"Where the Knots of Narrative Are Tied and Untied": The Dialogic Production of Gendered Development Spaces in North India

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Participatory research with a Rajasthani (India) drinking water supply project indicates that women's participation has generated an ongoing struggle inside the implementing nongovernmental organization (NGO) and in villages. A Bakhtinian analysis of the project's women's participation program can illuminate the micropolitics of dialogic struggles surrounding women's participation and its related spaces. Bakhtin's concepts of utterance, dialogic process, and chronotope offer geographers a framework for analyzing the constant, simultaneous production of meaning and space. A Bakhtinian analysis of NGO fieldworkers' speech accesses the micropolitics within social relations, which construct gendered spaces. Gendered participatory approaches need reevaluation because dialogues about women's participation extend the scope of that participation beyond what is intended by development policymakers and practitioners. As part of their work, fieldworkers simultaneously are influenced by and contribute to shifting spaces of gendered domination, flexible meanings of women's participation, and newly audible voices. Verbal struggles over gendered spaces lead to new meanings of women's participation. These new meanings in turn expand the influence of women's participation as a platform for sociospatial change. Gendered gains may be temporary and incremental, but where before there was little precedent or feeling for women's participation within the drinking water supply project, over time women's participation became linked to all project goals. *Key Words: Bakhtin, development, gender, India, space.*

> . . . Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.
>
> —(M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, 1984)

Ravinder, a fieldworker for Our Water (a pseudonym), a Rajasthani (Indian) nongovernmental organization (NGO), admits that women fieldworkers do not participate in his NGO on equal footing with men. He also realizes that, despite planning, fieldworkers may not be able to create women's participation in the management of village water resources. Nonetheless, he believes it is significant that men and women within his NGO are talking about women's participation. He expresses hope:

> So even here in this project there is no equal participation for women fieldworkers. How will she create women's participation in villages? So very slowly, whatever is in our pre-planning and written in our handbook, that much women's participation we may not get; we may do less. We keep thinking about it, between us we keep arguing and reasoning (*tarksangat ladaaii*) and we talk a lot about it. See, some way may emerge (*nikal jaaye*). There may be a blast (*visfot*) which will bring complete participation and equality in society. (Ravinder, male fieldworker, 2000)

Ravinder's words emphasize that women's participation in development is a dialogic process that includes negotiating how women fieldworkers will participate within their own organizations. He is hopeful that through these verbal exchanges—or some "explosion"—equality in society may occur.

This article results from long-term ethnographic research I did in northern Rajasthan on the women's participation program of Our Water, a drinking water supply project (O'Reilly 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006a, 2006b). The women's participation program, as stated in project texts, attempted to bring women into the social, political, and economic lives of their communities through activities that involved them in public discussions, decision making, and control of resources. My previous research shows that the result of gendered participatory approaches is a *gendered paradox*: NGOs are charged to bring women into the social and economic lives of their communities, yet they cannot accept their own women employees as full participants.

Women's participation was initially included in the project because of gender mainstreaming trends in international development, but over time NGO members

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began thinking reflexively about women's participation in the organization itself. Generating women's participation (both inside the organization and in villages) produced an ongoing struggle among project staff and between staff and their constituents over meanings of women's participation and accompanying spatial changes. For example, male fieldworkers, who lived at field offices, were eventually required to be bathed and dressed by the time their female colleagues arrived for work (O'Reilly 2004). I deploy Bakhtin's concept of dialogic process with the aim of illuminating the question of how development interventions foment changes in social and spatial relations through gendered participatory development programs. Instead of evaluating the success or failure of women's participation based on definitions of women's participation found in project documents, I am interested in the results of discursive negotiations over women's participation occurring among project staff, and between staff and their constituents in villages, over the course of project implementation. As Ravinder indicates, everyone talks a lot about it.

My interest in the Russian literary theorist, Bakhtin, is in partial response to poststructuralist development critiques that hinge on deconstructing discourses of development, as if, somehow, they remain stable across scales (e.g., Escobar 1995). From this perspective, development discourses and policies formulated within international institutions move seamlessly until they encounter local people, where resistance arises or not (e.g., Ferguson 1990; Dahl and Megerssa 1997; Rahnema 1997; Sachs 1997).[1] But the gendered participatory paradox generated within NGOs requires exploration into these organizations as central sites where discourses of participation are negotiated. Although the planning documents of Our Water give the impression that inside the organization discourses about women's participation are unified and uncontested, during fieldwork I experienced circulating discourses as changing and multiple, as fragments and fragile practices embedded in documents and embodied in agents. The tensions that discursive instability creates are productive, I argue, in the creation of new meanings and spatial shifts.

Bakhtin's theories of language encourage a continuous foregrounding of discourses as constantly produced *and* productive. A Bakhtinian analysis of an NGO's women's participation program can illuminate the micropolitics of dialogic struggles surrounding women's participation and the production of its related spaces. Building on the work of Folch-Serra (1990), Collins (1999), and J. Holloway and Kneale (2000), I unfold ethnographically how Bakhtin's concepts of *utterance*, *dialogic process*, and *chronotope* offer geographers a framework for analyzing the constant, simultaneous production of meaning and space. While acknowledging the complexity and breadth of Bakhtinian thought, J. Holloway and Kneale (2000, 83) claim that the advantage of a Bakhtinian analysis (such as the landscape analysis method suggested by Folch-Serra 1990) is that it "does not privilege discourses or fix representations but instead depends upon a recognition of their relative weight in dialogue." For Bakhtin, neither meaning nor space stands fixed or separate from the other; both are constantly and actively cocreated, as well as highly contested. Space is an important element of power struggles *and* is transformed through dialogic process.

One of the aims of this article is to take space seriously as a realm of active political engagement within gendered structures of domination. Space, as used here, is "the spatial configuration of power-imbued social relations" (Massey 2000, 283). Following Massey (1994, 2000, 282), space may be conceived as "actively and continually practised social relations" or, as Lefebvre (1991, 17) puts it, as "spatial/social practice"—to suggest that space is coded with social and spatial practices *as it is produced*.

The work of fieldworkers is primarily talk—another reason to turn to Bakhtin—and as they talk, fieldworkers mobilize particular ideas about women's participation and space. Considering space as relationally constructed foregrounds the spatial "as an active force in the formulation and operation of dominance/resistance" (Massey 2000, 283; see also Sharp et al. 2000). Massey (2000, 284) argues that what is at issue politically is "transforming, subverting, and challenging the constitutive relations which construct spaces in the first place." Massey's argument that space is continually produced out of social relations of unequal power parallels Bakhtin's theory of meaning creation. Individual speech acts, Bakhtin posits, create direct and indirect challenges to oppressive social relations (Bauer and McKinstry 1991). Individuals—embedded within asymmetrical relations of power—challenge spaces of domination through speech. Put differently, "spatial configurations of power-imbued social relations" are disrupted by agents giving voice to alternative meanings beyond those that are hegemonic. Bakhtin presents geographers with a micropolitical, discursive approach to geographic research seeking out the processes of sociospatial change (e.g., Sharp et al. 2000). For my study, Bakhtinian analysis highlights how competing voices in dialogue over women's participation create counterhegemonic spatial shifts.

Such a politicized view of sociospatial relations is critical to an investigation of the work of development projects because projects aim both to build on *and* to subvert existing spatial/social practices (e.g., Schroeder 1999; O'Reilly 2006a). NGO agendas often contain a mandate for social change; grassroots organizations set themselves the task of challenging existing social relations (e.g., Routledge 2003). The NGO I studied, Our Water, had a complementary sociospatial goal: getting women out of their houses and involving them in drinking water supply management. This goal was equated with empowerment (O'Reilly 2006a). Notwithstanding that such plans are fraught with tropes of colonialism, gendered private/inner spaces, and the home, they also indicate development policies that link changes in space to changes in social relations. The practices of NGO field staff can be examined for their challenges to established spaces of dominance and their efforts, conscious or unconscious, to reorder spatialities of power.

Development interventions create changes in sociospatial relations through the discursive negotiations of project actors. With a Bakhtinian ear for conversations as struggles over meaning creation that occur between parties of unequal power, we can discover the spatial outcomes of these dialogic struggles. Put simply, *competing voices create spatial shifts*. They may be immediate, or they may occur over time. Participant-observation fieldwork provides the kind of data necessary for such an analysis.[2] I trace the dialogical and controversial interactions between field staff and their village constituents in order to illustrate how gendered spaces are produced through individual voices engaged in struggle. I demonstrate that dialogic exchanges over women's participation extend its meanings, thereby creating additional spaces for women's voices and concerns. As struggles unfold over what topics and activities women's participation contains and does not, and over the value of women's participation to the project as a whole, the profile and relevance of women's participation is enhanced. Bakhtinian analysis draws attention to how women's participation discourses link up with hegemonic ideas about gendered spaces, but it also reveals how voices emerge to produce subversive meanings and spaces.

The Project

Project Area

Our Water was a joint Indo-German development project designed to supply town and village populations in Rajasthan's *khaaraa paanii* (saline water) belt with clean drinking water. Existing groundwater was undrinkable due to its high salt content (Henderson 1994). The project area covered approximately 20,000 km^2 in three northern districts of Rajasthan: Churu, Jhunjhunu, and Hanumangarh (Figure 1). Phase One of the project (completed December 2005) covered 378 villages and two towns, reaching almost 900,000 people. Most of the area is semidesert with little rainfall—about 312 mm annually with great geographic variability (Henderson 1994; Ram 2002; Ram et al. 2003). Villagers harvest sweet rainwater for drinking during the rainy season (July-August) from rooftops, ground-level *kunds* (passive rainwater catchments; see Figure 2), and other traditional sources. Wells are uncommon except for irrigation purposes. Before the arrival of project water, residents of the area received water twice daily at public taps through a Government of Rajasthan (GOR) pipeline (Figure 3). Water provision by the GOR was free, allegedly treated, but sporadic. Fetching water from public taps is predominantly the work of women and girls. The Our Water supply was designed to flow twenty-four hours a day and was strictly for household consumption and livestock watering.

Figure 1. The Our Water project area. (Map courtesy of Dick Gilbreath, University of Kentucky Cartography Lab. Originally published in O'Reilly, K. 2004. Developing contradictions: Women's participation as a site of struggle within an Indian NGO. *The Professional Geographer* 56:174–84.)

Our Water had a technical team (deputed from the GOR's Public Health Engineering Department) that

Figure 2. A passive rainwater harvesting system called a *kund*. Rain that falls on the surrounding surface area drains toward the ground-level holes in the dome and into a tank below. The girls are drawing water out with a bucket on a rope and then filling their pots. (Author photo)

built the project's massive supply system infrastructure (Figure 4). Water comes into Rajasthan from the Himalayan mountains of north India through the Indira Gandhi Canal. It travels to water treatment plants, and ultimately villages, via small canals and pipelines. At each village's entrance a meter records total water usage; each household pays a share of the monthly bill depending on the number of its members and heads of livestock. The underlying logic is that villagers want clean water regularly supplied, and they are willing to pay a nominal charge in order to get it.[3] Although water's commodification is a global trend (see Page 2003, 2005b), in Rajasthan the project was the first of its kind. Community participation would, according to the Project Social Side (PSS) document, *Achievements 2002*,

Figure 3. Government of Rajasthan's Ground Level Reservoir, which, before the arrival of the project, provided drinking water. (Author photo)

Figure 4. A new Elevated Service Reservoir under construction. For scale, note the man standing under it. (Author photo)

"ensure sustainability and enhancement of the benefits" of a regular, reliable drinking water supply (PSS 2002, 22). The GOR was expected to be more responsive than before to village "customers" when it assumed full responsibility for water provision and payment collection in December 2005.

Project Social Side

The work of the PSS is described in one of their leaflets:

> *Extensive complementary measures* to ensure sustainability and enhancement of benefits, are implemented by the Project Social Side (PSS), a consortium of regional NGOs. The approach is participatory: a Water and Health Committee in every village, awareness building for payment and water conservation, fair distribution of water, health education, women's participation and sanitation measures. (PSS *Leporello Leaflet*, n.d.; emphasis in the original)

The PSS drew its staff from five local NGOs, but it strove to act as a cohesive unit. In three stages of preparation, implementation, and follow-up, activities in four components were implemented: water distribution management "as the core component"; sanitation, the "construction of latrines and bathrooms [places to bathe] with soakpits [for waste water]"; health educa-

tion "to realise the potential for improved health"; and women's participation "essential across all activities." In addition, monitoring, evaluation, and management information systems "functioning in a two-way mode, from head office to [field] office and village, and vice-versa" were also being built (PSS *Leporello Leaflet*, n.d.).

Approximately seventy Indian staff worked for the PSS out of both the main office and scattered field offices in the project area. Our Water's PSS members were a diverse group: some were local, some were not; their home states, first languages, economic backgrounds, castes, education levels, ages, and marital status varied. Seven program officers (one woman, six men) managed from the main office, and made occasional visits to the field. There was a German consultant as required by the German donor bank. As of March 2001, there were thirty-six male fieldworkers and fourteen female fieldworkers, who lived and worked in area villages.[4] In addition, there were seven drivers (all men) who transported field teams to villages in Our Water jeeps. Each field team comprised one woman and two men. Women fieldworkers implemented women's participation activities, which ranged from mobilizing women's groups, to village mapping, to training in household cleanliness and safe water-handling practices. Male fieldworkers initiated village-level water management institutions, discussed payment plans, and supported latrine-building. Some men (especially team leaders) concerned themselves with the work of women's participation, but there was a fairly rigid division of labor. No man was ever assigned to women's participation, or any woman to water distribution management or sanitation. Ideally two complete teams were to be stationed in each field office, with one team member designated as the team leader of both teams, but, due to high turnover of women staff, occasionally teams were short a woman member. Of seven team leaders, one was a woman. Field teams were the primary link between the PSS main office and the village sites. Similarly, women fieldworkers formed the fundamental connection between village women and other PSS staff. Field teams lived in field offices or nearby residences in a village in their service areas (a service area comprised fifteen to thirty villages).

Amenities in the villages of the project area are few. In the words of one fieldworker about conditions in villages: "Villages in [the project area] are very backward. There is no light [electricity], water problems are there; there are no roads." Villages *are* electrified, but provision is erratic. Less than 10 percent of households had latrines according to an early PSS survey. A village within the project area includes *badaa aadmii* (literally "big men") and politicians who are powerful and outwardly respected by program officers and locals alike. Often these men are Brahmins or Rajputs (both high caste), but *saarpanches* (locally elected leaders) may be other castes as well and occasionally are women. A woman *saarpanch* is widely perceived to be nominal only, the real power being held by her male relatives (e.g., father-in-law and/or husband). The caste and class makeup of villages in the project varies a great deal from village to village. Very generally, most villages have a majority of Jats (considered an "other backward class" in Rajasthan; Muralidharan 1999); followed in number by Brahmins and Rajputs; few Muslims; few Baniyas (intermediate caste); some Meghwals, Nayaks, or other "scheduled castes" (low castes); few Kumhars and other backward classes; and very few "scheduled tribes" (aboriginal people).[5] Drawing on data from two surveys of household income done by Our Water in 1993 and 2000, it was determined that median household annual income was Rs.13,000 (US$289).[6] Village sizes in the project area varied considerably (based on 1991 census data used to design the project), but almost half of all villages had fewer than 1,000 residents.

The work of an Our Water fieldworker took place at a number of different locations. At the main office, monthly meetings of all staff were held for "experience sharing" and training sessions. At field offices, small teams of fieldworkers lived, planned daily activities, and met with individual villagers. In villages, fieldworkers traveled together or separately to conduct activities and meetings. In any given day, a woman fieldworker made approximately two village visits by jeep, depending on each village's distance from the field office and the other village. She might meet with a women's savings group at the home of one of the members, waiting about an hour for all members to arrive. She would take attendance and make a list of who had saved how much money. A discussion might take place about who should take responsibility for the group's records in the future. Given the amount of time remaining, a woman fieldworker would leave the village or make another visit to a different group in a different neighborhood. She would then return to the field office and make notes, coordinate the next days' activities, or rest until day's end.

I was first introduced to the staff of Our Water in the winter of 1997 through an Indian friend's spouse who was working for the PSS. From summer 1998 until winter of 2002, I visited the NGO and its project area intermittently for five periods of two months to one year. During that time, I gathered project documents and conducted participant-observation with staff as they worked in the main office, field offices, and in villages. I informally questioned staff about Our Water's goals,

women's participation. and their practices. I recorded daily field notes, informal discussions, interactions, and practices. My research assistant, Tasneem Khan, and I recorded, transcribed, and translated twenty-two formal interviews taken in semistructured format in Hindi, Marwari, and English.

Women's Participation in a North Indian Context

In general, north India can be characterized by low education levels, poorly functioning public services, and limited roles for women (Dreze and Gazdar 1998, 60). Despite recent economic growth, the region shows slow rates of poverty decline (Dreze and Gazdar 1998, 33). North India, compared to the rest of the country, lags in terms of gendered social development indicators such as mortality, fertility, and illiteracy (Dreze and Gazdar 1998, 33). North Indian women compare less favorably to men in terms of wages, age at marriage, health care access, and property rights (Mies 1982; Agarwal 1992; Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre 2000; UNDP 2003). In Rajasthan, where socioeconomic conditions are broadly representative of the wider region of north India,[7] liberalization and government quotas in the 1990s have led to an upswing in women's work force participation and public visibility. Between 1991 and 2001, female main workers[8] increased from 13 percent to 17 percent (Census of India 1991, 2001). The agricultural sector is the leading employer of women, but women have increasingly joined the NGO sector, filled the GOR's 30 percent quota for women in service jobs, and been elected into reserved seats and chairperson posts for women in local government (*panchayati raj*) (Rajasthan Planning Commission 2006).

As Dreze and Gazdar (1998, 47) conclude for neighboring Uttar Pradesh, modernization and development seem to have done little to reduce gender inequality in Rajasthan. The sex ratio in Rajasthan rose between 1981 and 1991 to 922 women per 1000 men, but the number of girls in the zero-six age category *declined* in the same period from 917 to 909 (Rajasthan Planning Commission 2006). Despite the law prohibiting child marriage, 68 percent of girls are married before age 18. Strong son preference in north India has been linked to hypergamy (the arrangement of girls' marriages to boys of higher status) and the expected (but illegal) practice of giving dowry—critically linked to hypergamy in north India (Basu 1999). As family incomes increase and dowry demands rise, preference for male children is on the increase.[9] In contrast, rising income levels do not appear to be improving women and girls' household level share of health goods and services (Rajasthan Planning Commission 2006). Women's work force participation rate varies inversely with household income level (Rajasthan Planning Commission 2006), indicating that household inequality may be worst for women of wealthy families.

The agency of north Indian women as it relates to their reproductive health, fertility rates, and child care has been closely linked to the status and location of women after marriage (Dyson and Moore 1983; Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Rahman and Rao 2004). Married women usually join their husbands' families in their village (*sasuraal*) after marriage. Both older mothers-in-law and younger daughters-in-law practice *ghuunghat*—fully covering the face as a sign of modesty and respect—and *purdah* (literally "curtain"), which involves not leaving the house; *ghuunghat* in front of strangers, senior men, and senior women; and staying silent or lowering one's voice in the presence of these people (Luthra 1976; Joshi 1995; Unnithan-Kumar 1997). Unmarried girls living in their natal villages do not veil or stay in seclusion. *Ghuunghat* and *purdah* are not rigid institutions, as Joshi (1995) and Raheja and Gold (1994) indicate, but are fluid depending on a woman's age, kinship relationship to her husband's family, caste, class, religion, and marital status. Women find ways of expressing their agency within patriarchal systems; they accept, contribute to, and undermine gendered oppression. Men may be dominant but their dominance is never complete, thus it is important to seek out how north India women, who often may appear powerless, destabilize male dominance (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997).

Women's Participation in Our Water

The status of women in Rajasthan provides the impetus for Our Water's gendered intervention. According to PSS documents, women's participation is critical to project success in terms of its goal to improve the health conditions of the population. For example, the PSS *Achievements 2002* document (2002, 31) states that "Women are responsible for safe collection, handling and storage of water. It is up to them to use the new water supply to improve domestic and kitchen cleanliness. It is the woman who can translate the benefits of this water supply into development of personal hygiene in her children."

Although project documents indicate an understanding of gendered oppression, established gender-water roles are not seen as part of the problem that must be overturned. The PSS *Handbook on Women's Partici-*

pation (n.d.) notes that "although men are generally less concerned with hygiene in the home and with the practical tasks of water use, they need also to be the target of health and hygiene education messages . . . because they can provide moral and practical support to their wives." On the contrary, maintaining these gender roles will sustain the project infrastructure. Women, in their roles as mothers and household caretakers, can learn water hygiene techniques and teach them to their children, thereby bringing about long-term health benefits. Project plans call for women to give their opinions about where neighborhood public taps should be placed, to monitor taps for water use and misuse, and to take responsibility for cleaning public taps. The PSS *Achievements 2002* document (PSS 2002, 31) states that one or more women's representatives should sit on village-level water management committees to "incorporate women's concerns in the decision-making process." In addition, according to the the PSS *Handbook on Women's Participation* (n.d., 27), women's "essential" qualities of conscientiousness and commitment are required by the project to achieve sustainability. Women are targeted as those who will want the system most and who will do the most toward convincing others to take care of it. It is hoped that women will be empowered by participating in the project and will collectively begin to solve other problems.

Women fieldworkers—whether they are local or not, speak Marwari or not, have much or little education—are expected to facilitate village women's participation. Often their methods were to lecture, not to listen. Simply by being women, however, women fieldworkers make women's participation feasible (PSS 1993, E6/8). The PSS's approach of hiring women to promote women's participation is in keeping with global trends of women's increasing employment by NGOs for the purpose of assisting women's development schemes (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Garcia 2001; O'Reilly 2003). Some staff denigrate women's involvement, others celebrate women fieldworkers' capabilities, but a majority of PSS staff, both program officers and fieldworkers, both men and women, engaged in practices that signal an ambivalence about women fieldworkers' importance in the project (O'Reilly 2006b). Although mixed feelings about women's participation did not break down neatly along gendered lines, divisive problems surrounding the women's participation component often were conceived as women versus men. The multiple attitudes of PSS staff led to the above-mentioned paradox that NGOs marginalize their women employees even though the organization is charged to bring about village women's participation.

Participation: Theory and Critique

Participatory approaches to development have taken many forms historically, but an approach based on PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) techniques became mainstreamed in international development during the 1980s and 1990s (Hickey and Mohan 2004). In response to "top-down" development projects that failed to supply solutions for locally specific development problems, populist forms of participation take a "bottom-up" approach that attends to the needs and desires of those affected (Chambers 1983, 1997). The logic behind participation is that if local people are involved and invested from the outset, their knowledge will contribute to locally-appropriate and sustainable solutions (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Mosse 2001). Populist participation at the grassroots is also expected to empower the poor to define and solve their own problems. Through participation, local people will simultaneously share their knowledge, provide labor, and empower themselves.[10]

Just as development planning eventually incorporated women into their projects (Boserup 1970; Tinker 1990; Kabeer 1996), so too have participation programs become gendered (Moser 1993; C. Jackson and Pearson 1998; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Cornwall 2003). Following general participatory goals and adding women, policymakers plan that village women's participation in development projects will include them in community decision making (Guijt and Shah 1998; Agarwal 2001), lead to sustainable resource management (C. Jackson 1993), or raise women's incomes and social capital through income generation schemes (UNDP 2003). Additionally, women's participation, it is suggested, may lead to their empowerment, but how empowerment happens, at what scales it happens, and even *what* constitutes empowerment remains in question (Friedmann 1992; Kabeer 1996; Rowlands 1997; Guijt and Shah 1998). Rowlands defines empowerment as a process that increases self-confidence, agency, and a sense of dignity. The process includes (a) attention to power as a productive force and (b) analysis of gendered imbalances in control of resources and opportunities (Rowlands 1997). For Cleaver (2001), as empowerment has become mainstreamed as a development goal, its radical meanings have been depoliticized.

Notions of women's empowerment frequently incorporate ideas of spatial change, specifically including notions of making or remaking spaces where women exercise power (Price-Chalita 1994; O'Reilly 2006a). The spatial has often been overlooked in previous work about participation, but Cornwall (2004, 75; see also

Fischer 2006) argues that framing participation as a spatial practice allows us to think about how "particular sites come to be populated, appropriated or designated by particular actors" in ways that enable or disable social transformation. Development project staff attempt to create spaces for participation by establishing opportunities for those on the margins to be included or for different voices to be heard. However, if we accept that space is socially and discursively produced, then it is always already imbued with social relations of power. Dominant meanings of participation will influence who enters and who speaks, and how what is said is understood within spaces created by project staff. Existing social relationships, previous experiences, and a wider sociopolitical context are not left at the boundaries of "invited spaces" designed to include a heterogeneous group of actors (Cornwall 2004, 76). Cornwall (2004) and Fischer (2006) conclude that more needs to be known about when, where, and under what conditions invited spaces work to produce what is hoped for, and how routinized forms of participation may have transformative potential. This research contributes directly to those goals.

Critics of participation charge that participatory approaches have failed to become an active practice: donors, practitioners, and planners may speak the language of participation but their actual approach during project implementation remains "top-down" (Mosse 2001).[11] Other critics claim that participatory approaches are chosen because they increase projects' costs and time efficiencies by accessing local labor (Kabeer 1996; Rahnema 1997; O'Reilly 2002). This criticism holds for Our Water as well, since villagers pay for water and assume responsibility for system maintenance inside village boundaries—responsibilities previously those of the GOR. Mohan and Stokke (2000) criticize participatory approaches for being overly "local" and therefore neglecting broader unequal relations of power within which the "local" is embedded. Given the waxing popularity of such approaches, Hickey and Mohan (2004) suggest that participation must move away from techniques and methods and toward an explicit ideological grounding concerned with power. If participation is to enable social change, then it must (a) focus at multiple scales, and (b) include a radicalized notion of citizenship that encompasses agents making decisions within multiple, political communities to which they belong (Hickey and Mohan 2004).

Power is also a central focus for Cooke and Kothari (2001), who take a Foucauldian approach and explore participation as a discourse through which power circulates. By framing participation as a discourse that contains "the potential for an unjustified exercise of power," Cooke and Kothari (2001, 4) argue that participation can be tyrannical in its exercise. Like any discourse, what is included and what is omitted in discourses of participation have important implications for project outcomes. Participation can be deployed both to extend and to undermine power (see also Crush 1995; Escobar 1995; Kothari 2001; O'Reilly 2006b). Project documents and fieldworker trainings are intended to stabilize meanings of participation, but NGO employees generate alternative meanings of participation through their practices, which change over time and circumstances (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Mosse 2001; O'Reilly 2006b).

The question remains: what is the connection between project discourses and staff practices? A unified discourse of participation may emerge in Our Water documents, but that discourse does not reflect the multiplicity of positions and voices of staff (to say nothing of donors' or villagers' voices). Development plans may fail to do one thing (what they planned) but they may succeed at doing something else (usually unplanned) and "that something else has its own logic" (Ferguson 1990, 276). It is necessary then to go deeply into the everyday production processes of meaning creation. With this point in mind, I began to notice how negative attention focused on women's participation seemed to *strengthen* the women's participation component and encouraged the resolve of staff who favored it.

Bakhtin and the Micropolitics of Language and Space

Foucault (1990, 100) indicates that the world of discourse is "a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies." He is well aware of the spatial productivity of discourses (Foucault 1984). He suggests that

> It is this distribution that we must reconstruct, with the things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden, that it comprises; with the variants and different effects—according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated—that it implies; and with the shifts and reutilizations of identical formulas for contrary objectives that it also includes.
>
> —(Foucault 1990, 100)

In the realization that identical discourses can serve to *further* and to *hinder* power, Foucault argues for the importance of the context, the speaker, and his or her position of power.

Foucault comprehends the importance of individual speakers and context in his studies of politics, but it is

the work of Bakhtin[12] that brings discursive examination of power to the level of microlinguistics. At this scale, Bakhtin finds the elements of meaning creation and, therefore, social change. In Bakhtin's formulation of *dialogue* or *dialogic process*, dialogue is not a "free exchange" but is determined by "the play of power and hierarchy" (Morris 1994, 9). Dialogues are processes of negotiation; meanings are negotiated through a constant, open-ended dialogic process (Bakhtin 1981, 1984, 1986; Todorov 1984; Morris 1994). Meaning, for Bakhtin, is always transient and becoming. He is fundamentally opposed to any idea of meaning as fixed in time or space (Morris 1994, 249). Dialogue allows for the emergence of alternative meanings beyond those that are hegemonic; dialogic process "invites new possibilities for activism and change" (Bauer and McKinstry 1991, 2).

Bakhtin's ideas wed the micropolitics of dialogue with constructions of space. His work has attracted the attention of scholars from many disciplines, including geography. Most geographic work turns to Bakhtin's ideas of carnival (see Bakhtin 1984; P. Jackson 1988, 1992; Shields 1989; C. Lewis and Pile 1996; Gregson and Crewe 1997; Woods 1999; S. L. Holloway 2004), but others have let Bakhtinian concepts guide their ethnographic research (e.g., England 1994; O'Reilly 2004; Sutherland 2004) or their consideration of the composition of the subject in time-space (e.g., Harvey 1996; Landzelius 2003). In the context of Scottish urban regeneration, Collins (1999) uses Bakhtin to trace through language the ultimate failure of civil society/government partnership. Folch-Serra (1990) and J. Holloway and Kneale (2000) explore the breadth of Bakhtin's concepts for fruitful connections for geographers. Following Bakhtin's argument that meaning is created by human agents engaging in conversation, Folch-Serra (1990, 255–56) posits that human "agency creates landscapes through metaphors and comparisons whose outcome is the building of roads, towns and cultures." In other words, agents talk about landscapes in ways that create the meanings that shape landscapes. As J. Holloway and Kneale (2000, 82) summarize, "space is constructed by the constant dialogical interaction of a multiplicity of voices." Bakhtin suggests that social change and the creation of space may be explored through the micropolitics of dialogue and by tracing refracting meanings as they occur through dialogic exchange.

For my purposes, Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* helps illuminate how conflicts over women's participation are held in tension within an NGO, as well as the spatial productivity of dialogic negotiation. *Heteroglossia* is Bakhtin's term for the fragmentation of ideologies[13] through language—the multiple views of the world beyond those meanings which dominate. Centripetal (*monologic*) forces centralize and unify meaning and are exploited by dominant social groups in order to impose their truths. Working in opposition to centripetal forces are centrifugal (*dialogic*) forces "which stratif[y] and [fragment] ideological thought into multiple views of the world" (Morris 1994, 15). Heteroglossia is a central, distinguishing idea of Bakhtinian thought that captures the potential, productive conflict between antagonistic social forces. It is *not* polyphony, which Bakhtin defines as multiple voices on equal terms. Heteroglossia includes the multiple and conflicting voices within institutions and allows that all meanings have some power, and some meanings dominate without having total power.[14] Similar to Williams's (1977) discussion of hegemony[15] and Foucault's (1980, 1990, 1995) understanding of discourse, Bakhtin posits that struggles between actors to exploit centripetal and centrifugal forces within discourses illustrate their inherent conflicts. These conflicts, in turn, are sites within language where meaning is produced.

Drawing on a Bakhtinian approach, Collins (1999) demonstrates how over the course of an urban regeneration project in Scotland (that ultimately failed), community members actively redefined key terms in opposition to those of the Scottish Office. "Partnership" was the original term used by the Scottish Office to indicate a cooperative relationship between the government and activists in the community. Ultimately the monologue of the Scottish Office could not be maintained and was overturned by activists who realized that "partnership" meant no real oppositional voice from the community to Scottish Office plans. Different meanings of partnership began to emerge until finally activists were explicitly rejecting "partnership" as a term that represented the relationship between the community and the Scottish Office. Activists *sought* an oppositional stance and defined "partnership" as the opposite of what was happening. Collins's analysis shows that during moments of heightened conflict the polarization of meanings is that much clearer, which may in turn further heighten conflict. In this way, the "same words [partnership] mobilized in different ways . . . make a profound impact on processes of social change" (Collins 1999, 86). Language use over the course of the conflict not only showed the conflict developing but played a role in how it developed. In this case, Bakhtinian analysis "attunes us to the dialectical relationship between processes of language-use and broader processes of social change" (Collins 1999, 85; see also LaDousa, 2004, on language ideology and social change in north India).

For Bakhtin, everyday conversations generate meanings through the interplay of different speakers' utterances. Simply put, an utterance is each statement of a speaker, whether lengthy or brief, until another voice speaks (Bakhtin 1986, 71–2). As a unit of analysis, the utterance "is always shaped by the relationship it has with *other* utterances" (J. Holloway and Kneale 2000, 76, emphasis in the original). An utterance never stands alone, but is dialogic. A speaker does not have complete control over meanings produced from his or her utterances. A speaker has control over what she or he says, but only limited control over how what is said is understood by the hearer.[16] The understood meaning of a speaker's utterance is communicated when the listener responds. Therefore, dialogic understanding is active, not passive—in real life, speakers and listeners respond to each other and formulate meanings as conversations unfold.

The asymmetry of power differences between speakers and listeners drives the utterance and how it is understood. The utterance is inextricable from the social relations of power in which it is embedded. Bakhtin and Voloshinov (1994a, 41) write: "What is characteristic for a given utterance specifically—its selection of particular words, its particular kind of sentence structure, its particular kind of intonation—all this is the expression of the interrelationship between the speakers and of the whole complex set of social circumstances under which the exchange of words takes place."

Dialogic process "has at its base that people's responses are conditional"; that is, utterances arise out of circumstances that are "irreducible and contingent" (Bauer and McKinstry 1991, 2). Therefore, "[v]erbal communication can never be understood and explained outside of [a] connection with a concrete situation" (Bakhtin and Voloshinov 1994b, 59; for more on the criticality of grounded inquiry, see Mitchell 1997 and Sharp et al. 2000). Or, put differently, "Neutral dictionary meanings of the words of a language ensure their common features and guarantee that all speakers of a given language will understand one another, but the use of words in live speech communication is always individual and contextual in nature" (Bakhtin 1986, 88). Bakhtin posits that no word is beyond influence of the time-space within which it was uttered.

Bakhtin's concept of *chronotope* refers to the time-space context that shapes any narrative text (Morris 1994, 246). Every dialogue has a chronotope that colors speakers' utterances and influences how listeners hear them. Bakhtin attributes to chronotope some of the meaning that shapes narrative. Chronotope is "where the knots of narrative are tied and untied." It is where meanings come together into a story or series of events (Bakhtin 1981, 250). As time-space, chronotope determines in part what discourses may be drawn on, and how an utterance may be understood. Chronotopic analysis includes examining how chronotope refracts meaning and contributes to the audibility or inaudibility of certain voices in specific contexts. Chronotopic analysis also encompasses investigating how real landscapes are dialogically constructed. Chronotope can be used to read the centripetal and centrifugal forces at work in the culture from which texts emerge. To read landscape bias is to recognize the limitations of the discourses that created that landscape (Folch-Serra 1990). Still further, "chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a centre for concretizing representation, as a force" giving weight and life to narrative events (Bakhtin 1981, 250). It is chronotope as a *force* that (a) links time and space equally and (b) adds "flesh and blood" to narrative that I seek to develop for geographic analysis of the discursive production of space (Bakhtin 1981, 250).

In the subsection that follows, an example of a male fieldworker's silence on women's empowerment in his home village illustrates how we might understand the influence of chronotope on dialogue. I follow this example with another that depicts how the words of PSS management are creative of a chronotope that supports a narrative of women's participation as critical to project success. A third example shows how chronotope shapes the words of staff opposed to women's participation into an expression of support for the women's participation component.

Spatial Micropolitics

The social dynamics of each village in a development project's area are not uniform. The chronotope of each village is unique; each village has its own configuration of power relations and history. Skilled fieldworkers learn these dynamics for each village and modify their words and practices accordingly (O'Reilly 2002). For example, Ravinder often spoke in favor of women's empowerment, but he felt constrained in speaking to the women of his own family about unveiling:

> I know my mother and wife should do this work [of empowering women] but I cannot make them [do it] because change in society comes slowly. I know women should not follow the veiling system (*pardaaprathaa*) but I cannot say to them [my wife and mother], why are you covering your face (*kyon ghuunghat nikaal rahii ho*)?

Ravinder found he *could* express his views on women's rights in other villages in the project area and that they

meshed with Our Water's stated goals for women's participation, but the chronotopes in which he is embedded at home and in his village prevent him from speaking to his wife and mother openly. This present chronotope shapes his voice by silencing him. Despite his readiness to discuss women's empowerment when he is in other villages, he acknowledges his silence. "Change in society happens slowly," he tells me, indicating that he knows his words will not/cannot be heard. He cannot open up a conversation about veiling because he is fully aware of the village context in which they *all* live. Ravinder is not ready or willing to disrupt the power relations in which he is embedded. (Although he does not express it, conceivably Ravinder's awareness of his multiple positions is in part what silences him. He knows he carries the authority of an experienced fieldworker, but he is also neighbor, son, and husband.) In this particular example we hear a fieldworker realize that he cannot raise more radical meanings of women's participation within his own family/home. He speaks of it in other places, but in the chronotope of his own village a monological discourse speaks singularly about the practice of veiling.

In spaces where those in power speak monologically, one subversive voice may plant the seed for dialogue, creating an opening in time-space where hegemonic meanings can be engaged dialogically. The PSS's monthly meeting of all staff at the project's main office provides an example in which out of project heteroglossia surfaced the voices of two Program Officers, who spoke up about the importance of women's participation. Previously in these meetings, whenever women began to speak about their work toward women's participation, most of the men would cease listening and talk softly among themselves. At such a meeting in July 2000, when the susurrus drew her notice, the women's participation program officer berated those making the noise for failing to consider the activities of women's participation important to the work that they were doing individually and to the project. A senior program officer added his voice and authority, addressing those present on the seriousness of the matter:

> Seriousness *kamii hai. Man lenaa padegaa* but seriousness *kamii hai. . . . Mahiilaa binaa yah* project *nahiin chalegaa*. (Seriousness is lacking. You have to take an active interest [in this issue] but seriousness is lacking. . . . Without women this project will not go forward.)

This was the first time to my knowledge that male fieldworkers' casualness toward women's participation was openly addressed.

Through their words the two program officers attempted to influence directly the meanings of women's participation by declaring its importance and urging fieldworkers to think about it seriously. They spoke with authority, but dialogically—engaging male fieldworkers was key to the program officers' message. The chronotope of the monthly meeting time/room reconfigured when their voices claimed that women must be heard and that women's participation is important to the project. In that moment a shift occurred; suddenly the women fieldworkers in the room became visible and audible. Their utterances created the meeting room as a space where, temporarily, all voices were heard, not only those of men fieldworkers. Men began paying attention to what women were saying when they spoke. These types of interactions became more and more frequent in the main meeting room over the months I studied the project, and served to reinforce the growing importance of the women's participation component. Men continued to talk together during women's reporting if the women's participation program officer was not present, but other program officers would speak up about the need for men's attention. The incident set the stage for future insistence on women's critical project roles in the presence of all staff.

In the following example, men's resistance to women's potentially expanding roles takes an ironic twist. In June 2000, during an annual visit by German donor bank officers, the most senior officer's frequent inquiries indicated to staff and to villagers that women's participation was high on the agenda of those holding the purse strings. There was talk that US$2 million were on the table for women's participation. Some staff handled the attention to women's participation by denigrating the women's participation component, saying it was important only because it brought in funds. Together, both the positive and negative dialogues worked to establish a high profile for women's participation during the German officers' visit, which culminated in an all-PSS-staff meeting in the main office. Within this chronotope of support for women's participation, men well-known to be opposed to women's participation spoke that they considered women's participation an integral part of the project. Unlike how they might belittle women's participation in other settings, here they argued that their work supported women's participation. (With the exception of Nilam, all participants in the following dialogue are men.)

> *German Bank Officer*: Do you have sufficient resources and tools for doing your jobs [of women's participation]?
> *Ravinder:* In our team's area, there are only 2 women and 28 villages. The women's groups are coming up rapidly, so

there should be more women fieldworkers.
Gopal: Yes, increase the number of women fieldworkers. And they should stay in the PSS longer [in reference to the high turnover of women staff].
Nilam: Why not give the women fieldworkers responsibility for sanitation? We have been restricted.
German Bank Officer: Do you want to do that work?
Nilam: We are accountable. Men were doing it . . .
[A senior male Program Officer cuts her off.]
Vasant: All the project components are interrelated.
Ramu: We don't take an individual approach. It's team work.
Gopal: We work together. All do the work. Men are not seeing women's participation as separate.
German Bank Officer: Are men involved in women's participation?
Anand: They do it.
Kamal: The things are related.
Vasant: We take the microcredit groups' mission. When there were no women fieldworkers we did this work.
Anand: And school sanitation. We take all the activities of the PSS into the schools.

Knowing that they were expected to be working toward women's participation as part of the whole project, men who ordinarily maligned women's participation insisted it was an integral part of their work. Chronotope established their utterances to mean that women's participation was critical to project success and received equal support—statements belied by the fact that travel for women's participation almost always came last when field teams prioritized vehicle use. One program officer used his authority to silence Nilam, who initiated a conversation about women starting to do men's sanitation work. Her remarks, emerging from a positive chronotope of women's participation, were perhaps too subversive to be allowed complete utterance. Program officers often expressed ambiguous feelings toward women's participation and, in this case, the presence of superiors and all staff in the room caused this officer to interrupt the meanings Nilam wished to put into play. The words of the men who spoke after her may be understood as a backlash against the increasing importance of women's participation and women fieldworkers. Most male fieldworkers resisted any intrusion of women fieldworkers into their work and many preferred the spatial segregation between their activities. Interestingly, field staff who recognized that some men were exaggerating their activities did not call their bluff. Few wanted the work of the PSS to look bad in front of the officials, but perhaps also the existing chronotope enabled men's activities to be viewed in a different light. For example, Anand's reference to school sanitation work may have reminded staff that access to latrines at schools enables girls to attend. These male fieldworkers' voices ironically reinforced women's participation as a critical project component. Importantly, within a month of this meeting, program officers began discussing reassignment of women fieldworkers to sanitation and water distribution management jobs.

The following confrontation between NGO women fieldworkers and a male member of a village's water committee[17] offers an excellent example of the heteroglossia surrounding women's participation and points to the centrality of space for dialogic process. The events of this one afternoon meeting synopsize the entangled power struggles creative of new spaces for women's participation. This example is followed by another in which women fieldworkers discuss involving more village women in village water committee meetings. These incidences represent women fieldworkers' verbal struggles to create spaces for women only and to increase women's access to men's spaces.

Gendered Spaces in the Making

In this example, taken from my field notes, the women's participation program officer, two women fieldworkers, a female German consultant, and I are gathered inside a public school room with a group of about fifty village women and girls in order to talk in detail about some of the women's group activities planned by the project:

> Toward the end of a three hour meeting of women and girls held inside a classroom of the village school, Kishore, a man on the village's water committee called the girls away (from outside the room). In response, the women's participation program officer, the German consultant, and the two women fieldworkers present told the girls that they should stay. A bit later he tried to call the women away, but as they stood to go, the consultant and the women's participation program officer told them to sit down. The women's participation program officer sent Kavita out of the school room where we were all sitting to go talk with him. Then she sent Savitri (who is senior to Kavita) when she could hear his voice continuing to call to women from outside the room. I saw one woman look at her sister-in-law and motion with her head for her to go, but as she and the other daughters-in-law[18] were rising to go, they were told again to sit down. Then Savitri came back and the women's participation program officer went out herself to talk with the member of the village water committee. Before going, she told Savitri to finish the meeting in "*paanch minat*" (five minutes). At that time, we were reviewing the purpose of microcredit and savings groups.

> When the meeting ended, I went round to the front of the school where the women's participation program officer, the consultant, Kavita, Savitri, and the village's water committee were sitting with Ravinder, a male fieldworker. I arrived in time to witness the middle-aged man who had been calling women out of the meeting apologize to the women's participation program officer with a blank look on his face, stand up and walk off. In seconds he was back and began to put chairs inside the school. The women's participation program officer remained seated and asked for water,[19] so I took a chair beside her. She said that everything was going so well, but because of him "*barbaad ho gyaa*" (it's ruined). Kavita told me the men had asked, "*hamaaraa paramparaa todenge kyaa*?" (Will you break our traditions?) and related this comment to our discussion in the school room with the women that questioned the practice of *ghuunghat karnaa* (covering their faces). During this discussion of veiling in the meeting it had crossed my mind, and likely the minds of others, that the windows were open and men were sitting just outside. (Author's fieldnotes 2000)

In this example, NGO women fieldworkers struggled with Kishore, an elected, middle-aged male member of the village's water committee, over women's participation in a PSS-sponsored gathering and women's occupation of space. As the conflict escalated, women from the PSS with ever-increasing levels of authority[20] attempted to engage Kishore in dialogue outside the classroom so that the conversation taking place within it could continue. The women fieldworkers also addressed the village women present at the gathering and commanded them to remain in the school room despite Kishore's directives that they should go home. Tension in the room, as indicated by women fidgeting, exchanging glances, and whispering to each other, continued to increase until the meeting finished. When the meeting finally did end, the women's participation program officer "held her ground" literally and figuratively, by remaining seated in one of the chairs Kishore was trying to return to the classroom.

The gendered territorialization of the classroom was established by multiple factors. The classroom was initially occupied by the three women fieldworkers, the German consultant, two village women who had come with us that day from a village nearby, and me. Male members of the village water committee, a male fieldworker, and some other men sat outside as women and girls from the village joined us. Unlike other informal meetings with field staff, this meeting started with a song to launch the meeting and mark the occasion as special, which it *was* since almost all women of this village who were participating in project activities were together in one place. The singing and the presence of so many, but only, women—including two foreigners—territorialized the classroom as exclusively for women during those hours (Sack 1983). The claimed space of the school room enabled the women's participation program officer to say what she wanted to say: to raise the difficult question about the practice of veiling, to encourage women to support the project with their labor, to explain to them what savings and credit groups might do for them. Most of these topics were standard project fare with the exception of veiling. The intention of this meeting was to inform village women in the room about some of the items on Our Water's women's participation agenda, but an exchange was also begun with listening men who were present but not within the room itself.

Men surveilling women's meetings was quite common when women fieldworkers were visiting a village. During more informal women's meetings, held in women's houses or outside in their courtyards, men often were present or peeking in the windows, cracking jokes, and commenting on the ongoing business. Project staff and village women seldom spoke openly about potentially controversial topics, in part because of this constant surveillance (O'Reilly 2002). The formality of this meeting, indicated by the presence of a program officer and the German consultant and the location of the meeting in a public school classroom, influenced why men did not enter the room but sat listening outside instead. Kishore clearly heard (as did the others sitting outside) what was being said inside since the women's participation program officer was not trying to keep quiet and the window shutters were all wide open. She may or may not have been aware that men were aggravated by the things she said, but she felt at liberty in that space to say them. She also trusted that Kishore and the other men were not going to enter the room (or bodily haul someone away); she continued to speak on topic despite his interruptions. She did not expect or allow women to leave.

Territorializing the room as women's space did not prevent Kishore's voice from entering it. Besides being upset at what was said in the room, he may have been purposefully interrupting the meeting in response to women's spatial claims. Although Kishore recognized the classroom as women's space by not entering it, his voice did enter and was heard by all the women present and the men sitting outside. The walls were immaterial to Kishore's utterance entering the dialogue, but the walls' materiality did matter to the women there: they provided some protection from prying eyes (seeing if they were there or how they were responding to either what the women's participation program officer or Kishore said) and they enclosed the space. Only at the end of the

conflict did Kishore and the women's participation program officer speak face to face (including when he apologized) but they were very much engaged in struggle, as were the men and women who were hearing what was going on. The women's participation program officer disregarded Kishore's apology. If dialogue is not a free exchange but a play of power and hierarchy, then Kishore's apology may be understood as a response to her status within the PSS, whether it was heartfelt or simply a required gesture. Her inattention to it told me that she considered him insincere. Nevertheless, his apology acknowledged her position of power.

The women's participation program officer spoke aloud publicly about social change—she expanded upon NGO meanings of women's participation to include an interrogation of the practice of veiling. Her counterhegemonic utterances brought a response. From a Bakhtinian point of view, Kishore responded monologically to her utterances. He tried to override the meanings of women's participation she was putting into play and to subvert whatever control over the space women had at that moment. The voices of women fieldworkers, on the other hand, indicate heteroglossia surrounding women's participation; Savitri and Kavita attempted to bring Kishore into dialogue. All actors present were engaged in the production of the classroom as a space exclusively for women and new meanings about veiling. In their roles as listeners, by their very presence (either inside or outside the classroom in this case), they influenced the dialogic exchange that created it (Bakhtin 1986). Kishore may have spoken up because the men outside were agitated and they expected him to do something as a member of the village water committee. No other male voice could be heard within the classroom. Village women in the room were *not* asked to join the dialogue either before or after the exchange occurred. Certainly their utterances would have added to heteroglossia, but the power of the women fieldworkers was wielded to silence them and maintain a women's space by keeping them seated. The presence of the German consultant and me heightened the importance of the gathering and its content; the German consultant's authority was at play when women heeded her words that they should stay.

Ultimately, the women's participation program officer told me that Kishore had ruined everything, and I believe that she genuinely felt that the day's work had come to nothing. The day was ruined for her because Kishore interrupted the meeting, disrupted the space, and created tension. She felt the event demonstrated a lack of support for women's participation on the part of the whole village water committee. However, like many other verbal conflicts that happened over the course of project implementation, Kishore's interruption gave the women's participation program officer a platform from which to engage in direct dialogue over women's participation and its related spaces (see O'Reilly 2004). Kishore's repeated attempts from outside the room to send girls and women home *emphasized* women's claims to the classroom. The women's participation program officer, from within it, countered that women did not have to go; she wanted women and men to know that Kishore did not have the power to send women away from a women's meeting. She knew he would not enter the room and physically take women away; he too was influenced by women's spatial claims, created through their voices. On this day, I argue, power dynamics shifted such that the space became one where the women's participation program officer could speak openly about social change, and insist on women's spatial claims.

The event synopsized here is one dialogue over the course of many dialogues occurring between multiple actors during an ongoing process. It emerged from, and contributed to, other conversations about women's participation and its related spaces. For PSS fieldworkers, the event spawned a long debriefing session at the field team's office about the necessity of having members of the village water committee convinced of the importance of women's participation for the project. I did not learn of any later repercussions for the village women who did not leave the meeting, nor did I hear of a backlash on subsequent visits to the village for women fieldworkers. Eventually women fieldworkers raised the issue themselves that village water committees should open their spaces to include women.

Women fieldworkers noted the absence of women's participation in specific village spaces and sought to correct the problem. During the visit of donor bank officers in June 2000, women fieldworkers took an opportunity to suggest that village women's activities be expanded—in particular, to open up village water committee meetings for village women's participation. In the dialogue below, we hear women fieldworkers expand on meanings and spaces for women's participation with the male bank officer:

> *German Bank Officer*: Women's groups are not formal, so how can they be sustained?
> *Sita*: This is a good question. The women's groups should be made equal to the village water committees. Even if they are informal, these groups don't feel they are weaker. They have different work but they are no weaker.
> *Sima*: User groups [of public tap users] are mainly women, so they feel that it is for their benefit [to participate in them].

Nilam: We have to give more and more responsibility to them.
German Bank Officer: Which responsibilities?
Nilam: Payment collection [of water charges]. There could also be more roles for the self-help groups.
Pushpa: The latrine subsidy forms are filled in women's names.
Sita: The women's groups and self-help groups should be called into the village water committee meetings. Maybe they don't have legal power but they should sit in the meetings.

These utterances are part of a larger dialogic and material struggle over village women's access to the power/space of village water committees. It was well-known in the PSS that despite a guideline that every village water committee have one or more women's representatives present at meetings, women who were chosen as representatives were frequently *foto sadasya* (dummy representatives), or meetings were often held without women present. Village women were often not called to meetings, or meetings were held when women could not come. If a women's representative attended, she did not often sit with the male members. Instead she would sit silently outside of the main meeting area, but within hearing range. In this example, this most senior man's question about sustainability was a verbal sanction of women's participation. It carried significant weight among staff, despite the fact that the German officers did not make decisions about Our Water's daily activities. Women fieldworkers responded by suggesting that women's participation stretch into the male spaces of the village water committees by increasing the number of women invited. In their words, women's groups were placed on par with village water committees, and the activities and spaces of user groups and self-help groups were augmented. These women's unstated hopes were that greater numbers of women's representatives would allow women to sit with men in the main meeting room and to speak. In the presence of all other staff, they sought the German bank officer's approval to expand village women's access to public space.

At the same time that women fieldworkers were attempting to enforce PSS guidelines about women's representatives in village meetings, they were also increasing their own participation in the PSS by engaging in an all-PSS dialogue about the activities they felt deserved attention. In this example, mixed messages about women fieldworkers' activities in villages found an outlet in the main meeting room with the visiting German bank officer. Were women's representatives supposed to attend meetings, or were they not? As the profile of women's participation grew over time, struggles surrounding women's participation in one space for one group (e.g., opening village water committee meetings to women's groups) increasingly manifested themselves in other spaces for other women (e.g., women fieldworkers initiating their own program at the main office). The women's participation program officer's struggle with Kishore can be understood as an opportunity for her to assert women's spatial claims (with the assistance of two foreigners and a "captive" female audience) in a space where her power is greater than it is in the main office. Unlike the chronotope that surrounds her daily work at the main office, the chronotope of the women's meeting in the school room supported her authority and her words. These dialogues suggest that women fieldworkers reconceived particular spaces as spaces of action (Nagar 2000). For women fieldworkers, the office meeting room was seized as an opportunity for dialogue with those in power about greater women's participation for villagers and fieldworkers. Village water committee spaces were conceived of as further frontiers for dialogic exchange. For the women's participation program officer, the classroom became a space where she could insist on a women-only public space.

Chronotope, Dialogic Process, and the Production of Space

In the project's early years, women's participation appeared to have little relevance to project activities. A monologue that defined women's participation as superfluous enabled the women's participation component to be considered by many staff as "some talks in a corner" (Author's fieldnotes 2000). I was asked when I arrived to do field work why I was studying the Our Water project if I was interested in women's participation. However, over the years I studied the project, dialogue about women's participation increased and formed a basis for gendered change. The more women's participation was talked about, the more dialogic presence it had. The more presence it had, the more women's participation became a recourse and support to those seeking gender equality within the organization and in villages. The presence of female fieldworkers was always considered critical support for producing women's participation, but a need for more women staff became pressing. The PSS proposal for strengthening women's participation in the project states: "[m]ore effective and efficient support has to be given . . . mostly in the form of frequent visits by the female [staff] of the PSS, the number of which has to be increased substantially" (PSS 2000, 12). Gender sensitivity training led by outside facilitators was organized in early 2001. Staff began to think reflexively about women's role in the organization; field-

workers spoke up about women's exclusion from certain project roles. When it appeared that women fieldworkers' roles might expand into the realm of previously male-only jobs, certain staff grew defensive. Those opposed to women's participation found they could no longer claim it was not important, instead they argued that it was important only because it brought money into the project. Program officers spent hours haggling over meanings of participation and empowerment (O'Reilly 2004).

As Ravinder's words hinted in the opening paragraph of this article, these dialogues about women's participation *created* the project's goals for women's participation, goals about where village women and women fieldworkers would spend their time and who would control it. We hear the forces of power that produced spaces where women's voices emerged or where recognizable spaces for women were created (see Folch-Serra 1990). Dialogic struggles surrounding women's participation—a multiplicity of voices for it or against it—challenged unequal, gendered social relations and moved the conversation into new spaces. New meanings of women's participation had repercussions for gendered spaces, as nearly all of the dialogues about women's participation inherently involved a challenge to existing gendered relations of power. Expanded meanings of women's participation resulted in an interruption of previously male-only spaces, territorial claims for women's space, or reconfigured spaces such that fieldworkers could speak in support of women's participation and be heard. In the dialogues included in the preceding subsections, we can hear individual voices in struggle reworking meanings of women's participation.

Dialogues produce space—as dialogues unfold, as positions are taken up and spoken from, spaces are both drawn on and created. Dialogic process can be traced as it occurs in order to hear some spaces becoming locations where the language of women's participation can be heard, and other spaces where it is never spoken aloud. These examples indicate that altering spaces of domination does not require an exclusive space (i.e., territoriality). A chronotope that enables agents to take opportunities where those in power can be engaged dialogically will suffice. Women fieldworkers sought to change spaces of domination by occupying them and by opening up for question and struggle previous understandings of these spaces as male-controlled. Even dialogues perceived as "failures" for women's participation contributed to the production of gendered space because such exchanges kept the language of the women's participation component dialogic, not monologic.

I am arguing here against agentless discursive stabilization in favor of a notion that at the microlevel "discourses are inherently dialogic" (Morris 1994). As Bebbington (2000, 495) suggests, development theorizing requires "more nuanced interpretations of development that emphasize human agency and depict what room to maneuver exists within otherwise constraining institutions and structures." Bakhtin's ideas move us beyond conceptualizing fieldworkers' actions as "resistance" by suggesting that they work with and against the variety of meanings of women's participation that circulate (O'Reilly 2006b). Development policies, like participation, once NGO staff begin discussing them and making plans for operationalizing them, begin to take on a life of their own as meanings are struggled over between project actors of unequal power (Ferguson 1990; Collins 1999; O'Reilly 2006b). NGO fieldworkers engage in dialogic process not just person to person, but with the overarching meanings and spaces of women's participation that flow within the project. Unlike policies that seek to predetermine the meanings of terms like "women's participation," we see from the examples above that meanings remain open, ambiguous, and always available for reconstruction (O'Reilly 2006b). Technical solutions (e.g., training) may be sought by NGO management and consultants in an attempt to stabilize meanings, but dialogic process keeps meanings multiple and changing.

The chronotope of development interventions is the time-space where and when meanings of women's participation are struggled over, and where and when gendered space is in the making. Space for women's development is what is at stake territorially, but so also are those meanings that might emerge in that space. Our Water field staff and constituents created a women's participation chronotope—a time-space within which the knots of narratives for or against women's participation were tied and untied. As part of their work, they simultaneously were influenced by and contributing to a chronotope that included shifting spaces of gendered domination, flexible meanings of women's participation, and newly audible voices. The gains may have been temporary and incremental, but where before there was little precedent or feeling for women's participation, over time the women's participation component refracted and connected with almost every element of the drinking water supply project. The findings of this research indicate that development planners, policymakers, and NGOs might reconsider their definitions of success for gendered participatory approaches. As the fieldworker Ravinder is aware, "change in society happens slowly," thus it is a significant step toward social change that discussions of women's participation have suffused the NGO. Where previously women's participation had been muted, meeting rooms, classrooms, and villages became spaces where a narrative of women's participation was constantly in the

making through dialogic negotiation. Gendered spaces and meanings were simultaneously remade.

Conclusions

Recent work in critical development geography has focused on the agency of actors in making development meanings and spaces (Bebbington 2000; Nagar and Raju 2003; Laurie 2005; Page 2005a). These authors hold central that development processes are productive of tensions, and that resolutions to these tensions are worked out spatially, discursively, and culturally. Certain spaces are imagined and physically created as those "for" development (Pigg 1992), and development spaces reflect the power struggles of those involved in the processes of their creation (Schroeder 1999). Mutersbaugh (2002) demonstrates how the arduous construction of an overlarge cooperative building was the result of co-op members negotiating the highly complex network of social relations within which they were embedded. Rather than emerging as a series of rational choices, co-op members' building strategies evolved over the building process and contained intricate spatial and temporal depth. Bassett (2002) shows for contradictions in gendered social relations surrounding cotton production that solutions are sought at a variety of scales, resulting in the dispersal of gendered struggles to other locations. I have traced the dialogic process of women's participation to illustrate how tensions surrounding women's participation are creative of new meanings and spatial shifts. Typically, critical development geographers do not investigate at the microlevel; however, processes of spatial change become available through analysis of the micropolitics contained within dialogic process. At such a level, utterances can be analyzed as active forces of social change, when due consideration is given to the agency of speakers and listeners and the chronotope in which dialogic exchange occurs. Chronotope, as an analytical tool, can guide the capture of real-time, power-infused contexts within which meanings and spaces are produced. Geographic explorations of entanglements of power may be guided by listening for voices speaking monologically or dialogically—that is, voices seeking to preserve the status quo or subvert it. I suggest that a Bakhtinian approach has broad application for investigations into the dialogic production of space beyond critical development geography. As Sui (2000) argues, Bakhtin's ideas about dialogue as a relational process involving situated speakers and listeners resonate with geography's recent aural turn.

A body of geographical and anthropological research has arisen to investigate NGOs as purveyors of development, questioning their impacts on institutions "above" or "below" them (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Bebbington 2000, 2004; Mohan 2002; Sundberg 2003). Development scholars have turned to NGOs because of their position as (1) interpreters and creators of international development directives (Crewe and Harrison 1998; D. Lewis 2003); (2) contact point with village "clients" (Arce and Long 1992; Villarreal 1992); and/or (3) potential antagonist of the state (Paley 2001). As D. Lewis et al. (2003, 545) note, however, "there are still many more calls for ethnographies of development organizations than there are such ethnographies." This research makes a direct contribution to ethnographies of development organizations. D. Lewis et al. (2003) posit that only ethnography can explore structure and agency and their weight in the production of social life. Attention to context reminds the researcher that organizations are embedded within wider social structures and sets of meanings, whereas attention to practice and agency highlights that agents are active in the production of discourses and culture. For D. Lewis et al. (2003), agency is not voluntarist and, in particular, the actions of agents are determined in greater part by their participation in their organization than by the wider society within which they are embedded. Bakhtinian concepts attribute to agents the power to challenge social relations of domination through language; these same unequal relations, Massey (2000) argues, construct spaces. As I have shown above, taken together, language that challenges gendered inequality is productive of spatial shifts.

D. Lewis et al. (2003) suggest that studying organizational cultures in multiagency rural development projects demonstrates that the various cultures inside organizations may lead to integration or fragmentation. They found that breakdowns in cultural understanding explained why some ideas, especially contentious ones like "empowerment" were never realized. Using a Bakhtinian approach, my research shows that despite a lack of shared meanings within the PSS, a highly contested idea like women's participation gained ground, and part of what enabled the women's participation component was the tension between a stated, gendered participatory approach and the ambiguous feelings of many employees, both male and female, about women's participation's importance to the project. As D. Lewis (2003) indicates, norms of organizational culture cannot be read off as fixed aspects of social interaction but are instead negotiated and reshaped or even abolished within certain situations. It is these "certain situations" that a Bakhtinian analysis teases out, and particularly in this article, teases out with an ear to untangling the power relations surrounding spatial production. Mosse (2001) argues that organizations are constrained by institutional systems and procedures, and it is

important to assess these systems and procedures as forms of power. This research views these systems and procedures as techniques of power, which are generated as controls and limits to space. In north India, gendered spatial controls are negotiated at the scale of villages as well as within NGOs (and beyond). The examples above indicate that the feminist politics of fieldworkers were spatially informed. They were well aware of the spatial dimensions of the social changes they sought (see Nagar 2000).

Moving past critiques that village women's participation may be in name only or make little of its intended impact (Agarwal 2001; Cleaver 2001; Mawdsley et al. 2002), this research has sought out the micronegotiations behind the intended and unintended impacts of a gendered participatory approach. Hickey and Mohan (2004) write that through participatory approaches the bargaining position of the poor may be strengthened—existing power relations may not be overturned, but within unequal relations of power the position of the poor might be rendered less unequal. This element of their argument is an important thread in mine because I argue that although a radical social transformation did not occur in the project area or in the PSS, the language of participation established a chronotope supportive of women's participation. Staff succeeded in establishing women's participation as an issue that could be spoken of, debated, and reflected on, and which—despite forces against it—kept women's participation on the Our Water project agenda. Our Water's original goal of organizing village women into women's groups that would go on to solve other village problems (beyond water supply) has not been realized, but a variety of women's groups did emerge and women fieldworkers began to raise their voices with confidence. If we accept Rowlands's (1997) definition of empowerment as a process that increases self-confidence, agency, and a sense of dignity, then arguably the project's women's participation component was implicated in growing empowerment for women fieldworkers. Bakhtin's concerns with subjects at the intersection of language and the wider social world mean that fieldworkers gain new insights into themselves, their situatedness in relationships of power, and their work as they engage in the labor process of development.

Because Bakhtin's concepts of language and meaning never allow discourse or subjectivity to stabilize (Landzelius 2003), his ideas constantly foreground fieldworkers as dynamic agents linking discourses of women's participation, other actors in the project, and development practices. Further investigation is needed into women fieldworkers' subjectivities, which I hypothesize are created through the same dialogic struggles shown in this analysis. Rising incorporation of women into development projects, both as clients and facilitators, signals that research is needed on the implications of women fieldworkers' subjectivities and their influence on village level results. Such research would contribute to an understanding of the relationship between dialogic process, gender, subjectivity, and practice within NGOs. Bakhtin provides a frame for understanding how women fieldworkers' subjectivity is constructed as they negotiate multiple, contradictory meanings of women's participation that surround them and their work.

I initially turned to Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia as a way to conceptualize the multiplicity of meanings and conflicting voices I heard circulating within Our Water. Later, Bakhtinian analysis revealed that these many voices engaged in struggle were the driving forces behind the production of spaces of women's participation and the extension of women's participation into a reflexive consideration of how women were being included within Our Water itself. My interpretation of events and conversations is one of many possible understandings of them, but this is, in part, one of the strengths of Bakhtinian analysis—it connects a single utterance or dialogic exchange, shaped by chronotope, to heteroglossia. A Bakhtinian approach to constructions of space requires that the researcher accept that meanings are constantly in flux, any spatial "result" is going to be temporary, and negotiations are ceaseless and constant. In these ongoing struggles lie opportunities for changes in sociospatial relations of domination.

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Notes

1. Everett (1997) and Bebbington (2000) offer similar critiques, indicating that local people encounter development programs as they are making their own way. Thus development agendas may be resisted, incorporated, and/or manipulated to fit with individual plans.
2. Bakhtin's premises encompass the chronotopic complexity of relationships between author, ethnographic writing, and

audience. See Folch-Serra (1990), England (1994), and Sutherland (2004) for geographic considerations of Bakhtin-informed ethnography.

3. Villagers pay for water based on the quantity they use—the less they use, the cheaper the price. The *most* they are asked to pay for water is 4 rupees per 1,000 liters (approximately US$0.10).
4. The real names of fieldworkers have not been used. As the women's participation program officer is unique in her position as the only woman manager, I have received her permission to identify her in the text.
5. The Government of India Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment offers the following definitions of "scheduled castes": "extreme social, education and economic backwardness arising out of the traditional practice of untouchability" and "scheduled tribes": "indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large and backwardness." http://socialjustice.nic.in/schedule/faq.htm#sc1 (last accessed 22 October 2005). "Other backward classes" have been selected by the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Commission for Other Backward Classes based on "social and educational backwardness." http://delhigovt.nic.in/newdelhi/dept/obc/CC.doc (last accessed 22 October 2005).
6. This figure is in keeping with the Rajasthan Excise Department's 2005 per capita income figure of Rs. 13,066. http://www.rajexcise.org (last accessed 22 October 2005).
7. North India is defined here (and elsewhere) as Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan (see Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Dreze and Gazdar 1998).
8. The Government of India defines a "main" worker as someone who works more than 183 days a year.
9. See Basu (1999) for an argument on how southern Indian states seem to be following a north Indian trend in terms of sex preference.
10. Watts (1995) and others (e.g., Blaikie 2000) note that the populist agenda of participatory approaches meets the needs of both mainstream and alternative development camps. For example: new social movements and/or NGOs compensate for a decline of the state (Clark 1995; Paley 2001); participation can reconnect the state and their populations (World Bank 1997); local cultural and scientific knowledge fill in the gaps where "expert" science has failed (Shiva 1989); local involvement brings project costs down, leads to project sustainability and provides better feedback (World Bank 1997).
11. In the case of Our Water, plans for activating community participation followed trends favoring participatory approaches to natural resource management. However, community participation was fitted into preexisting large-scale plans that left scant room for local actors to maneuver. The GOR and German donor bank had already decided on the necessity of a new water supply system infrastructure and its design prior to signing cooperation agreements. Community members were given only minor roles (e.g., public tap site selection, election of local management boards, and payment arrangements).
12. Some scholars believe that the early work of V. N. Voloshinov and P. N. Medvedev was actually written by Bakhtin, with minor contributions from them. As this conflict is unlikely to be settled with certainty, for clarity's sake I list Bakhtin as the first author in the main text and in the Reference entries, but note here that Morris (1994), editor of *The Bakhtin Reader*, attributes work earlier believed solely to be that of Voloshinov or Medvedev to each and also credits Bakhtin. J. Holloway and Kneale (2000) note that the confusion over who wrote what is well in keeping with Bakhtin's concepts of open-ended dialogue.
13. Bakhtin's use of the term "ideology" refers to a given social group's world view, rather than a conscious, political viewpoint (Morris 1994, 249).
14. This concept is also found in Foucault, but heteroglossia, given its prefix, reminds us more constantly than the term "discourse" of the multiplicity of meanings and contradictions contained within discourses.
15. Williams (1977, 112) suggests that hegemony is "always a process," not a system or a structure. Hegemony viewed as practice must be understood as actively renewed and recreated, just as it is continually resisted and limited. Counterhegemony and alternative hegemony, which threaten hegemony, are "real and persistent elements of practice" (113). Counterhegemonies indicate what hegemonic processes have to control—hegemonic processes must respond to the oppositions that threaten them. In this way counterhegemony is part of the process of hegemony.
16. Bakhtin holds that the utterance is not a matter of free choice on the part of any individual—imposed from without are recognizable patterns and orders of speech which limit flexibility, ease, and creativity when speaking. Bakhtin refers to these patterns and orders of speech as *speech genres*. The concept of speech genres does not contradict Bakhtin's arguments for the constant flexibility of meaning and language. He theorizes that speech genres form a frame around language that helps listeners and speakers begin to make sense of what is said, but do not determine the utterance, leaving open creative possibilities.
17. Village water committees are registered local institutions of elected representatives, who oversee decisions, care, and payment for drinking water once the village signs a contract with the GOR.
18. Daughters-in-law are generally easy to spot because they are the women (in a group of women) who keep their faces completely covered in deference to their mothers-in-law and other senior women.
19. It is the most basic form of Rajasthani hospitality to offer water to guests. By asking for water, the women's participation program officer indicates that she is a guest, that she must be accommodated, and that she is not in a hurry to be off.
20. Kishore is aware of this hierarchy, as he knows the women fieldworkers of the NGO.

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