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## Fields in Motion, Fields of Friction: Tales of "Betrayal" and Promise from Kangra District, India

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# Fields in Motion, Fields of Friction: Tales of 'Betrayal' and Promise from Kangra District, India

Radhika Johari

Over a period of five decades, Kangra District in Himachal Pradesh, India, has been si(gh)ted within different development imaginaries that have taken shape within a succession of bilateral projects at particular configurations of scale and time. These development flows into the region have in turn fostered a plethora of competing institutions and practices, contributing their own divergent flows within an inherently mobile and 'developmentalizing' terrain. While this fluid and fertile space offers rich opportunities for partnerships across disparate sites, there is a need to revisit 'collaboration' as a key feminist tool for facilitating social justice and change. Widely lauded by feminist scholars for its empowering, equalizing, and transformative potential, collaboration is also viewed prescriptively in terms of 'success' and 'failure.' Consequently, 'strategies and

solutions' are sought to negotiate its minefields and to resolve, often futilely, the friction that repeatedly erupts within them. In this paper, I review friction as a valuable methodological frame within feminist collaborative research and praxis. Reflecting on some of the ways in which it played out as a creative source of production, interruption, and mutation in my own collaborative ventures in Kangra, I trace its sometimes unanticipated and diversionary routes and the vistas of 'betrayal' and promise that they reveal. In place of prevailing efforts to contain and resolve friction generated at border crossings, I suggest that a feminist engagement with friction through 'location work' that follows its routes across a 'developmentalizing' terrain can provide promising detours and avenues for empowerment and social justice.

**Keywords:** anthropology, collaboration, development, feminist praxis, friction, mobility.

## Introduction

In this paper, I illuminate the contours of a feminist methodological framework that emerged through my collaborative engagements in Kangra District, India, and trace the unfamiliar but promising avenues it offers for facilitating socially inclusive and empowering change. This framework and its connected routes unfolded in relation to my self-positioning at the interface of anthropological research, feminist praxis, and development practice. As a contextual background to my discussion of the routes that this positioning led me to take in the core section of the paper, I begin with a conceptual overview that emphasizes and interrogates core concepts in feminist research and praxis, namely, collaboration and location. I introduce a less traveled road that is indicated by an attention to and focus on friction as it plays out in feminist collaborative research and praxis. In the second section of the paper, I sketch the terrain in which I conducted my doctoral research and engaged in collaborative ventures, providing an outline of the ways in which development paradigms have traveled at different scales and times and have been routed through Kangra District. I conceptualize these flows in and out of the region as a ‘developmentalizing’ process; one of ‘becoming’ that is essentially creative and productive, leading to a profusion of diverse, divergent, and often competing development ideas, actors, and practices generated by successive development projects.

Within this richly textured terrain, I reflect on my personal locations and routings within and across development practice and academic research as the subtext and pre-text for my subsequent discussion of the collaborative endeavors that I engaged in beyond my doctoral research. Providing examples of these endeavors, I illustrate how friction, which has been inherent in Kangra’s developmentalizing terrain, was also an integral aspect of my efforts to foster collaborative practice. Mapping its pathways through these endeavors, and the varying perceptions and practices that it fostered, I highlight its productive potential and often unanticipated impacts. In conclusion, I suggest that in place of a prevailing tendency among feminists to sideline or attempt to defuse friction, and to create streamlined and ‘successful’ collaborative partnerships among disparate players, an attention to the creative role of friction, while entailing a degree of discomfort, may yield fertile ground for socially inclusive and empowering change.

### Rerouting Feminist Collaborative Research and Praxis in a ‘Developmentalizing’ Terrain

While feminist methods reflect varying hues and textures across disciplinary boundaries, and across academic

and non-academic locations, they share an abiding commitment to engendering socially and politically progressive change. A feminist methodology can thus be more accurately described as a set of principles or signposts for charting a course of action that leads to intellectual, political, and ethical engagements with issues of power, difference, and social justice, often entailing difficult ‘border crossings’ (Nagar 2003) between activist and academic sites of practice. Within these broad conceptual contours, the forging of collaborative partnerships across sites of difference has emerged as a core feminist methodology.<sup>1</sup> Collaboration, with its liberating and transformative potential to disrupt entrenched power differences, is often described in the literature as a key attribute and defining feature of feminist research and praxis. Thus, for example, feminist collaborative projects offer empowering possibilities through the creation of a space to “let them do... whatever” (Peake and Trotz 1999: 192); one that denies the researcher’s essential privileging and disrupts the entrenched dualism of ‘field’ and academy (Lutz 1995; Sparke 1996). Moreover, by fostering the transformative potential of power to work *with* others as opposed to power *over* resources, institutions and decision making (Kabeer 1994 cited in Parpart 2002), they may be equalizing, pulling the researcher towards “grittier intellectual alliances” with community educators and activists (Gordon 1995: 375). In view of its promising potential to promote empowerment, reciprocity, and accountability to communities, collaboration across differences is viewed by many feminist scholars as a key tool for research and praxis in the repository of feminist methodologies.

In contrast to this celebratory view of collaboration, a second, less prominent strand in the feminist literature emphasizes inherent tensions and frictions within disparate partnerships forged at border crossings. While still viewing collaboration as beneficial and consistent with feminist goals of challenging hierarchical relationships and changing society (Monk et al. 2003), feminist scholars writing in this vein regard it as problematic: a “fragile possibility” rife with “thorny complexities,” and characterized by “the tango of tension and play of power” (Rhoades 2007: 1, 3, 7). They point to the “formidable challenges” of collaborative partnerships emerging from ever-surfacing conflict that is “depressingly difficult” to resolve (Cottrell and Parpart 2006: 20, 25). As such, friction is “always at work” within “uncomfortable collaborations” (Walsh 2008: 80). In reflecting on their own experiences of collaborating with community-based researchers and activists, some of these scholars have attempted to define key constitutive characteristics of feminist collaboration such as egalitarian participation in project design and

decision-making; shared ownership of the project and its outcomes; transparency; multiple perspectives; and common goals. Wherever these characteristics are relatively prominent, collaborative projects are viewed as 'successful.' More commonly, problems and tensions tend to repeatedly surface, reflecting fundamental power imbalances with their attendant hierarchies among unequal partners. These arise from: different and sometimes competing agendas and motivations for conducting research; personality clashes; institutional constraints; different conceptual and methodological orientations; differential access to resources; turf issues around ownership, authorship, and dissemination; and contrasting sites of accountability (communities and universities), and for influencing change within local, national and international fora (Monk et al. 2003; Cottrell and Parpart 2006; Rhoades 2007; and Irving and English 2008).

Importantly, then, feminist scholars have drawn attention to underlying power dynamics and inequities within collaborative partnerships, particularly where power differentials are significant as between university researchers and grassroots community-based researchers and activists. They have also usefully identified common sources of tension and friction within these partnerships. However, they have largely tended to adopt a prescriptive approach aimed at identifying "unintended blind spots" (Monk et al. 2003: 104) and "solutions and strategies" for overcoming these tensions and issues and "making academic – community collaboration what it can be" (Cottrell and Parpart 2006: 25). The "failures" that result when collaborations and solidarities do not come to fruition within the research process, and the painful reality of "incomplete dialogues," are rarely discussed and analyzed in the literature (Sultana 2007; Nagar 2003: 369). Rather than engaging with friction as an analytical and methodological tool, and as a fundamentally creative aspect of the dynamic of partnerships forged across differences, feminists (and other academics) have tended to view its presence and influence within collaborations as an obstacle to be contained, surmounted, and resolved.

In place of this negative conception of friction, I propose a radically different view that draws on Tsing's (2005) discussion of the creative role of friction across diverse connections to show how it can serve as a valuable methodological frame for exploring tensions that arise within feminist research and collaborative ventures. As defined by Tsing (2005: 4), friction can be viewed as "the awkward, unequal, unstable and creative qualities of interconnection across difference." Moreover, Tsing (2005: 206) suggests that mobilizations can only advance

through friction, which promotes and circulates global capital, commodities, and ideas. Friction is thus required to keep things in motion. As such it is richly productive, generating possibilities for new encounters and cultural political formations. Tsing (2005: 77) further develops the concept of articulation, as distinguished from collaboration involving a common project, to describe how preexisting groups and discourses can be contingently linked without a common project at hand. In doing so, she emphasizes the coming together of collaborators who may not share common goals, and whose collective efforts may or may not be successful. The productive potential and unpredictable impacts of friction are particularly evident in such articulations that are essentially both creative and transformative. Therefore, I suggest that a willingness to fully explore the frictions that are generated through the dynamics of articulation and collaboration across diversity and difference, and to map their pathways, is essential for developing a feminist methodology that emphasizes a politics of presence and connection across disparate sites. It may offer insights and possibilities that open up new vistas, some of which may contribute to empowering activists and community leaders to "do...whatever." Two focal questions arising from this alternative view of friction are: how might feminists working within collaborative contexts better understand the productive and transformative potential of friction within and across fields of difference? And, how might we map the pathways that friction takes, often along unanticipated routes, to track its genesis and engendering of contingent social formations?

The methodological framework I advocate for exploring these questions is 'location work,' which can be viewed as a definitive set of principles and practices that are constitutive of feminist research, ethics, and practice. Location work encompasses every aspect of the research process from the researcher's inherent mobility, as she traverses crisscrossing pathways between academic and non-academic sites of practice, to an ongoing process of self-reflexivity through which relations between the researcher and her subjects are negotiated across fields of difference. This emphasis on continual travel and translation between different sites resonates well with Tsing's conceptualization of friction as movement, enabling us to follow its routes. It further resonates with important anthropological critiques of constructions of scale, space and place, and their methodological implications for ethnographic research. These critiques have drawn attention to the fluid and shifting nature of relationships between local and non-local contexts of ethnographic research, highlighting dynamism,

unpredictability, and a plurality of disparate and multi-directional flows (see, for example, Appadurai 1990; Marcus 1998; Davis 1999; Lassiter 2005; and Rabinow 2007). Mobile research that can follow people, resources, and ideas, and the frictions that propel them, is, therefore, an essential aspect of location work. A second critical aspect of location work entails an exercise in self-reflexivity; one that continually foregrounds questions of the researcher's multiplex identity,<sup>2</sup> often as both insider and outsider, and her shifting positionality in relation to her subjects. Intersubjectivity, the researcher's representation, and her accountability to the community are pivotal in this exercise (McDowell 1992; Narayan 1993; Blunt and Rose 1994; England 1994; Russell and Bohann 1999; Nagar 2002; Sultana 2007). This practice, I suggest, provides a useful way of constructively engaging with friction rather than resisting it when it occurs. Location work can thus be usefully viewed as a fluid and open-ended journey of "methodological becoming" (Mountz et al. 2003) that is continually under construction throughout the research process, and is uniquely suited to follow the processes and pathways of friction within feminist collaborative research and praxis.

In the context of my own research and collaborative ventures in Kangra District in the mountainous northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, I have explored how these feminist principles and practices can be applied within a fluid and dynamic developmental context. While my doctoral research has focused on the multiple and competing development rationalities that have flowed through the region, seeking to meld together conservation and livelihoods generation agendas within a series of international bilateral development projects, the profusion of ideas and networks fostered by these projects has provided fertile ground for exploring the possibilities of new imaginaries outside of their scope. This has led me to follow intersecting pathways within and beyond my research through collaborative engagements with local activists, whose conceptual frameworks and agendas evolved on the ground through their participation within these development flows. Positioning myself at the interface of feminist praxis, anthropology, and development practice, my own commitment has been to contribute towards critical and creative thinking among activists in the area in ways that seek to engender inclusive social and political change defined by local processes and understandings. Further along in this paper, I describe some of these efforts, tracking the friction they generated and its unpredictable outcomes. As a prelude, clarification on 'developmentalizing' as a concept that illuminates the fluid and dynamic context of these engagements would

help to bring out the relevance and scope of feminist praxis in this kind of terrain.

I suggest that a conceptual shift from an ontological view of development as a state of being, however defined, to developmentalizing as an active and open-ended process of becoming draws attention to the movements through space and time of contrasting and competing imaginaries that shape and texture varied forms of practice. This emphasis on mobility provides a useful lens for examining sustained development flows within a region. A majority of the imaginaries that fuel these flows are conceived remotely within international development agencies seeking to gain ground in different global locations through bilateral partnerships with national and regional governments. They reflect a continuous chronology of competing approaches that attempt to eclipse and outdo their predecessors through 'new,' 'state of the art,' 'improved' strategies. Each promotes its own set of institutional forms and practices, some of which remain after the project concludes to become part of ongoing development flows. These diverse forms and practices in turn may foster further reflection and experimentation on the ground by local activists and groups, often in competition with each other, who may adopt, innovate, or challenge existing imaginaries, contributing their own efforts to these flows. Thus, developmentalizing is an inherently creative process that generates a multiplicity of forms, perspectives, and approaches, some of which offer potential for social and political empowerment at the grassroots. The fluid and kaleidoscopic terrain that it creates provides fertile ground for feminist praxis based on the principles of location work that I have described. When applied to such a richly textured topography, a feminist methodology with an emphasis on mobility, focus on connectivity, and attentiveness to the creative role of friction, may yield valuable insights and promising collaborations in support of its commitment to empowerment and social change. Before illustrating its application, I will sketch the contours of Kangra's developmentalizing terrain as a context to my collaborative endeavors.

### **Fields in Motion: 'Developmentalizing' Kangra<sup>3</sup>**

Kangra District provides an exemplary illustration of a region in which different imaginaries traveling in and through particular configurations of scale and time, and brought to fruition within articulations of diverse institutions and individuals, have been constitutive of a developmentalizing terrain. As I describe below, the broad contours of this terrain have been shaped within

a series of bilateral projects of *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ), the German Agency for Technical Cooperation,<sup>4</sup> and the state government of Himachal Pradesh. These projects have reflected shifting development logics and priorities at global, national, and regional levels, ranging from intensification of agricultural production to strengthen food security and national sovereignty, to watershed rehabilitation and management for enhancing resources and livelihoods of local populations.

The Indo-German Agricultural Project (IGAP) was the first GTZ-supported project to be implemented in this region. Initially launched in Mandi District in the same state, the Project was extended to Kangra through a supplementary agreement in 1966 and inaugurated in this district in 1967. Its rationale and trajectory can be mapped to particular conjunctures of scale and time, the first being the Cold War period when West Germany was part of an influential US-led global alliance seeking to contain the spread of communism within newly independent postcolonial nations. More specifically, East and West Germany were locked in competition as they sought to extend their individual spheres of influence. Given its location adjacent to communist China, India offered an important and strategic target for a developmental logic of intensified agricultural production to enhance food security and individual wealth, thereby reducing migration flows to the cities and curbing the rise of a potential urban proletariat.<sup>5</sup>

This global imaginary, promoted by US and West German development agencies in India, intersected with two further scalar imaginaries. At the national level, an imaginary of agrarian reform was evidenced within India's governmental planning processes and the extensive promotion of green revolution technologies that would reduce foreign imports and consequently strengthen national sovereignty (Gupta 1998). A second confluence of national and regional imaginaries occurred in 1966 with Kangra's dislocation from the economically progressive state of Punjab and its incorporation into the nascent state of Himachal Pradesh.<sup>6</sup> The new state's leaders, seeking to shift perceptions of the region as economically backward, actively sought to divert development flows into the region.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, at a local level, rivalry between the project leader based in Mandi and the deputy project leader in Kangra resulted in a structural oscillation between one project, under the overall jurisdiction of the Mandi-based project leader with an extension in Kangra, and two independent and competing projects headed by these leaders in the adjacent districts. Ultimately, the deputy leader was recalled and the Kangra Project was separated from the Mandi Project in 1970 (Agrawal et al. 1973).

IGAP's overall aim was to achieve "rapid and significant increases in agricultural production...through an integrated and intensive use of improved agricultural techniques...to saturate the entire cultivated area with high yielding varieties of seeds" (ibid 28). This envisioned goal was in concert with the Intensive Agricultural District Program (IADP) that had been adopted in selected 'model' districts of the country. Conceptualized and sponsored by the Ford Foundation and by other western countries, IADP promoted a package extension program to provide farmers with improved techniques and inputs such as high yielding seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, implements, and credit to intensify the scale of agriculture in the selected districts. While IGAP also adopted a 'package' approach, it differed from the American model in ways that reflected the Federal Republic of Germany's competitive efforts to forge its own innovative developmental model (see Unger 2010). Implemented in a region far from being considered 'model' for agriculture, IGAP was conceptualized by GTZ as a bilateral and multisectoral approach to achieve a broader base for bringing about enduring structural changes in the district through the incorporation of modern inputs and technologies within traditional farming systems. Institutional channels for project implementation centered on the existing agricultural extension service and the development of cooperatives, which had an established history in both countries. The German cooperative model, which Unger (2010) describes as "low-modern," was thus in striking contrast to the American "high-modern" green revolution model of agricultural development.

IGAP was gradually extended over the entire district and remained active up to 1980 when it was succeeded by a second GTZ project in the region: the Indo-German Dhauladhar Project (IGDP). The new project's strategy of reducing demand for biomass consumption by initiating 'social village organizations' to change people's behavior around natural resource use (Gupta and Preuss 1994) was shaped by a very different imaginary at converging scales. At the global level, reconciling environmental degradation with poverty alleviation through participatory resource management approaches was emerging as an influential development strategy; one that was strongly reflected in India's social forestry program, which gained impetus from 1976. This national level program centered on afforestation involving community participation to take the pressure off forests and rehabilitate degraded forests and common lands. Convergent rationalities at global and national levels further intersected with local influences and dynamics. The German IGAP project leader, who had developed a strong and enduring attachment to the area, advocated for continued GTZ support in this region, and was keen to

contribute towards its first ecologically oriented project. He helped to develop the project concept in conjunction with senior forest officers, pushing for a new forestry-based project housed within their own department, which was now attempting to divert any further inflow of foreign funds from the Agriculture Department toward itself (personal communication February 27, 2009).

Another point of divergence between the two projects was IGDP's deliberate siting within a watershed—the upper Binwa catchment in Palampur Tehsil—reflecting an increasing attention to watershed management as a programmatic focus.<sup>8</sup> While IGDP emphasized afforestation and soil conservation as core interventions, the multisectoral approach of IGAP was continued but expanded to include newer initiatives such as developing alternate energy sources and fuel saving devices as well as self-employment schemes, in addition to agriculture, animal husbandry, and horticulture. Community-oriented activities such as upgrading of paths, schools, community centers, and irrigation channels, and introducing literacy courses and sewing courses for women, were components of what IGDP promoted as an innovative concept and model. This approach was known as “TRUCO” (Trust and Confidence Building), and was implemented through entry-level activities aimed at motivating people's participation “as partners” rather than as “targets” of the Project (Czech 1985: 19).

Institutionally too, IGDP followed divergent routes from its predecessor, which reflected the Forest Department's ascendance and control. A new agency, the Himachal Pradesh Farm Forestry Development Society, under the chairmanship of the state's Forest Secretary, was formed to execute the Project.<sup>9</sup> Whereas IGAP relied on local extension workers for its implementation and targeted individual farmers in addition to setting up cooperatives, IGDP promoted ‘social village organizations,’ notably village development committees (VDCs) to strengthen links with the Project. However these structures were only formed towards the mid-phase of the Project, which ended in 1989, and were not, therefore, a part of its original conception. While participatory approaches to resource management were generally experimental and somewhat *ad hoc* within IGDP, they were envisioned as an integral component of its successor, the Indo-German Changar Eco-Development Project, the last in this chronology of GTZ projects that has focused exclusively on Kangra District.

Launched in 1994 and extended till December 2006, the Changar Project, as it was commonly termed, was of the longest duration and the most ambitious of the GTZ projects in its efforts to integrate social and environmental

objectives within its design and methodology. The new project was once again under the lead agency of the Forest Department, with other sectoral departments participating by invitation and assuming a gradually declining role.<sup>10</sup> By the time of its inception, participatory resource management programs were widely in vogue as a dominant trend in international development, intersecting at the national level with India's Joint Forest Management (JFM) program, which was initiated in 1990. The project's location in Kangra's Changar area, being the lower portion of the Binwa catchment; the upper area having already been covered by IGDP, reflected spatial contiguity and a continuing prioritization of watershed development within GTZ and the state forest department. Given this area's dominant characteristic of water scarcity, and its economic marginalization, this was a convincing overall development rationale for its selection as the Project's target area.

Like the earlier projects, the Changar Project was multisectoral, covering key areas such as afforestation, soil and water conservation, animal husbandry, agriculture, horticulture, alternative energy, and livelihoods development. IGDP's watershed planning methodology was further innovated and refined by subdividing the area's watersheds into manageable ‘mini-micro watersheds,’ each composed of four to six villages, to better integrate social and ecological interventions. A second aspect of novelty in the Project's methods was its heavy reliance on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques, which were being widely promoted by international development agencies during this period. These methods formed the basis for developing village integrated resource management plans (IRMPs) formulated by VDCs that were created in all of the participating areas. To further strengthen a participatory approach, the Project's German leaders invited and encouraged the participation of individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as consultants in designing eco-income generation activities.<sup>11</sup> Three different enterprises were formed: artisans producing bamboo crafts; a women's herbal medicine enterprise; and a women's cooperative producing pickles and condiments. The formation of these resource-based enterprises through an eco-development approach that strategically included women's empowerment, another prevalent development imaginary, was thus a further significant step in the developmentalizing of the region.

The above discussion has broadly mapped imaginaries, institutions, and processes that over an extended period have shaped and textured focal interventions within

a series of large-scale development projects in Kangra District. Each has reflected a confluence of rationalities at different scales and times. Thus, IGAP illustrated Cold War development logics aimed at rooting rural populations through intensified agricultural production to curb the rise of a disaffected urban proletariat, and hence of communism, in emerging postcolonial nations. This converged with an Indian state imaginary of national sovereignty through food security, and with regional state- and economy-building aspirations. By contrast, IGDP was shaped by a different environmental imaginary at both global and national levels, which emphasized watershed management using experimental approaches to foster people's participation through 'trust building' and livelihoods strategies that did not deplete the resource base. This approach was further calibrated and consolidated within the Changar Project, which drew on by now well-established methodologies of participatory resource management within watersheds, enlisting external resource persons and NGOs to design some of its prominent enterprise-building interventions. These shifting development imaginaries were accompanied at the implementation level by institutional reconfigurations: rivalry between the agriculture and forestry departments and the latter's gradual ascendance, and a wider ambit of participation in the Changar Project through GTZ-mandated inclusion of external consultants and NGOs.

While this chronology of GTZ projects, shaped by influential imaginaries and by the institutional dynamics within which they took root, has been pivotal in constituting Kangra's developmentalizing terrain, there have been parallel as well as recent and ongoing development flows into the region. Notable among these is the ambitious World Bank-funded Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project, which combines scaling up of 'updated' micro watershed management strategies with an 'innovative' bio-carbon environmental services model in ten districts of the state. Another significant development flow has entailed a plethora of women's micro-credit and self-help group (SHG) initiatives routed through government, non-government, and commercial organizations that have flooded the region. All of these have contributed in significant ways to the developmentalizing of this region and have fostered a proliferation of local institutions that contribute their own flows, some being divergent and offering potentially promising avenues for feminist praxis. It is to these avenues that I now turn in the context of my own collaborative engagements within these rich and fertile 'fields in motion.'

## Fields of Friction: Tales of 'Betrayal' and Promise

Before describing some of my engagements within this terrain, I will briefly map the long journey that took me to Kangra and beyond along crisscrossing pathways of academic anthropology and development practice. A decade before embarking on my doctoral research, having previously worked as a consultant within several donor-funded conservation and development projects in Bhutan, I briefly visited Kangra in 1997 to explore further professional possibilities in the Indian Himalayas. During this trip, I was introduced to and stayed with a luminary of Navrachna, a state-wide network of independent activists and organizations that had established a Working Group for Natural Resource Management in 1994. Several of its members were now consultants to the Changar Project in an interesting conjuncture of local activists and a state forest department-led, international donor-funded project. They had designed and facilitated a fledgling initiative based on a core concept of eco-income generation (EIG) that was tailored to the specific economic and ecological context of Kangra's Changar belt. With its emphasis on generating sustainable livelihoods through the sale of products made from locally available surplus resources by a cooperative of women's producer groups, the evolving enterprise appeared promising as a means of reconciling environmental and livelihood concerns, while empowering women within an inclusive framework. I therefore placed it 'on hold' as a likely future focus for doctoral research. Years later within my academic program, I drew on my cumulative experience as a development professional in South Asia to explore a constructive tension between critical theory and development practice, further transected by my personal orientation towards a feminist politics and practice of location. This multi-positionality has been the impetus that led me to engage in collaborative initiatives, some of which I describe below.

Upon my return to the region to begin my doctoral research, I began to forge connections within the crowded institutional space fostered by the Changar Project and its predecessors.<sup>12</sup> Given that my past interactions within Navrachna had led me to a significant crossroads in my professional and academic trajectories, I aligned myself with its members, many of whom were now located within parallel networks competing for projects and funds. Some of these individuals were already known to me from my earlier visit to the region, and from an Indo-Canadian conservation and livelihoods development workshop that I had initiated, while others were recommended by researchers and development practitioners from my circle of acquaintances in New Delhi. Within this group, I felt

most connected, intellectually and personally, to a local husband and wife activist duo, who, through their own NGO, had been closely involved with Navrachna's work in the area since 1992. The latter, 'V,' had been recommended to me as a research assistant by another doctoral student; a role that she far exceeded in our combined research and collaborative ventures. Hailing from a *dalit*<sup>13</sup> background and through her exposure to Navrachna's work, 'V' had evolved a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which caste and gender inflected social and environmental relations in this region. She had previously used her strong and persuasive communication skills to empower women to participate in campaigns to advocate against alcohol consumption and abuse, a primary factor in domestic violence against women; to highlight reproductive issues and the value of the girl child to stem the growing trend of female infanticide; and to facilitate election processes within Samridhi, the independent cooperative of women's producer groups that had emerged out of the chrysalis I had encountered during my first visit to Kangra in the 1990s. My close friendship with 'V' and our work together forged a continuum between my research and feminist praxis through collaborative ventures in which we were equal and trusted partners.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond the Navrachna network, I was struck by the proliferation and diversity of players working on environment and development issues and women's empowerment, which have been major interlapping tributaries in the developmental flows of this region. Limited employment opportunities in an area characterized by out-migration and the lucrative potential of development work have been key factors fueling the developmentalizing process and contributing to such diversity within a small but highly competitive arena. This includes not just "standard" development actors such as activists and NGOs, but also entrepreneurs in various individual and institutional permutations such as a computer sales agent working with women producers; and a family-owned pickle-making unit that doubles up as an NGO and a training organization for women's self-help groups (SHGs). My development experience and networks, and my research and writing abilities, served as a useful 'passport' for negotiating this terrain, and led to frequent requests for my inputs and documentation support in developing proposals seeking funding. As part of my collaborative orientation and efforts to ensure my accountability to the wider community, I provided this support on a selective basis, factoring in my time constraints and comfort levels with the individuals involved. In one case, I was distrustful of the motives and agenda of a local businessman who was now 'advising'

an offshoot group of Samridhi. He approached me for a personal donation, and my refusal to comply with this request led to a personal attack in which I was cast in the role of the exploitative researcher/outsider who wanted to 'take away data' without contributing to local initiatives. While the incident highlights contrasting local perceptions of my positionality; in this case as an exploitative 'outsider,' which in turn required balancing acts between constructive engagement and self-protection against manipulation on my part, the friction that it generated did not hinder my participation in collaborative initiatives within and beyond my research site.<sup>15</sup>

One such initiative that took root within my research locale was spearheaded by the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of the area and included locally based activists and researchers, a visiting American fellow affiliated to 'V's' and her husband's NGO, and myself. This initiative built on the Changar Project's participatory watershed management approach, but incorporated evolving concepts, notably community-based ecotourism, which was being tested in other Himalayan regions, as well as innovative institutional mechanisms for promoting more equitable and inclusive resource management. The latter, in particular, signified potentially promising diversionary flows within Kangra's developmentalizing process. Prior to embarking on this venture, the group, excluding the DFO, had been meeting regularly to discuss possible areas and themes of collaborative work. Some members were old acquaintances from Navrachna and the Changar Project while others, namely the American fellow and I, were newcomers. Being diversely positioned, intellectually and professionally, we were contingently articulated (Tsing 2005) in our efforts to develop this project. As a starting point, we had identified critical threats to a watershed catchment that served as a crucial water source for the nearby town of Palampur and its vicinity. These included hydropower construction, indiscriminate use of resources such as fodder and fuelwood, and contaminated water supplies within open irrigation channels. We, therefore, constituted an informal voluntary action group to design a pilot program to: improve water quality through technical interventions; create a water users governance forum to elicit community participation, regulation, and monitoring; and generate local livelihoods through community-initiated ecotourism activities in the catchment area. We also planned to develop collaborative and funding mechanisms through the involvement of local government stakeholder agencies. Based on our discussions, I worked with the American fellow to formulate a concept note for wider dissemination and support.

An offshoot and unanticipated impact of my involvement in this effort, which significantly aided my own research, was the rapport I established with the DFO, who assisted me in procuring elusive forest records and reports on the recently concluded Changar Project. However this venture was also productive of an uncomfortable and disruptive friction. One of the participants, a non-local researcher and activist, who had established his credentials in the area through his work with the Changar Project and with a US-based researcher, was currently a consultant to a professional New Delhi-based development NGO working in the field of sustainable natural resource management. This NGO was already an established player in the region and was working on pilot schemes in Changar to promote 'incentive-based mechanisms for watershed services'; a permutation of the popular watershed imaginary of Kangra's developmentalizing process. While the group expected the researcher/consultant to facilitate the prospective Delhi-based partner's collaborative inputs within this local initiative, this did not happen. Instead, he and his team of researchers, formerly also with the Changar Project, 'took' the concept note and initiative directly to the NGO without involving the rest of the group. Positioning themselves strategically to garner the (personal) benefits of an exclusive and exclusionary partnership with the well-established and well-funded national level player, they eclipsed and diverted this promising local development flow within a mainstream, externally fed current that took it in a different direction. Clearly the participants' agendas and motivations had been very different. Though information on the fate of the initiative has not been forthcoming, we subsequently heard that the NGO had sent an appraisal team to assess the site. It seems likely that an initiative evolved locally by a group wishing to explore issues in the watershed catchment in a creative and inclusive way, injected by their prior learning experiences within the Changar project, may mutate into different forms and practices shaped by the prevailing imaginary of developing markets for watershed protection services and livelihoods that is in full flow in India and elsewhere. How this flow, initiated by development organizations and intermediaries, both local and nonlocal, will impact on the perceptions and practices of the actual users of this watershed catchment, and whether or not they will also be able to divert this flow in ways that substantively benefit them, is part of the unfolding tale of Kangra's developmentalizing process.

Before continuing further, my positioning by others and self-positioning within this initiative deserve some reflection. At a personal level, I was frustrated at times by the burdens and expectations placed on me,

for example, bearing all the costs of our trips to the catchment site, since offers to pay for food and taxi fares were not forthcoming. In this case, I was perceived by some members of the group as a privileged outsider with money, skills, and resources that were valuable to them. My friendship and association with the American fellow, a newcomer who lacked language skills and development experience, further consolidated this positioning, though I was considered an 'insider-outsider' given my Indian origin and language abilities. At another level, whereas I could have represented the group in discussions with the Delhi-based NGO, whose head and several of whose staff members were known to me, I chose not to further disrupt and amplify the sensitive local dynamics in this highly competitive context<sup>16</sup> by taking on an externally oriented representative role. Instead, I left an open space for the rest of the group, now whittled down to 'V' and her husband 'S' to 'do...whatever.' What emerged from the preceding 'betrayal,' within this open space, was a promising new collaborative venture that had not previously been attempted in this area. As I discuss below, it marked a clear divergence from prevailing development currents, and a much awaited turn towards advocacy for social justice.

My academic research had revealed the deep roots and intersections of caste- and gender-based discrimination in the region, and this was a focal concern and topic of discussion with 'V' and 'S' towards the conclusion of my work. As a fundamental axiom and idiom of inequality in Kangra (Parry 1977), caste structures social, economic, and political relations at every level. In the context of my research, it had been a constant source of friction and 'interruption' of project practices that reinforced historical inequities and exclusions of particular groups. This was especially the case for women, whose mobility has tended to be restricted to relocation due to marriage, usually within the district, and who are, therefore, more embedded within local power relations than men, who more commonly migrate to distant urban metropolises in search of employment. These concerns resonated deeply with 'V' and 'S' who had long desired a departure from the Changar development template to take up *dalit* social justice issues, but were discouraged from doing so by several of their upper caste colleagues. They were urged to 'stick to development' rather than delve into sensitive caste issues, which had always been rendered invisible in development planning. However, an unanticipated consequence of the friction generated within the watershed catchment initiative that I described earlier

was that it fueled a chain of events culminating in the ‘outcasting’ of ‘S’ and ‘V’ from their former networks, leaving them troubled but ‘free’ to branch out on their own.

Increasingly, the husband-wife duo began to interact with a diverse group of independent *dalit* activists and educationists, many of whom are Marxists. These informal gatherings quickly coalesced into a loosely structured state-wide network to advocate against various forms of social, economic, and criminal injustice against marginalized *dalit* and other groups.<sup>17</sup> During a series of meetings, the group had identified critical issues to be addressed within a ‘People’s Campaign for Socio-Economic Equality in the Himalayas,’ which they planned to launch across the state, while also extending the network to Uttarakhand and other Indian Himalayan regions. Given my close association with ‘V’ and ‘S,’ who had catalyzed the network’s formation, I was invited to participate in their intense and heated consultations and to write a detailed strategy paper that provided contextual information on the Campaign and described a wide range of focused interventions in response to selected themes and issues of injustice. This would then be widely disseminated within and beyond the state to seek advisory, training, and financial support from interested individuals and organizations that could help the Campaign to sustain itself.

The themes and interventions identified by the group largely focused on issues of economic justice and policy and legal reforms, notably around forest and land rights, livelihoods security, state budget allocations, and legal redress mechanisms. While these were undeniably broader issues of critical concern, what was missing was a specific attention to *dalit* women who suffered the double dosed discrimination of gender and caste. This generated some friction within our heated discussions on whether or not to include gender as a priority area within the Campaign. In this case, I actively engaged with this friction, supporting ‘V,’ the lone woman in the group, apart from myself, in injecting the issues and priorities of her nascent network, the Mountain *Dalit* Women’s Forum (MDWF) as another strategic focus area of the Campaign. Our research together and her activist experience had highlighted growing incidences of violence, notably rapes and assaults, and various social and economic discriminatory practices against *dalit* women for whom caste and gender inequities have intersected in powerful and mutually reinforcing ways within local axes of power and domination. In March 2007, a gathering of *dalit* women leaders from surrounding *panchayats* (local governance structures) and *mahila*

*mandals* (grassroots women’s institutions) was organized by ‘V’ as part of the local chapter of activities planned for International Women’s Day. At this gathering, the women described common discriminatory practices against them in their villages and a lack of supportive structures to empower them to articulate and challenge these practices. A collective need for a separate organizational space for *dalit* women was expressed, leading to the inception of MDWF as an informal and flexible ‘watchdog’ network that could collectively mobilize to take up incidents that came to light from across the state. As a result of our discussions with members of the wider ‘People’s Campaign,’ the need to address the specific concerns of *dalit* women through the activities of MDWF, with conceptual and practical support extended by the Campaign was acknowledged and acceded to.

To follow ongoing trajectories of these initiatives, neither the ‘People’s Campaign’ nor MDWF have found a sustained source of funding given their positioning beyond the scope of inherently “anti-political” (Ferguson 1990) development flows currently coursing through the region. Structurally, they have both remained informal and flexible, yet succeeded in extending and diversifying their membership base even beyond the state. To some extent, though integral to the wider effort, MDWF’s separate identity has been eclipsed within the Campaign, which despite having no enduring financial support, has scaled up activities since its inception. Notable among its achievements are its comprehensive assessment of the status of *dalit* in Himachal Pradesh and a documented state-wide public hearing held in 2010 to bring out issues of discrimination and abuse against *dalits*. The latter report was sent to the National Human Rights Commission, which issued an order to the state’s Chief Secretary to respond to the report within a stipulated time. These activities, reinforced by public rallies, media campaigns, and linkages to state and national level rights-based organizations have drawn public and political attention to systemic discrimination and abuse of *dalits*, particularly women, across the state. Meanwhile, MDWF has evolved into a state-wide forum with strong links to national-level *dalit* support organizations, and has strengthened its internal capacities through a leadership training program held in 2011. A promising development has been its recent decision to seek wider support and independent funding for its activities and to further strengthen its organizational capacities to establish its own gendered identity separate from but closely aligned to the wider Campaign. For my part, I continue to engage with and support both of these networks, offering encouragement as well as conceptual inputs and brainstorming, and assisting in practical ways

with documentation, proposal development, networking, and dissemination. My own feminist praxis is integrally conjoined with these locally rooted and routed initiatives, borne out of friction and facing uncertain futures. I remain convinced that they offer vistas of promise for engendering equity and social justice for those left behind in Kangra's developmentalizing process.

## Conclusion

My discussion in this paper of two inter-linked examples of my border crossings between academic research and activist/development practice, connected through specific pathways of friction, is intended to offer some reflections and insights on how feminist routes might be carved through a developmentalizing terrain such as Kangra. Such a terrain, as I have argued, is continually 'on the move' in a process of becoming. This process occurs as prevailing development imaginaries at different scales converge within particular places and institutional configurations, only to be replaced by new or 'updated' approaches that in turn bring more players into their ambit. Developmentalizing, then, engenders a rich, fertile, and inherently mobile space that is also highly charged as proliferating ideas and institutions compete with each other to garner incoming flows of funds and resources. In such a fluid and ever shifting space, the contours of which I have broadly sketched in the context of Kangra, I have aimed to show how an attentiveness to the processes and pathways of friction, which propels this movement of people, ideas and resources, offers both necessary and promising routes for collaborative feminist praxis. Revisiting feminist literature on collaborative praxis, I have argued against a prescriptive and sterile view of collaboration that seeks to control and contain friction in order to develop 'successful' partnerships across disparate sites. In its place, I have attempted to demonstrate how a feminist methodology of location work can be used to creatively engage with friction and to map its pathways, some of which may offer divergent flows from mainstream development currents towards wider and inclusive processes of social justice and change.

The two collaborative ventures that I have described are indicative of how I applied location work within my own feminist praxis. Importantly, they illustrate how friction is an integral aspect of collaboration, being inherently productive and transformative in ways that cannot be anticipated, and leading, sometimes, to new and rewarding connections when fully engaged with. In the first example of the watershed catchment, friction due to 'betrayal' and cooptation of the initiative by one set of partners for their personal benefit through their association with a well-

endowed New Delhi-based organization would seem on the surface to indicate 'failure' and a dead-end regarding further joint endeavors. However, by choosing to engage creatively and non-judgmentally with this friction within an open space, the remaining group members, sidelined within their established collegial and personal networks, were 'freed' to pursue divergent and promising initiatives beyond mainstream development currents. Through my own practice of location work, which entailed mapping the routes of friction and choosing my own pathway along these routes through a process of self-reflexivity and self-positioning, I was able to follow and support the two networks that emerged from this experience. Friction in this example, while uncomfortable, was intensely productive and transformative, leading to the formation of new networks borne of 'betrayal,' which hold significant promise for meeting shared goals of empowerment and social justice for marginalized *dalit* groups, and especially for *dalit* women who face both caste- and gender-based discrimination and injustice.

The interactions between these evolving *dalit*-centered initiatives further indicate the ways in which friction has continued to 'travel' and to operate. At the start of our discussions, during the initial period of forming and establishing the 'People's Campaign,' gender was not an acknowledged priority area of concern since the focus was on wider issues centered on land and forest rights, livelihoods security, state budget allocations for *dalit* empowerment schemes, and legal processes such as public hearings for addressing criminal injustice against these groups. However, heated discussions during the consultations served to inject and integrate gender concerns into the wider campaign and to enlist its support for the novice MDWF network. Thus, friction continued to carve its own routes through the new networks, leading in this case to a more broad-based, responsive, and inclusive structure. While both of these initiatives remain outside the framework of mainstream development flows, they nevertheless have their roots within Kangra's developmentalizing processes as responses to the exclusions that these processes have entailed.

To conclude, I have aimed to illustrate the unpredictable effects of friction within and outside of Kangra's developmental flows, highlighting its genesis and engendering role as contrasting positions and perspectives have articulated across the gaps of development practice. These effects, I suggest, are indicative of divergent routes available to feminist scholars located within anthropology and other disciplines, who seek to engage in a politics of connection across difference, and within what I have described as a developmentalizing terrain. In an inherently

mobile context of multiple and competing development imaginaries that shape such a terrain, and the proliferation of institutions and networks that they engender, a feminist politics of location and practice would need to reflect on the integral role of friction as both creative and disruptive within collaborative ventures that are planted in this fertile ground. In particular, it would need to engage with the different sources and effects of friction that manifest in such contexts: friction over resources and funds, as well as over disparate objectives and perspectives that are encountered across difference. It would also, importantly, need to further explore friction generated between development agencies and intermediaries, between the intermediaries themselves, and between these groups and the communities that they target. By placing friction conceptually at the center of their methodologies and practice, feminists and other scholars traveling on divergent routes across the gaps of critical theory and development practice, and guided by a well-crafted methodology contoured to the area of its application, may be offered vistas of ‘betrayal’ as well as promise in unanticipated ways. Both, I suggest, are rich sources of learning and reflection to be valued in equal measure.

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## Endnotes

1. It should be noted that while feminists have promoted collaboration as a potentially empowering process, it has also been mainstreamed in problematic ways as a mandatory methodological tool due to grant-making stipulations imposed by national and international funding organizations (Cottrell and Parpart, 2006; Irving and English 2008).
2. As Narayan (1993: 288) succinctly puts it: “a person may have many strands of identification available, strands that may be tugged into the open or stuffed out of sight” depending on the context and prevailing vectors of power.
3. This description responds to seminal anthropological critiques of an archetypal conception of the researcher’s ‘field’ as a discrete, stable, and sedentarized locality (see, for example, Appadurai 1988 and Gupta and Ferguson 1997).
4. The agency was reorganized and renamed as the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) or German International Cooperation. However, in this paper I refer to its old name which was in use during the period of my research.

5. See Unger (2010) for a detailed and insightful discussion of West German modernization policies as they were configured by Cold War politics during the 1950s and 1960s.

6. From 1948 onwards, Himachal Pradesh was variously defined through a series of political-administrative revisions: as the 'Chief Commissioner's Province'; a 'Part C' state of the Indian Union; and a 'Union Territory,' finally achieving full statehood on January 25, 1971.

7. According to a senior Indian counterpart of the IGAP team, Dr. Y.S. Parmar, the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, was instrumental in persuading the German and Indian governments to locate the Project in the state. It should also be noted that the construction of the state as a 'backward hill area' in need of development within the state imaginary was also prevalent at national planning levels (Planning Commission GOI 1981).

8. A *tehsil* is an administrative unit within a district in India.

9. In the case of IGAP, project activities were entirely integrated within the district level government administrative structure.

10. The continuing dominance of the Forest Department within the Project's governance structure reflected this department's increasing influence within Kangra's developmentalizing terrain.

11. The friction generated between the forest department and participating NGOs, and between the NGOs themselves, make for an interesting tale, but one that cannot be delved into here.

12. The Changar Project had been officially terminated approximately six months before I began my fieldwork.

13. *Dalit* is a category that describes members of the so-called 'untouchable' castes, notably those legally classified as Scheduled Castes and Tribes in India.

14. At the start of our relationship, 'V' informed me that she wanted to work with me but not for me as her 'boss.' I could not have been more enthused by her attitude.

15. In their classic text on ethnographic methodologies, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 83) give fair warning of how situations such as the one I describe can arise as people gauge what the researcher may offer and, perhaps, how easily they could be manipulated and exploited.

16. I should note here that I was never expected to nor asked to play a representative role in relation to the Delhi-based organization.

17. The term *dalit* usually refers to the categories

'Scheduled Castes' and 'Scheduled Tribes,' both of which are situated at the tail end of the caste hierarchy and are widely subjected to processes of social and economic marginalization and even criminal assault in many parts of India. However, within this initiative, it is used in a widely inclusive sense to encompass all groups that are socially, economically, and politically marginalized.

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