



Chutes and Ladders: Negotiating Gender and Privilege in a Village in Northern Pakistan

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The game of Chutes and Ladders metaphorically guides my reading of the spatial and material landscape of Askole village, northern Pakistan. I suggest that gendered spatiality and privilege are contingent upon postcolonial relations. This reading is based upon ethnographic fieldwork in northern Pakistan and through the reading I set out four goals. First, I hope to extend thinking on the social and spatial relations of gender, using an autoethnographic sensibility. Second, to insert colonial/postcolonial relations more squarely into the village's matrix of socio-gender relations of privilege, complicating an orientalist narrative of female subjugation. Third, that by reading spatiality in tandem with reading the landscape, the spatial and social relations of gender privilege become more apparent. Finally, I hope to add to existing geographic literature on home spaces.

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It's a crazy vertical world in Askole. People travel on their rooftops and move up-and-down on ladders [between different levels of the house]. Kids as young as one and a half years old climb up-and-down the ladders. They can barely reach the rungs but are able to climb

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them. It's really amazing to watch the motor skills and coordination in such little kids. As I sit in the garden, I can see women and kids hanging out on the rooftops. At the end of the day, they are all over the rooftops, sitting around, talking, sewing, embroidering, and just hanging out. (Field Notes 6/17/9)

Introduction

I wrote these field notes in my first days as a graduate student/researcher in the village of Askole, located in the Karakoram Mountains of northern Pakistan. Askole is a settlement of some 450 people, all of whom are Shia Muslims. As I read these notes now, my use of the word "crazy" reflects my disorientation within the spaces of the village and is, obviously, distant to villagers' own perceptions. Between 1996 and 1998, I undertook ethnographic research there, focusing upon changing household and gender relations within a growing adventure tourism economy². I participated in and observed the daily and yearly movements within and between the domestic and village spaces of Askole, with my participation greatest in the most mundane activities, such as learning to move through the gendered spaces of the village. In this article, I read the village's landscape with a specific eye towards how spatiality and the built spaces of the village constitute gendered subjectivities.



Figure 1. Interior of Askole Home, Balti Level, with Smoke Hole, Sky Hole and Ladders (Source: author)

² For more on the results of this research project, see Besio 2003, Besio and Butz 2004, Besio 2005, MacDonald and Butz 1998.

The vertical orientation of households and the up-and-down spatial movements I describe in my notes entails more than just knowing about village spaces. A part of my learning to “fit in” as a female in the village, included learning its spatial rules and practices dressed in clothing unfamiliar to me, (*shalwar kameez*), locally made long shirt and pants that I wore during my field research, and through my temporary but nevertheless embodied learning of gendered spatiality in the village. I consider myself an agile body, with no fear of heights. Yet that agility withstanding, I eventually mastered climbing up and down the steep, hand-hewn ladders without tripping myself in my new clothing. I also had to learn where to sit in a room and how to comport myself appropriately around women, men and children, all bodily attitudes that people in Askole learn through experience. I did not have a lifetime of moving up-and-down the vertical space of the homes, and my embodied participation in and learning of daily life helped me conceptualize better the dynamic relationship between spatiality, gender and privilege that is the subject of this article.

At some point during my research, the game of Chutes and Ladders became an organizing metaphor that I used think through the spatiality I had begun, if only partially, to comprehend in Askole. As I understand the game, when a player lands on chutes, it means she or he falls back to the beginning. Ladders, on the other hand, allow a player to ascend to the finish and win the game. At that point in time, I was not aware of the colonial genesis of my metaphor, and the extent of it did not become known to me until writing this article³. However, it seemed an apt way of thinking about Askole’s spaces, because in the households, domestic spaces are those most identifiable with the metaphoric chutes as the material smoke and sky holes (see Figure One). These are the physical openings between levels of the household, which allow movement between them. The domestic spaces of chutes and ladders are those most associated with women, children and the elderly, those bodies most engaged in less-highly valued reproductive activities. Going down a chute, meant that one was entering into the spaces of reproductive labors, metaphorically “lower” in social hierarchies.

³ The game has a colonial predecessor, “Snakes and Ladders,” played first in India, perhaps as early as the second century (<http://gamesmuseum.uwaterloo.ca>; <http://www.tradegames.org.uk>), and initially was a kind of morality instruction for youth. A lucky roll of the die and a player ascended a ladder towards enlightenment and nirvana, landing on squares such as “reliability,” “faith,” “knowledge” and “asceticism.” A poor roll sent a player sliding down a snake, predictably towards evil, hellish domains, with players landing on squares labeled “disobedience,” “vanity,” or “rage,” for example. In the early version, there were more snakes than ladders, although the spatial path was clear: ascendance up the ladders meant success. Snakes and Ladders was eventually appropriated by the British Raj, making its imperial way to England in the late nineteenth century, where Victorian sensibilities retained the moral function of the game but changed the virtues and vices to suit their audience (<http://www.tradegames.org>). In its even later American incarnation, the game was sanitized further and its title changed to Chutes and Ladders. Predictably, in the American version “getting to the top” meant success.

On the other foot as it were, moving up the ladders led out of the household, into the nominally public spaces of the village, those of masculine gendered bodies, of portering work and earning income. These bodies and activities are increasingly most highly-valued by villagers. As will become more clear below, public and private are awkward terms to describe space in Askole, as there is a fluidity of space and movement of bodies through these spaces, and I use those terms with that fluidity in mind. Moreover, I do not suggest that the spaces of the village and the household determine social hierarchies. There is a parallelism and symmetry between the village's spaces and social relations of privilege, which warrants further attention in examining the links between embodied spatiality and social privilege.

It is pedestrian to suggest that the spatial is social and the social is spatial. Yet through my metaphor of chutes and ladders, I began to see the complications within my initial analysis of built spaces and social relations. Gendered subjectivities in Askole form and are formed by social spaces, spaces which may be situated at the metaphoric tops of the ladders and at the bottom of the chutes. Yet, just as significantly, what first appeared to me as chutes, might well have been ladders. In my now more experienced, although still partial reading of Askole spaces, I envision domestic spaces and the bodies who move within as responding to changing social and economic relations. These, in turn, affect and are affected by a range of feminine and masculine subjects whose gendered bodies move through these spaces, especially as those subjects embody authority, either colonial or imperial. Thus, my reading of this landscape includes the material spaces of the village and the spatiality of gendered practice in those spaces.

My reading of this landscape draws from Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) notions of autoethnography to situate household spaces within the context of contemporary colonial relations. The public spaces of the village include the sustained yet transient presence of two new groups of arguably postcolonial masculine bodies: Pakistani military and police personnel, and western trekkers and mountaineers. While not all of these bodies are male, they are nevertheless gendered masculine, which has implications for the production of village spaces and the gendered practices of them. In this article, I highlight the social and spatial relationship between households and the landscape of the village within this dynamic social and historical context, drawing from recent work on autoethnography (see Butz and Besio 2004, Besio and Butz 2004, Besio 2005).

I hope that my reading of gender and spatiality in this article achieves four things. First, that in conceptualizing relations of gender privilege through the lens of *contemporary* colonial relations this helps to understand better the gendered constitution of Askole subjects, a subjectivity that has been and continues to be

naturalized in regional discourses as *jangli* (Besio 2001). *Jangli*⁴ is an Urdu/Hindi word used in the pejorative to describe people and things that are dirty and, literally, “of the jungle,” the hills and woods, in short, places at the margins of society (Shields, 1992). As Baltis use the word *jangli*, and as it is used in other parts of Pakistan, it connotes a positioning at the margins of Pakistani society, a position that I suggest Askole occupies literally and figuratively. This discourse of *jangli* situates Askole women at the margins of that margin.

Second, and following from this first goal, is that by inserting colonial/postcolonial relations into the village’s matrix of socio-gender relations of privilege, I begin to complicate a simplistic causal and orientalist narrative (Said 1978) of Muslim female subjugation by acknowledging the ongoing effects of internal colonialisms on the construction of masculine and feminine gendered subjectivity. Put succinctly, while Islam is certainly important to the production of gendered identities and privilege in the village, such as those related to discourses of women’s seclusion, colonial and postcolonial relations influence the constitution of all gendered subjects. That is, some masculine and feminine subjects have more privileges than others, which is visible in the landscape. Discourses of colonial privilege and power intersect with local discourses of *purdah* (women’s seclusion)⁵ through the militarization and “touristization” of the village landscape, especially through the sustained presence of masculine bodies associated with colonial and postcolonial powers (see Besio 2006).

Third, I hope that by reading spatiality in tandem with reading the landscape and with the relations of colonialism in mind, I am able to highlight the ways that gendered and sexed bodies come to know the village and their subjectivities as situated within wider social, economic and gender hierarchies. Moreover, that through villagers’ creative uses of spaces, they assert their status and privilege, in whatever form they have in whatever ways that they can. My reading of spatiality and the household landscape suggests that Askole subjects use space to assert their agency in strategic ways.

Finally, Askole homes and domestic spaces are, as Alison Blunt and Ann Varley state more generally of homes (2004, 3), “invested with meanings,

⁴ The English word “jungle” derives from the Hindi/Urdu word.

⁵ *Purdah* or female seclusion from public spaces is widely practiced in Baltistan. There are two plausible reasons why seclusion has not yet been adopted in Askole. First, until quite recently, the public spaces of the village did not include the sustained presence of unknown males, such as Pakistani military personnel and policemen, and there was not a compelling reason for adult women to remain secluded. Second and most importantly, agricultural production in Askole requires significant amounts of female labor because it remains unmechanized (see also Azhar-Hewitt, 1999).

emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life.” As my field notes suggest, my reading of these homes is partial, informed by my own positioning within and outside of this place. Nevertheless, I hope that this reading captures some of the “lifelihood” and livelihood of Askole, and that it contributes to geographic research into the “interplay of material and symbolic geographies of home” more broadly (Blunt and Varley 2004, 4)⁶. Before looking at this interplay within Askole more closely, it is to the wider social and material context in which the homes are situated that I now turn.

In the next and second section of the article, I outline my understanding of the historical and social context of colonialisms in the region. The continuing reorganization of Askole’s landscape and subjects’ gendered spatiality within that landscape suggests that villagers actively acknowledge and practice the presence of “new” masculine/colonial bodies. In the third section of the article, I describe the village and household landscape in more detail, outlining the daily and yearly rhythm of people’s movements, focusing on how villagers and non-villagers spatial practices. I then return to my initial metaphor of chutes and ladders, suggesting the many creative ways that Askole villagers transform apparent chutes into ladders.

Playing the Game: Social Context

In Askole, as elsewhere, nationality, ethnicity, religion and class are significant factors in the constitution of gender and privilege. As noted above, Baltis are Shia Muslims, a religious minority within the predominantly Sunni population of Pakistan. However, the marginalization of Baltis within Pakistan is only partially due to sectarian difference. The marginalization of Baltis comes to the foreground most prominently in relations of contemporary colonialism and nationality because, in effect, Baltistan remains an internal colony within the state. Baltis are not full citizens of Pakistan because of the region’s history as part of Kashmir⁷. Throughout this article, I refer to Pakistanis and Baltis as if they belonged to different countries not because of their sectarian differences, but as a reflection of the fact that Baltistan and the Northern Areas, once part of Kashmir,

⁶ See the special issue on geographies of home edited by Alison Blunt and Ann Varley in *Cultural Geographies* (2004, 11).

⁷ There is an active separatist movement in the Northern Areas. For more on the Free Balawaristan Movement, see <http://www.jammu-kashmir.com/insights/insight20000206b.html>

remain disputed territory between Pakistan and India due to ongoing boundary disputes since the time of Partition in 1947⁸.

Baltis and other people of the Northern Areas do not have rights to full parliamentary representation, resulting in chronic underinvestment in regional social services. For instance, one outcome of underinvestment is a lack of government run schools and teachers in Baltistan, leaving many Baltis functionally illiterate and with limited employment opportunities (for more on the effects on livelihoods, see <http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~kmacd/Kar-i/index.htm>). Despite this, many men find work in the Northern Area's growing adventure tourism economy where they earn much desired cash incomes⁹. Balti families continue to rely predominantly upon their own labors for subsistence, producing food and rearing animals, although they have integrated paid trekking and mountaineering work into their livelihood strategies as well (see McDonald and Butz 1998). Askole women do not porter and many of their daily spaces and places are distant to those where trekking labor occurs, although their physical distance from spaces of tourism is decreasing. I address this in more detail below.

Baltistan is important as a tourist destination and more treks and mountaineering expeditions head to this part of the Karakoram than any other part of the Northern Areas (Mock and O'Neil 1996). Given its prominence as a tourist destination and as a location within Pakistan's and India's "disputed territory," it is also a kind of occupied territory within the nation, whereby Pakistani military, police personnel and the trekking industry control movement across segments of the region's landscape. This is not an intentional collusion of military and tourism interests, but more a convergence of the neo-imperial interests of Pakistani colonialism and western tourism.

For example, Pakistan's military is responsible for the construction and maintenance of local infrastructure, which has facilitated the growth of adventure tourism along the route to K2, the world's second highest mountain and the main tourism sight/site. In order to pursue the state's military goals, Pakistani military constructed Skardu's airstrip that is capable of accommodating jet planes. The unintended effect was that the military airstrip facilitated tourism growth as well, allowing trekkers to fly from Islamabad to Skardu in an hour and eliminates a twenty-four hour bus journey. The Pakistani military also built the main road into the Braldu Valley where Askole is situated, and just below the village is the last

⁸ In 1948, a year after independence from the British Raj, the Northern Areas only nominally became part of Pakistan (Dani 1991).

⁹ Portering for western trekkers, a holdover from colonial rule, discursively continues to produce Balti porters as human beasts of burden (MacDonald 1998). This discursive construction contributes to lack of opportunities for Baltis as well.

military outpost before personnel make the trek up to the military's base camp high upon the Siachen Glacier. Although tensions between Pakistan and India have diminished somewhat in recent years, the military maintain a year-round presence nearby the village, in close proximity to Askole villagers' wheat fields and wood gathering areas.

This convergence of interests has brought an increased number of masculine bodies to the Braldu Valley. I return to the significance of this embodied military presence in much more detail below, and closely linked to the military's physical presence, Pakistani police maintain a check post in the village to make sure that western mountaineering expeditions and trekking groups have the required permits to travel into the "restricted" zone, produced by military occupation on the Baltoro glacier.

The presence in Askole by the various masculine bodies, who are more colonizer than colonized because they are associated with the nation-state, produces changes to the ways that villagers, especially Askole women, practice and embody village spaces. Females cannot travel across village spaces with as much ease, because they are wary of interacting with unknown and unrelated males, given their values about gender appropriate spaces. Askole females dress conservatively, cover their heads, and behave modestly in keeping with Islamic practice, although they do not practice a strict form of *purdah* or seclusion. Because females are responsible for significant numbers of agricultural chores, such as weeding in the village's fields, it is not feasible for women to seclude themselves at home and their discourses of appropriate female behavior differ from those nearby. In Skardu for example, inappropriate female behavior would be Askole women's visibility and prominence in agricultural spaces that are visible to unknown masculine bodies. Askole women are well aware of regional differences and perceptions of their "improper" behavior, which draw attention to their lack of religious decorum, notions of their sexuality, and fear for their personal safety as they encounter unknown and unrelated males¹⁰.

Masculine outsiders to the community have had and continue to have power to influence spatial practices in the village, particularly those who are effectively the colonizers from within the nation: Pakistani military and police personnel. These contemporary colonial relations affect and produce power relations that Askole males and females live with today. The material and symbolic landscape of

¹⁰ I am hesitant to say much about Askole women's views on their sexuality since I did not have extended conversations with them about the topic. My Balti language skills are limited, and during the time I had a female interpreter, neither she nor I pursued sexuality as a topic with Askole women. This is not to say that we did not talk about sexual topics, we did. However, we did not converse about their desires for more secluded women's spaces based on their perceptions of sexuality.

the village -- the houses, the fields and the pasture -- is one shared with masculine outsiders who pass through these spaces, although not equally and not all the time, reflecting and reproducing transcultural relations which differ from colonial relations under the British Raj.

According to Pratt (1992, 4), transculturation is the highly asymmetric and unequal relations between groups of people who engage in sustained contact, such as those between colonizer and colonized. Pratt (1992, 6) asks: "how does one speak of transculturation from the colonies to the metropolis?" She states that it is easier to think of transcultural interactions at the colonial centers. Pratt (1992, 7) suggests that in the colonies, transcultural effects are most apparent in "autoethnographic texts," or "instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms." Pratt illustrates what she calls an autoethnographic text with the example of a document written in Quechua by an Amerindian who rewrote the history of Christianity to include indigenous people (1992, 2). The document was written in an idiom that is more colonizer than colonized, but for a purpose that is more for the colonized than the colonizers. In this specific example, the Quechua document envisions a form of Christianity that includes non-western peoples. Pratt suggests that (1992, 4) autoethnographic texts call into question the "over-determined history of imperial-meaning making," by suggesting the ways that colonized subjects creatively and willfully "write back" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffen 1989), inserting themselves into colonial discursive frameworks.

As I have suggested elsewhere (Besio and Butz 2004, Besio 2005), there is room for understanding autoethnography as practice and widening the definition of an autoethnographic text. It helps in keeping in mind the ways that subjects, whose textual voices may be muted, in fact, engage with the idiom of those with more representational power. I read Askole households and the village landscape as a kind of text (Lewis 1979; Moore 1996; Winchester 1992), keeping an autoethnographic sensibility in the foreground (Butz and Besio 2004). My reading looks both the landscape as a text in which bodies' movements through the village spaces continually "rewrite" the landscape, asserting and inserting themselves into a dialogue with colonial discourses. While the idiom of the village landscape is largely a local one of wheat fields, goat and yak/yak-hybrid pastures and household reproductive activities, it is also possible to read it and villagers' bodily movements and changes to the landscape to see villagers' practices their spaces on *their* and the colonizers' terms. In that gendered bodies practicing these spaces have differential powers and privileges, my reading of spatiality and landscape as a kind of autoethnographic text offers a means of teasing apart gender and colonialisms in productive ways.

For example, as noted earlier women's and girls' face-to-face engagements with masculine western tourist/trekker/mountaineer bodies are uncommon,

although the *potential* of interaction nevertheless is a concern for villagers because of local discourses of where women should be and how they should comport themselves in those places and spaces. In Askole, women's and girls' agricultural and household activities make them visible to trekkers and military personnel, and they must account for the possibility that these masculine bodies may be present in the fields at certain times of day during the summer months. While in most instances trekkers pass through the village and do not have sustained interactions with females, there is nevertheless the chance that there may be interactions. In response to this, villagers attempt to confine western trekkers/mountaineers in tourist-only spaces with an enclosed campground and effectively limit interactions.

The construction of a fenced community campground can be understood as a writing of space to accommodate these western masculine subjects, using an idiom – and I use that term loosely – that is more western than local. Local campgrounds would not be fenced-off spaces, although they may have stonewall or some other kind of border surrounding the camping space. A local camping space is not demarcated as exclusively, although it is, in all likelihood, a masculine space in that camping spaces are associated with hunting¹¹. From an autoethnographic perspective, the purpose of the village campground is more local than western: the containment of unknown masculine bodies.

There is, though, a significant difference in villagers' interactions with Pakistani military and police personnel. These male bodies cannot be easily excluded from village spaces, because they are Pakistani and bodies of state authority. Women and girls may meet them at any time in the fields, and may be required to assist male family members in entertaining police or military in their homes. In many ways, the presence of these masculine subjects is more difficult for villagers to negotiate because of their apparent cultural similarities to villagers as Muslims and Pakistanis. Villagers cannot "rewrite" public village spaces to exclude military and police personnel. However, as I will suggest in more detail below, they can and have rewritten household spaces by creating "guest rooms," which can effectively contain male bodies. On the surface, guest rooms as a rewriting of household space appear to make Askole homes more Pakistani by making Askole homes less-three dimensional, adding on to the middle-floor of the home. Yet the ways that villagers use these spaces for weddings and to assert localized authority, suggest a creative use of space that is more strategic than at first glance.

¹¹ The high pastures of the village that some men, women and children inhabit in the summer months, have summer shelters. These are more like small homes, and I do not include these as campground spaces.

In the next section of the article, I describe in some detail these household and village spaces looking more closely at the ways in which bodies move through the daily and seasonal activities required to maintain Askole's livelihoods. I return to the examples immediately above in more detail, providing a more thorough autoethnographic reading of guestrooms and their material and symbolic significance as simultaneously a chute and ladder.

Chutes and Ladders: The Material Landscape

Askole homes are built along a vertical axis of three levels within a nucleated village settlement pattern. The uppermost level of the household is the rooftop and is a kind of shared space; that is, the rooftop space imperceptibly joins to a household – sometimes more than one household – adjacent to it. The middle level of the house is a living space and used as a kitchen space during the spring-autumn period, and is at ground level. Families use the subterranean level of the home as a living space, predominantly in the winter months. Household-based activities such as cooking, caring for family, weddings and birthing occur in middle and lowest levels of the households.

In Askole, sounds and bodies move fluidly in and out of the three main levels of the house, and along two main axes of flow: up-and-down. The rooftop, the *balti*, and the *katsa* run the continuum from a public area – the rooftop – to a private area – the *katsa*. The *handoq* or rooftop is the uppermost level of the house. The *balti* is the summer, spring and early-autumn kitchen, one ladder below the rooftop. The *katsa* is the winter subterranean kitchen with adjoining animal pens, two ladders below the roof. In Figure One, the *katsa* is not seen in the photo, but is located immediately below the ladder on the left side of the photo.

Although homes are close to one another, a body does not travel between homes through an interior passageway between adjoining structures. One must go up to the roof and enter through the roof opening to the *balti* and climb down a ladder, or enter through the door on the main level to enter the home, which is at ground level. The up-and-down movement through space via the ladders acts as a kind of “speed bump” to interactions, effectively slowing but not eliminating them. Ladders rest on the edge of the entry holes between levels: the *thud khong* or *khnam khong* (sky hole) between the *balti* and the roof, *khar khong* (See Figures One and Two).

The architecture of Askole homes is one that is no longer common throughout Baltistan, although remains in use in the villages farthest from the regional capital. In Skardu, the three-tiered construction and use of space is disappearing for a host of reasons, which include but are not limited to changing economic orientations to a monetized over semi-subsistence economy where

animal husbandry is less necessary. In the following sections, which are organized according to seasonal usage, I read the village's landscapes and the spatial movements of bodies within its spaces to elucidate the recursive relationship between gender, privilege and spatiality.



Figure 2 Ladder to Katsa through the Smoke Hole
(Source: author)

Late autumn and winter

In the wintertime, the vertical axis of the household is at its deepest. Families move their kitchen into the subterranean kitchen in the fall, after the harvest is finished¹². Dug out from the ground on the lowest level, and surrounded by a sheep and goat pen, it is warmer than the ground-level *balti*. The lowest level kitchen is smoky because there are no stovepipes to ventilate the cooking fire; it is dark because the only natural light comes from the smoke hole above or from

¹² This varies from household to household. One woman said, “after the wheat is picked, then we move into the *katsa*.”

homemade oil lamps. On winter days, a light snow may fall through the smoke hole down into the *katsa*, although it remains relatively warm. Families cook over an open hearth that consists of three large stones that form a stand for a teakettle, pressure cooker and chappati iron. Pots and plates are kept to the side in a cupboard, and people sit around the cooking fire on woven rugs, animal skins or on the wooden platform to one side. There are no chairs or beds per se in the *katsa*. Immediately surrounding the cooking area is a sleeping space filled with padding, straw covered by bedding and a cotton mattress. Wintertime is associated with living in the lowest depth of the house, and the movement of bodies continues to flow between the three different levels of the home. There is little sense of alienation in the winter because there is so much socializing. However, women often commented on their liking for spring, summer, and fall over winter because they could be outside with friends, rather than in their smoky *katsa*.

Spring, Summer and Fall: Upside

When spring emerges, families plant their fields and move up to the middle-level of the house. It is the largest part of the home, airy and bright, about three to four meters below the rooftop. The *balti* level has a living and cooking area, also housing a storeroom (or sometimes many store rooms) and the composting dry latrine. Women organize their spring-summer-autumn kitchen in much the same way as the downstairs winter kitchen, although the cooking area ventilates more efficiently and some homes have built-in a stovepipe for greater ventilation. Like the lowest level of the house, the *balti* kitchen has a hard-packed dirt floor. It has a raised sleeping platform that families share, although many families choose to sleep on the rooftop beginning in early summer and through the autumn nights. In summer, many of the villagers sleep outdoors on the rooftop because it is cooler and offers a stunning view of the clear night sky at 3000 meters.

Above the *balti* level, is the roof, which is a large flat dirt area that is effectively a living space that adjoins the adjacent households. It is difficult to tell where one family's household roof ends and another's begins, and usually the adjoining household is a close relation, a brother to the household head, for example. On the rooftops are brush-barriers piled up waiting to be burned, punctuated by the smoke holes that lead down into the *balti*, and dotted with women's shelters. The rooftops are pathways from one home to another, and given the large flat expanse, they are also ideal for just sitting around and talking, sorting rocks from buckwheat or wheat, and for children, playing with friends. Women keep small shelters on the rooftop. In many ways these shelters are the most private spaces that exist in the home for women (and sometimes men), and are paradoxically located amidst the most public space of the home, the rooftops. Families make the shelters of willow and mud, over a dirt floor (Figure Three). The

households and especially the rooftops are female's primary public meeting place aside from the fields, which surround their homes.



Figure 3 An Askole Rooftop with Shelter with Sky Hole in foreground (Source: author)

Autumn is an especially busy time of year, even after the completion of wheat harvesting. To augment the winter fuel supply, women and teenaged daughters gather brush from the village outskirts. If the collection area is close to the village, a woman may go alone, although men and women gather wood together in areas where they may meet military personnel. Girls and young women collect dung each evening after animals have roamed the fields. These are occasions for socializing while doing work (Besio 2003).

Late-autumn wood and dung gathering trips also provide a space for impromptu potluck meals in the fields. When time in the field or away from home exceeds an hour or two, women will often bring a pot to make tea, or some flour and butter to make a snack called, *phe*. During the harvest, it is common to take the morning tea while working. In addition to these field-based meals, there are potluck meals that are a little different because the sole reason for going to the fields is to have *hlto zan* or “hungry food.” Away from the watchful eyes of village bodies of female and male authorities, *hlto zan* are like parties. They are raucous, bawdy, joyful, and slightly secretive, away from the eyes of mothers'-in-law, mothers, husbands, sons and brothers. In a sense, the gatherings are sanctioned

spaces of everyday resistance (Scott 1985, 1990), far from the spaces of the household. Events like these are recalled fondly during the winter months, when younger women have few spaces other than their homes to socialize. *Hlto zan* are also significant because they take place in spaces that encroached upon by western trekkers/mountaineers but especially by military and police personnel.

“Winning” the Game: Negotiating Gender and Space

In Askole, some bodies, especially those masculine bodies most associated with colonial powers have more ability to move through space in whatever way they choose. Increasingly, female subjects are wary of running into military men, because of perceptions and reported incidences of abuse towards women. Nearly all the women I asked told me they were afraid of military personnel, although not of trekkers or mountaineers. Females are especially cautious in winter and fall of crossing paths with military personnel. Because the fields are busy in the summer months, women and girls have fewer safety concerns, knowing that there are many bodies passing through the fields and that local males are generally present. Events like *hlto zan* that take place during fall harvests and become much riskier with the possibility of encounters with military personnel.

Women and girls are active in public spaces of the village such as the fields. However, within the context of the village and Baltistan more widely, Askole’s village center, where there are shops, the mosque and *mattam-sara*, this is only nominally public space. Because social relations in Askole are intertwined and closely-knit, the whole village is a de facto a private space, although adult female subjects use these spaces less than males. It is only in the last twenty years that the sustained presence of unrelated masculine bodies – military personnel, police men, trekkers and mountaineers – have been present in the village, has the need to treat the village as a public space arisen.

There are few restrictions to where people can be at different times, and ones that do exist are produced relationally. When military or police personnel are present and women cannot avoid them, they keep their heads down, eyes cast away. In turn, these males are supposed to maintain Askole women’s modesty with like-minded modest behavior, although they may not. Military personnel and police do not treat Askole females with the deference they do to other Pakistani women. For their part, Askole males are very careful about protecting village women from unwanted interactions with unrelated male bodies, such as military or police personnel. These gendered interactions speak to regional and local discourses of

Baltis as *jangli*, that is, of ethnic and regional discrimination more widely, and specifically to Askole females as the most marginalized *jangli* subjects¹³.

Trekkers and mountaineers are largely unaware of the intricacies of discourses of *purdah* and regional discourses of discrimination, which are undoubtedly familiar to Pakistani military and police personnel. Male and female trekkers fall into the category of unknown masculine subjects, although their presence in the village is more easily contained by the campgrounds and that trekkers/mountaineers rarely spend more than a night near the village and their movement patterns are predictable. However, keeping Askole females at some distance to military and police personnel is becoming difficult for villagers, because the fields are public spaces where these unrelated masculine subjects pass through year round and at any time of day. Thus, the village spaces such as the fields have become more like chutes. While very few outsiders enter Askole homes and they remain predominantly a place of female bodies, young bodies, and elderly or invalid bodies, this, too, is changing.

Extending hospitality to guests (*meman*) is important to villagers. Villagers commonly extend hospitality to visiting family members and villagers from nearby. To foster political and economic ties with outsiders, such as guides or police personnel, village males offer water, tea and meals to outside visitors. Unless guests are close relatives, such as the head woman's parents or siblings, most entertaining takes place in the middle-level of the home and in guestrooms, which are *new* additions to Askole households. Notions of hospitality, especially trekking-related shows of hospitality, have facilitated the construction of these contemporary spaces, and many households have built "modern" guestrooms with windows built onto the middle (*balti*) level of the house. Guestrooms have earthen floors, often covered with a tarpaulin, and in the winter equipped with a wood-burning stove. Unlike the *balti* or *katsa*, one enters these rooms through a door from the *balti* level, rather than climbing down into them. During my fieldwork, I lived in two such guestrooms. Under day-to-day circumstances, guestrooms are spaces where males socialize, closing entry to women and girls. However, there are ceremonial instances, such as weddings, where the guestrooms open to females.

Wedding ceremonies take place between dusk and dawn, with males congregating in the guestrooms to sing and celebrate with the groom. Females sit in the lowest level of the house, the *katsa*, with the bride, except during those points of the ceremony that the bride and groom are in the same space and he comes into the *katsa*. When this occurs, males come down the ladders to sing and fête the groom, while female bodies young and old scatter to the perimeter of the

¹³ Men in other parts of Baltistan and Pakistan comment regularly on their low-opinion of Askole women, describing them as dirty and ignorant.

room. Until recently, most of the feminized part of the wedding was celebrated downstairs, the normative wedding landscape.

Yet one wedding I witnessed during the course of my fieldwork was different, reflecting the adoption of down-country Pakistani and Skardu wedding practices. When the bride left her natal home and arrived at her new home, the groom's family home, she did so from the guestroom in each respective household. Her father's second wife told me that it was her late-father's request and part of her marriage arrangement that she have a "modern" wedding, a Pakistani wedding. Because of his high-standing in the community, her father could practice space differently – albeit practice space through his daughter's body and her movements - - more like Pakistanis. Symbolically, this change in the spatiality in this Askole wedding draws attention to and reflects the changing architecture of their homes. Increasingly, Askole domestic space organizes horizontally. While this sort of architectural change may be glossed as part of the dynamics of cultural transition, it also reflects a use of the colonizer's space as a means to assert and insert villagers' identities into wider discourses of privilege.

Conclusion: More Chutes than Ladders

According to the up-down landscape and the spatiality I have described in this article, a landscape with fewer physical chutes and ladders suggests that the daily movements and what may be conceived of as a spatiality of privilege, could be lessened in lived gendered subjectivities. The up-down movement through the spaces of the household reflects a spatial hierarchy of productive over reproductive space. However, as households "modernize," building guestrooms and horizontally extending in space, the vertical dimensions of the home are diminishing as they have in other parts of Baltistan; doors and windows may replace ladders as the barriers to interaction.

The spaces of the village and households are increasingly those that village women, men, and children share with a range of bodies who are not from the village. Askole people now share their village and household spaces with outsiders, primarily masculinized bodies related to either tourism or state authority. The presence of these masculine subjects such as western trekkers, Pakistani police and military personnel is producing a village landscape that may seem to circumscribe female subjects' ascent of the "ladders" into the village's fields, although an autoethnographic reading complicates such an exclusionary reading.

First, the construction of campgrounds confines trekkers. Although campgrounds also exclude females, women and girls can nevertheless use the spaces of the fields with at least a partial knowledge of where the trekkers/mountaineers may be camped. This affords them access to the field space

and interactions with other females, which they profess to cherish. Second, while the military presence in the fields makes them riskier spaces for agricultural work and play, especially in the winter months, the construction of guestrooms produced a more modern wedding-scape, one which afforded at least one woman to assert her family's and her own status more prominently. Certainly, in this last example, a door became a ladder of sorts, allowing this woman and her family to assert their privilege and as not *jangli* subjects.

As village spaces become more masculinized, household spaces may become more exclusionary and a more feminized space. This reading suggests that even as homes become less three-dimensional and symbolically less-hierarchical, they are nevertheless both chute and ladder. It is likely that mechanized agriculture will make its way to Askole as villagers' incomes increase from portering work. Female subjects may then be relieved of some field labors, working more in their homes and out of the public view. This may allow female subjects to practice seclusion more like other Baltis, thus making them less *jangli* and more like other Baltis and Pakistanis. For the western trekkers and mountaineers who pass through Askole, female subjects who remain more in household spaces, may then appear to be more subjugated, but that reading fails to account for local discourses of women's seclusion which see it as a "good," allowing them to be "better" Muslims. Once again, what may seem like a chute is a ladder, complicating the metaphors employed by researchers. Nevertheless, my reading and its guiding metaphor leads me to reconceptualize my understanding of village spaces and its embeddedness in spaces distant to the village. In that, an autoethnographic sensibility applied towards reading the landscape and the spatial movements of gendered bodies in the village highlights villagers' strategic uses of space.

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