy in choosing a partner but values cultural traditions; and in the various impression management techniques used by guides to confirm their respectability as good Nepali sisters even as they labor in the public sphere. The roots of this tension are the seemingly contradictory messages young Nepali women receive. On the one hand, the discourse of development and modernization present in education curriculum, government policy and popular media reiterates that women must come “outside” and “forward.” On the other hand, hegemonic norms that limit women’s mobility and visibility in public space still have tremendous power. The same state that exhorts women to come “outside” continues to propose and pass gender discriminatory legislation.

An emergent way of thinking and feeling about women’s role in contemporary Nepal, that is, a new structure of feeling, is at odds with historically dominant conceptions of Nepali women’s place in society. As conceptualized by Raymond Williams (1977) a structure of feeling is a collectively held and incipient way of understanding social life. It is not tangible, yet it shapes the way social worlds are approached. A structure of feeling encompasses normative and affective aspects of cognition—how things, people and events are thought about. There is not a definitive origin for a structure of feeling, nor can it originate from a singular source. Rather, it is the consequence of slow incremental shifts in norms, and attitudes across a population, often in the context of broader socio-cultural or political-economic changes. In Nepal, development discourse, expansion of the capitalist economy, universal primary education for both boys and
girls, urbanization, new opportunities for commodity consumption, expansion of infrastructure and democratic social movements are just some of the factors that contribute to a new sense of women’s role in contemporary Nepal. The politics of gender are changing, and my informants recognize this change through their articulation of a new structure of feeling.

As Ahearn (2001) shows in her ethnography of love letter writing, gender and modernity in rural Nepal, her male and female informants encounter and iteratively produce a new structure of feeling about love, marriage and women’s autonomy. In Ahearn’s account she shows that her informants conceptualize romantic partnerships through a different interpretive framework than of generations past. In the new framework, marriage is understood as something that young men and women should arrange themselves and previously common “capture marriages” are seen as immoral. The normative commitment to love marriages expressed by Ahearn’s informants reflects a new way of thinking about and approaching intimate partnerships. That is, a new structure of feeling. Similar to Ahearn’s project, I identify an inchoate structure of feeling surrounding women’s role in the public sphere and participation in the wage labor economy. This structure of feeling encourages young women to take an equal share of the promises of modernity by pursuing higher education, by being present in public space, and by being productive participants in an expanding capitalist economy. However, such norms are at odds with hegemonic HCHH gender ideology, which emphasizes women’s domesticity and docility. How then do my informants make sense of these competing visions of modern Nepali womanhood?

Modernity, Perplexity and Rearticulation

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83 Capture marriages are, as they sound, a marriage in which a young man kidnaps a young woman as a bride. There are varying levels of consent involved in such marriages, which are now very uncommon.
The tension inherent in the way my informants move through their lives resonates with Ramamurthy’s (2011) concept of perplexity. Ramamurthy’s research concerns formerly indentured, low-caste cottonseed farmers in Southern India and their entrance into capitalist networks of accumulation as independent commodity producers. The concept of perplexity is introduced by Ramamurthy to help explain how her previously economically and socially marginalized informants encounter opportunities in a system of social organization less tied to rigid caste hierarchy. Ramamurthy describes perplexity as the defining characteristic of a new structure of feeling; perplexity is “an affect, a sensibility through which formerly untouchable caste smallholders experience and reflect on their incorporation into a complex and uncertain production process” (2011: 1036). Certainly, Ramamurthy’s field site and research questions are different from my own, yet the term perplexity captures how historically marginalized groups experience a sense of disequilibrium when global forces, including the expansion of capitalism, open up previously foreclosed opportunities. In my field site, young working class women are finding that participation in the public spaces and institutions from which they were historically excluded is not a clear-cut process of empowerment. Like the formerly low-caste farmers in Ramamurthy’s research, my informants experience social change as a new structure of feeling characterized by perplexity and uncertainty. Social ordering has shifted, but centuries of gender-based stratification cannot be so quickly undone. Taking on new roles, even as they are welcome expansions in what women have historically been allowed to do, is a process full of confusion, contradiction and indeed, perplexity.

For Ramamurthy’s (2011) informants, what follows from the destabilization of caste hierarchy and their subsequent entrance into formal and monetized markets is a “rearticulation” of social functioning in which both discourse and “concrete, bodily, and affective practices” are
deployed to makes sense of new ways of living (1037). In this sense, Ramamurthy gestures to a new structure of feeling and a new class habitus. It’s not just that caste and social organization is thought about differently; it’s that her informants have a new way of being in the world—new dress, new terms of address, new bodily movements, new comportment. The “concrete, bodily, and affective practices,” of formerly untouchable indentured farmers comprise a new smallholder class habitus (Ibid.). For example, whereas previously low-caste cottonseed farmers performed various demeaning rituals when interacting with their high-caste landlords, as independent smallholders they forgo these practices in lieu of a new demeanor of self-assuredness. The material and embodied shifts Ramamurthy describe are where a new structure of feeling about caste, class and social organization become embodied through a new class habitus.

As a result of a new structure of feeling marked by perplexity, a rearticulation of gender via “practices which question the material and social manifestation of cultural degradation” is in process (Ramamurthy 2011: 1051). Ramamurthy’s low-caste cottonseed farmers resist practices of “degradation” by embodying a smallholder habitus that rejects notions of high-caste superiority (Ibid.). In this sense they rearticulate what it means to be low-caste through discursive and material practices. Young working class women in Nepal’s urban spheres participate in a rearticulation of gender ideology by pushing back against the most restrictive aspects of historically dominant gender norms. They resist gender discriminatory norms of female domestic seclusion by asserting their right to public visibility and aligning their actions with notions of progress. As I show in chapter 5, guides reappropriate and re-gender discourses of modernity for their own use by mobilizing the parlance of development in their everyday speech. As I show in chapter 6, they also undertake a number of material practices that reiterate
their modern subjectivity. In this way, informants author themselves as the agents of modernity rather than the subjects of development efforts.

Ramamurthy’s informants directly link their experiences of social change to participation in the capitalist economy: “Dalit claims for ‘equality’ between all castes are secured through the magical exchange of money for things. Money, that which renders all things equal, analogously renders all those who can wield it commensurate” (2011: 1040). Similarly, my informants argue that through their status as wage workers, they have access to capital that renders them “commensurate” with working class men–at least up to the point at which they are in danger of becoming “over modern.” Although such parallels between Ramamurthy’s project and my own are significant, the concept of perplexity does not adequately describe what is articulated by my informants. This is because her conclusions are strangely gender neutral. Ramamurthy points out that the cottonseed commodity chain is itself quite gendered–a majority of field laborers are young girls whereas a majority of smallholders and lenders are men–but she does not discuss how perplexity might be felt for women smallholders in comparison to their male counterparts. Ramamurthy discusses a new vernacular of “dignity and self worth,” used by her informants who no longer show deference to high-caste landowners (2011: 1050). Yet, she does not explore how low-caste women, despite experiencing a loosening of caste hierarchy, may still face subordination and oppression as women within their own household and community. Ramamurthy also describes a new smallholder habitus, which includes embodied practices such as wearing white clothing previously reserved for high-caste men. However, there is no discussion of how comportment, dress or mannerisms have changed (or not) for low-caste women in her informant community. For perplexity to be useful for my own case, it would be necessary to see how it operates across gender. Instead of perplexity, I argue that anxiety is both
a more accurate descriptor of my informants’ everyday encounters with social change and, as an interpretive lens, more sensitive to gender as an organizing principle of social organization. In the next section I explore anxiety as a framework for understanding my informants’ experiences of modernity.

Local Meanings, Global Forces and Productive Anxiety

Nepal has not undergone industrialization in the same way many “peripheral” countries have. Unlike other examples of industrialization in South Asia, there has been no creation of either export-oriented processing zones for light manufacturing or offshore IT hubs hosting call centers. Nepal’s workforce has therefore not experienced the same incorporation of women into wage work, and indeed feminization of the work force, associated with the emergence of the “New International Division of Labor” as other parts of the global South (Fröebel et al. 1977). Unlike the subjects of Feminist Political Economy (FPE) ethnographies conducted in Mexico (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Salzinger 2003), Malaysia (Ong 2010[1987]), Sri Lanka (Lynch 2007) and Java (Wolf 1994), the subjects of my research are not working in factories or plants geared towards the production of goods or services for export. Yet, many of the same processes such as urbanization and marketization of the economy, are occurring in Nepal nevertheless. These processes are spurring shifts in long-held gender ideologies. Although my informants do not exactly mirror the transnational subjects of many FPE ethnographies, FPE can still offer some interesting insights into the lives of young working class Nepali women and conversely, female trekking guides can illuminate further areas of inquiry for feminist political economists.

In chapter 2 I describe the work of two FPE scholars working in South Asia. First, I discuss the work of Caitrin Lynch (2007) whose monograph on export-oriented garment workers
in rural Sri Lanka explores many of the same themes in this dissertation. Mainly, how do women make sense of their new positions as wage laborers in a globalizing economy and how do they navigate potential risks to their respectability that accompany their entrance into waged-labor? I also discuss Vijayakumar’s (2013) account of female IT workers in Bangalore and their struggle to align their identity as working women with traditional norms of female domesticity. Both Lynch and Vijayakumar note that the culturally dominant gender ideologies in their respective field sites produce anxiety in their informants about being seen as “bad girls.” In Lynch’s monograph, her informants set up a discursive binary between themselves as “good girls,” and the “bad girls” that work in the city. Lynch’s informants can make this distinction because although they do work in factories, these factories are located in villages that ensure the workers are still under family and community supervision. In Vijayakumar’s article, her informants frame themselves as “good girls” by noting that although they work in the city, they see wage labor as a temporary way to earn money before they pursue their real life’s work of being a dutiful wife, daughter-in-law and mother. Vijayakumar’s informants assert that they do not work for selfish reasons; rather, they are good daughters who will follow normative proscriptions of a traditional domestic life course once they marry.

In my field site, female guides cannot claim respectability by asserting they are village girls like the women in Lynch’s (2007) ethnography. As urban-dwellers, guides face a double knock to their character. Not only are they participating in wage labor, which is a traditionally male gendered activity, but they are also doing it in the anonymous city where they have no kinship network to keep them safe and vouch for their honor. My informants do not claim to be working for purely selfless reasons like Vijayakumar’s (2013) IT workers either. Instead, female guides specifically state that they are working to increase their autonomy and decision-making
power. Although my guides show significant deference to their parents and other traditional forms of social hierarchy, they nevertheless articulate work as a way to create more personal freedom. Thus, my informants do not claim the “good girl” label in quite the same way as the subjects of Lynch’s or Vijayakumar’s research. Still, they do claim this label. Female guides assert a “good girl” identity through their own unique set of impression management tactics that include meeting culturally relevant benchmarks of respectability. For example, remitting wages is one way young men in Nepal have historically gained *ijaat* (social honor). By remitting their own wages, female guides also gain prestige and affirm their “good girl” status in the eyes of their family and community.

Both Lynch’s and Vijayakumar’s informants are, like my informants, women entering the paid workforce for the first time. Their life trajectories are similar in that, as they become workers in a new economy, they encounter social change and must make sense of their role in it. Importantly, they must navigate conflicting messages about women’s place in modernity, especially as it pertains to their presence in the public sphere through participation in wage labor. That Lynch’s, Vijayakumar’s and my own informants all express quite similar concerns about balancing their desire to earn with their desire to meet hegemonic expectations of appropriate (re: chaste, docile, pious, domestic) femininity suggests that anxiety is an important topic of study for feminist political economists hoping to understand how and where gender inflects processes of globalization and global labor. Anxieties about being a “good girl” seem to structure young women’s experiences of social change whether they occur in garment factories in Sri Lanka, IT offices in Bangalore or on trekking trails in Nepal’s Himalayas.

This is not a new theme, or, indeed, one specific to South Asia. Anxiety about being labeled “over modern” or “broken”—or however else this anxiety is articulated in various “bad
“girl” tropes around the globe—is central to almost all FPE accounts of women’s entrance into the global workforce (Wolf 1994; Lee 1998; Ong 2010 [1987]; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Salzinger 2003). In a quotation that could be plucked from almost any FPE account of gendered labor, Ong (2010 [1987]) says of her Malaysian informants, “the sexuality of these new working women in transnational factories becomes the focus of anxiety over the social effects of capitalist development” (8). The anxiety that Ong (2010 [1987]) attributes to families and communities witnessing a reordering of gendered labor in Malaysia is similarly felt in Nepal and in other parts of the global South.

Yet, anxiety is not only felt by those witnessing young women’s entrance into the public sphere through participation in waged-labor. As many feminist political economists have observed, anxiety and tension is felt by women themselves. For newly proletarian women, anxiety stems from the contradictions and uncertainties they experience as they attempt to balance their personal desires with and against hegemonic norms that disapprove their status as wage laborers. For example, Ong (2010[1987]) argues that young women experience the transition from rural livelihoods to wage-based livelihoods as one of acute anxiety, so acute is the anxiety that it manifests through violent spirit possessions, which function as physical and metaphysical protests to the capitalist discipline experienced by Ong’s “neophyte factory women” informants (2010[1987]: 8). Ong’s ethnography paints a rather uncompromisingly bleak picture of how young women experience proletarianization. In a more tempered description of a similar social transition, Fernandez-Kelly (1983) and a decade later Salzinger (2003) note that Mexican women working in border-town maquiladoras spend considerable mental energy worrying about their reputation within the factory and in their home communities. Fernandez-Kelly and Salzinger’s informants are particularly troubled by potential rumors of promiscuity,
yet they still find sources of pleasure in their capacity to earn. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, Lynch’s (2007) Sri Lankan factory workers are deeply anxious about being seen as good girls rather than bad “Juki girls” (factory girls from the city), but still report satisfaction with their ability to work outside the home.

Anxiety seems to crop up in every account of women’s entrance into the public sphere through waged-labor. This is certainly understandable in light of the immense socio-economic and geo-political changes that generally accompany processes of ‘development,’ such as urbanization and expansion of capitalist markets. Of course, anxiety is not only felt by young women in such times of transition. As Liechty’s accounts of working class male youth in Kathmandu (2010) and urban middle class families (2002) shows, anxiety is felt by all members of society in response to rapid social change. For example Liechty’s (2010) young male informants express anxiety about seeming tough enough and resort to particular styles of posturing, dress and speech to construct a socially acceptable working class masculinity. In Liechty’s work on middle class families, he shows that men and women are equally troubled about appearing acceptably middle class, though their anxieties are particularly gendered. While his middle class men informants worry about buying the right type of consumer commodities to furnish the house, his middle class women informants worry about proper sartorial choices that convey disposable income without appearing garish. What is telling about these particular examples is that they point to the usefulness of anxiety as a way to

In the introduction I claim that modernity is a productive discourse in that, as a concept, it spurs concrete action on the part of those conceptualizing it. The idea of modernity, and ideas about what modern Nepal is or could be, shapes how my informants go about their day-to-day lives. In this sense, the discourse of modernity does more than circulate at an abstract level, it
very clearly incites material practices. Like modernity, Anxiety is also productive. Anxieties about the real and imagined consequences of being labeled a “bad girl” engender a wide-range of behaviors meant to communicate a “good girl” status. If, amongst other queries, feminist political economists are interested in why women entering the labor force behave, work, spend, think and feel the way they do, anxiety is a good place to start.

The framing question of this dissertation is what does it mean to “be” a modern woman for young, working class women in urban Nepal? What chapters 5-7 demonstrate is that anxiety underwrites much of this experience. As explained by Bourdieu (1984), habitus is an amalgamation of embodied practices such as speech, dress, orientation towards particular activities and aversion to others as well as a general disposition that communicate class status. Further, habitus can never be understood as a gender neutral concept (Ahearn 2001). I argue that the working class habitus of my female informants is one defined in large part by anxiety and tension. While this may seem bleak, it does not imply that female guides or any working class women in Nepal experience social change only as anxiety. As many of my informants plainly state, they see their lives in terms of progress, freedom and joyful opportunities to go “outside.” Nevertheless, I call attention to the underlying tension, the anxiety present in much of their discussions, because it may be a fruitful direction for future FPE scholarship. Much like the explication of the seemingly global “nimble fingers,” discourse helped FPE take a transnational perspective across research sites, so too might “productive anxiety” enable comparative FPE to gain traction on contemporary experiences of women’s incorporation into the workforce (Elson and Pearson 1981).

As feminist political economists continue to try and make sense of the relationships between gender, labor and social change, I argue that looking towards anxiety will prove useful.
A focus on anxiety moves the conversation forward by acknowledging that the traumas associated with incorporation into the wage labor economy might not be ones of labor exploitation (Ong 2010 [1987]). Instead, it might be in the difficult and daily negotiating that proletarian women undertake as they fill new social roles and enter a variety of previously foreclosed or simply unimaginable spaces, including that of waged-labor. Abu Lughod (1990), in her ethnography of gender in Bedouin society asks, “how might we account for the fact that Bedouin women both resist and support the existing system of power, without resorting to analytical concepts like false consciousness, which dismiss their own understanding of their situation, or impression management, which makes of them cynical manipulators?” (47). Taking this question as a broader theoretical and methodological query, I contend that focusing on the affective and productive experience of anxiety can accomplish what Abu Lughod asks. Anxiety points to systems of power, and how and where it is supported. Anxiety also gestures to sites of contestation and shows where new structures of feeling and new ways of being are emerging.

Importantly, because anxieties about navigating social change are gendered, using anxiety as an interpretive framework enables scholars to locate gendered sources of tension within the context of social change. In Nepal, navigating social change foments anxiety in both men and women, but these anxieties are different based on a number of intersectional aspects of identity including gender. The differences that are crystalized through the framework of anxiety enable scholars to hone in on how social change is understood, articulated and embodied across social difference. Focusing on sources of anxiety and on how informants cope with anxiety can give scholars a compelling new framework for understanding how women throughout the global South are incorporated into wage labor and the meanings of this transition for individual women and their communities.
Conclusion

Modernity, as a productive discourse, is not a status that can be achieved or a destination at which one can arrive; rather, it is an idea, an imaginary that moves people to action and shapes their hopes, desires and plans for the future. In Nepal, modernity is often used interchangeably with development, and in particular, development understood as a trajectory of capitalist expansion, urbanization and democratization of social institutions. The promises of modernity, namely participation in the institutions and public spaces that signal development have not been opened equally to all citizens. Across differences in social location, Nepali women have been variously marginalized in Nepal’s modernization projects. Yet, this trend is changing. A generation of young working class women in Nepal’s urban centers are making good on the promises of modernity through their mobility and public visibility, and, in the process, crafting modern subjectivities.

As this dissertation has shown, the answer to the question, “what does it mean to “be” modern for young working class women in Nepal?” is not easily answered. To “be” modern is to be in a process of negotiation and a state of tension and anxiety. Navigating this tension requires careful consideration of the benefits and potential dangers of coming “outside” into spaces newly open to Nepali women. If one thing is certain, it is that my informants do not passively wait to be labeled as “forward” or “backward,” rather, through a range of purposeful maneuvers and in spite of myriad challenges, they stake a claim to a modern identity.
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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

**BASIC LIFE COURSE**

1. How old are you?
   a. Tapaai kati barsha bhayo?

2. Where is your parent’s house (where are you from)?
   a. Tapaaikko buha aamako ghar kahaa ho?

3. How long did you live there?
   a. Tapaa basna thaaaleko kati bhayo

4. What is your home like? (Rural, city)
   a. Tapaaiko gauko ghar kasto cha?/

5. Who is in your family?
   a. Tapaiko paribarmaa ko ko hunuhuncha?

6. What work do your parents do?
   a. Tapaiko buha aamale ke kam garnuhuncha

7. Are they (brothers/sisters) married?
   a. Tapaaiko dhai bhai did bahini haru ko bihe bhayo?

8. Your position in the family is (birth order)?
   a. Tapaaiko paribarma kunchaii hunuhuncha? jetho ki khancho?

9. What kind of education did you have in your village?
   a. Gauma tapaile kasto khalko sikchyaa paunu bhayo

10. How old were you when you left?
    a. Gau chorda tapaaii kati barsa ko hunuhuntyo?

11. What caused you to leave?
    a. Gau bataa ke karanle yahaa aunnu bhayo?

12. Where did you first stay after leaving?
    a. Gau chordepachi, sabhanda pahile tapaai kahaa basnu bhayo?

13. How did you feel when you left?
    a. Gau chordisakepachi tapaailaai kasto mahasus bhayo?

14. How did you get to Pokhara?
    a. Tapaa pokhara samma kaseri aaipugnu bhayo?

15. Did anyone give you help when you came to (new place)?
    a. Tapaa naya thaa maa aaeapachi ke tapailaai kasaile sahayog garryo ta?

16. After that, what happened?
    a. Tsespachi Ke ke bhayo?

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**GETTING INTO TREKKING**

17. When was the first time you heard about guiding?
    a. Tapaaile guideing ko baarema pahilo patak kahile taahaa paunu bhayo?

18. When was the first time you heard about female guides?
    a. Tapaaile mahile path pradarshak ko baarema pahilo patak kahile taahaa paunu bhayo?

19. When did you first think women could be guides?
    a. Mahila haru paani path pradarshak huna sakhchan banera pahilo chotti kahile taahaa paunu bhayo?
20. Did you discuss women guides with anyone?
   a. Mahila path pradarchak kobaarema tapaile aru koi sanga kuraa kani garna bhayo?
21. What did you think other people thought about female guides?
   a. Tapaiko bichaar ma aru maanche harule mahila guide ko baarema ke sochchan?
22. When did you decide to take training to be a guide?
   a. Mahila guide ko laagi talim linu parcha banera tapaaiile kahile sochnu bhayo?
23. How did you talk about your decision with your friends?
   a. Tapaaiile aphno nirnayako baarema tapaaiile saathiharu sanga kaseri kura garnu bhayo?
24. How did you talk about your decision with your family?
   a. Tapaaiile aphno nirnayako baarema tapaaiile paribar sanga kaseri salaaha garnu bhayo?
25. What were your friends reactions?
   a. Tapaai ko nirnaya prati saathiharuko pratikriya kasto thiyo
26. What was your family’s reaction?
   a. Tapaai ko paribarko pratikriya kasto thiyo ni?
27. Were your friends or family worried about you living in a city?
   a. Tapaai sahar maa basdakheri ke tapaai ko buha aama ra paribar chintit hunuhuntyo?
28. How did you prepare to take the training?
   a. Talim lina ko laagi tapaaiile ke kasto ta yari garnu paryo?
29. How were you feeling right before the training?
   a. Talim linu tik aghadi tapaailai kasto laagi raheko thiyo?
30. What did you think about some of the challenges of being a female guide?
   a. Mahila guide huna ko laagi kasta kasta chunauti haru chhan jasto laagyo?
31. How was the training process?
   a. Talim ko prakriya kasto rahayo?
32. Right after training, what happened?
   a. Talim sakinebittikai ke bhayo ni?
33. How do you like living in a city now?
   a. Aaja bholi saharko jibaan tapaailai kasto lagchha?

FIELD EXPERIENCES
34. When was your first trek?
   a. Tapai pahilo patak trekking kahile jannu bhayo?
35. Where did you go?
   a. Kaahaa jaanu bhayo ni?
36. What was your role?
   a. Tapaai ko bhumika ke thiyo? (Guide ki baariya?)
37. How did you feel before leaving?
   a. Trekking jaanubhanda pahile tapaailai kasto mahasus bhayo?
38. What happened on that trek?
   a. Bato maa ke bhayo?
39. What was it like in the lodge?
a. Hotel maa basne bela ma ke kasto bhayō?

40. What did you learn on that trek?
   a. Tyo padyatrām maa tapaailaile kasto sike jasto laagyo?

41. How did the other guides and porters act with you?
   a. Aru guide ra baariya haru le tapaailaai kasto byabahar dekhaē?

42. How was your guest?
   a. Tapaaiko pauna kasto hunuhunthyo?

43. How did you feel after your first trek?
   a. Tapaaiko pahilo trek pachi tapaailaai kasto laagyo?

44. How often did you go trekking your first season?
   a. Pahilo season maa tapaai kati patak trekking jaanu bhayō?

45. What was the rest of your season like?
   a. Tapaaiko bhaki season kasto rahayō?

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**WORK HISTORY**

46. What are your responsibilities as a guide?
   a. Guideko rup maa tapaai kasto kaste jimewaari haru hunchan?

47. What kind of clients are your favorite?
   a. Tapaailaai kasto kasta pauna haru man parcha?

48. Who do you usually work with (couples? Single travellers?)
   a. Dherai jeso tapaai kasto pauna sanga kam garnuuncha? Jasto ki jodi athabat eklo padyatri?

49. Is there any type of client you can’t work with (e.g. Single men?)
   a. Kune pahuna haru sanga tapaailaai trekking jaana namilné paristiti hunccha? Jasto ki ekla purus paryatak haru…..kina?

50. What do you talk with guests about?
   a. Pauna haru sanga prayajesō ke ko baremaa kuraa garnuuncha?

51. What region do you work in?
   a. Tapai kun kun paryatan chetra maa kam garnuunchha?

52. How long are the treks usually?
   a. Dherai jeso padyatra ko abadhi kati laamo hunchha?

53. Is it harder or easier to work in different regions (for example for women guides in the Khumbu?)
   a. Ke kunai chetra bishes maa trekking garna garho athawa sajilo hunchha? Udaharan ko laagi khumbu chetra maa mahila guide ko laagi bhaye jastai?

54. Why do you think that is?
   a. Tapaaiko bichaarma esto kina bhayō hola?

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**PERCEPTION**

55. Why do you think most guides are men?
   a. Tapaaiko bichaar maa Dherai jeso guide haru purus matre kina hunchan?

56. Do you think guide work is appropriate for women? Why?
   a. Tapaailo kasto laagcha, mahila ko laagi guide kam upayukta chha ta? Kina?

57. Are there negative things said about female guides?
a. Mahila guide ko baarema maanche haruka nakaratmak dharanaharu chhan hola?

58. What do you think of these things?
   a. Esta nakaratmak dharanaharu ko baarema tapaai ke bhannuhunchha?

59. What do you think male guides think of women guides?
   a. Tapaaiko bichaarmaa purus guide saati harule mahile guide saathi haru ko baaremee ko sochchan hola?

60. What is it like at night for you in the lodges?
   a. Sutne bela maa hotel maa kasto kasto byabahar sahanu pareko chha?

61. What do you do with ‘joking’ guides?
   a. Jiskine guide haru sanga tapaai kaseri bybahar garnu huncha?

62. Have male guides ever said inappropriate things to you?
   a. Tapaa sanga kaahiyai purus guide haru le anupayukta kuraaharu garnu baeko chha?

63. What have you done in this situation?
   a. Esto paristitimaa tapaaile ke garne garnu baeko chha?

64. How do you show that you are a respectable didi/bahini?
   a. Tapaa aphu samanit wa ijatdar mahila baeko kuraa kaseri dekaunu hunchha?

CASTE/CLASS/ETHNICITY
65. What is your jaat?
   a. Tapaa kun samudaya wa Thar ko maanche hunuhunchaa?

66. Are there many ________________ guides?
   a. Tapaaiko Tharko guide haru kati dherai chhan hola? (Mahila ra Purus)

67. Who can be a guide (referring to jaat)?
   a. Tapaaiko bichaar ma kun kun jaat ko maanche haru guide huna sakchhan?

68. What about for women?
   a. Ani mahila ko baarema ni? Mero matlab kun kun jaat ko mahila haru?

69. Who is usually a guide (referring to jaat)?
   a. Nepalko sandharbama kun jaatko maanche haru dherai jeso guide pesa angal chhan?

70. Do different guides (from different jaat’s) get along?
   a. Pharak pharak samudhaiya bata aaeka guide haru kati ko milchhan?

SOCIAL FRAMEWORK
71. Now, what do your parents think of your work?
   a. Aaja bholi tapaaiko buha aama le tapaiko kam prati ke sochnu huncha?

72. Now, What do your friends from when you were young think of your work?
   a. Aaja bholi taapai balya kalka saati bhai harule tapaaiko pesa ko baarema ke sochchan jasto laagcha?

73. Do you think that boys think guiding is good job for girls?
   a. Tapaaiko bichaarmaa keti haru pani guide baekomaa keta haru le ke sochchan hola?

74. Do you talk to any boys?
   a. Bato maa kaahile kahi tapaai kunai purus haaru sanga kura kaani garnu huncha?
75. What do they think of your work?
   a. Uniharule tapaaiko pesa prati ke sochchan?
76. When you were young what did you think about marriage?
   a. Tapaa sano hudhakeri tapaailai bihe ko baarema kasto lagthyo?
77. Do you want to get married?
   a. Tapaailaai bihaa garna man parcha ki man pardaina?
78. Do you ever talk to your mom and dad about marriage? What do you both say?
   a. Ke tapaaila buha aama sanga kahile kahi bihe ko baaremaa kura garnu hunchha?
79. Do you ever talk to your friends about marriage? What do they say?
   a. Ke tapaaila kahile kahi saathi sanga bihe ko baarema kuraa garnu hunchha?
80. Can you be married and a guide? Why?
   a. Tapaa bihe garepaachi pani guide kam garnu saknu huncha? Kaseri? Kina?
81. Will you stop being a guide when (if) you get married?
   a. Biha garepaachi tapaai aphno yo pesa chodnuhuncha hola?
82. Do you think it will be hard to meet someone who agrees with your opinions?
   a. Tapaaiko bichaar man milne saathi betauna garho chha jasto laagcha?
83. What kind of marriage do you want (Love, arranged)?
   a. Tapaa kasto khalko bihe garna ruchaunu huncha? (Prem ki maagi bihe ki baagi)?

PERSONAL ECONOMY
84. Do you make enough money to pay for your own food and apartment with guiding?
   a. Guide pesa baata ke tapaai aphno dainik gujaara garna ra ghar bhadaa tirna saknu hunchha?
85. Who do you live with?
   a. Tapaa ko sanga basnu hunchha?
86. What other kinds of work do you do to make money?
   a. Paisa kamauna ko laagi tapaaila aru ke ke kam garnu hunchha?
87. Do you think it’s important for women to make their own money? Why?
   a. Tapaaiko bichaarmaa mahila harule aphai paisa kamaunu mahatvapurna chha?
Usobhaye Kina?
88. What do you like to spend your money on?
   a. Tapaa aphno kamai ke kuraa maa karcha garna chahanu hunchha?

FASHION/STYLE
89. When you are trekking you have to wear Western style clothes right?
   a. Trekking garne bela maa tapaaila paschimi saili ko pahiran lagaunu parcha hoina ra?
90. Do you feel comfortable in these clothes?
   a. kapara haru lagauda tapaailai sajilo laagchha?
91. Do you wear Nepali or western clothes when you are not guiding? Or both?
   a. Trekking nagaeko bela maa tapaailaai kasto khalko kapada lagauna man parcha?
   Nepali ki paschimi? Ki dubai thariko?
92. What do you prefer?
   a. Tapaaailaai badi kun ruchhi hunchha?
93. Do you dress differently here versus when you go back to your family home?
   a. Tapaaiko aphano ghar maa jadaakheri ke pharak khalko pahiran lagaunu hunchha?

DEVELOPMENT
94. What kind of differences do you see between your life and your parent’s life when they were your age?
   a. Tapaaiko baba aama - tapaiko umer ko huda ra ahileko tapaiko umerko jindhagi maa - ke pharak paunu hunchha?
95. What does it mean to be a ‘modern’ Nepali woman?
   a. Eota adhunik Nepali mahila hunulaai tapaai kaseri linu hunchha?
96. How is being a modern Nepali woman different than being a modern foreign woman?
   a. Eota adhunik Nepali mahila hunu ra adhunik paschimi mahila hunu ma ke pharak chha?
97. Could women have been guides 50 years ago?
   a. Aaja bhanda 50 barsha aghi, ke Nepali mahila haru guide hunu sambhab thiyo? Kina?
98. Do you think female guides is part of Nepal’s development?
   a. Tapaaiko bichaarmaa mahila pat pradashan Nepal ko bikaasko eota hissa huna sakchha?
99. What could be the contribution of female guides to Nepal’s development?
   a. Nepalko bikaasmaa mahila guideharuko ke yogdan huna sakchha?
100. What are your other goals?
   a. Tapaaiko arko sapana ke huna sakchha? Guide bhanda arko sapana ke huna sakchha?
101. If you were not a guide what would you be?
   a. Tapaaai guide nagaeko bhae ahile ke gardai hunuhuntyo hola?