The Everyday Politics of Water: Services and Citizenship for the Urban Poor in Kathmandu, Nepal

The Case of Bansighat, an Informal Settlement

Stephanie Butcher
I, Stephanie Butcher confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed,

**Stephanie Butcher**
Acknowledgements

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the ‘everyday politics of water’ inside a single informal settlement in Kathmandu, Nepal, and how this shapes experiences of citizenship for diverse residents across the settlement.

A key contribution of this thesis is an analytical framework unpacking the ‘everyday politics of water’. This explores the ‘politics’ of how daily material practices around water are produced by, and productive of, gender, ethnic, or tenure relations. This is set against wider urban trends unfolding in Kathmandu, including environmental and demographic change, gender relations and social norms, and policy and programmatic approaches of the water sector. This thesis particularly offers a contribution in linking these scales—bridging the analysis of urban drivers in Kathmandu with a deeper analysis of how localized social and power relations are negotiated through water. This notion of everyday politics is secondly linked with a feminist reading of urban citizenship. The thesis claims that everyday negotiations around water are linked with citizenship values including recognition, redistribution, solidarity, and self-determination. This supports an analysis of water interventions beyond the technical ‘nuts and bolts’ of provision, to a deeper understanding of the broader embodied, discursive or symbolic role water infrastructure plays, and how this shapes citizenship experiences for diverse individuals.

Eight months of qualitative and participatory field research in Bansighat, Kathmandu, is presented in three analytical chapters across scale: city, community, and body/household. Each chapter takes as its entry point two different material practices, demonstrating how these are underpinned by different values or perceptions, and how this in turn reflects or remakes social relations. In doing so, this thesis explores how social-power relations are related to: belonging in the city (chapter 5), participation in water management and community life (chapter 6), and how water is accessed across public and intimate spaces, and by diverse bodies (chapter 7). Ultimately this develops a rich portrait of the ways in which diverse residents relate to water, as well as to citizenship.
Impact Statement

This thesis is anticipated to have an impact both within academia and for practitioners working with urban services for low-income residents.

In particular, this thesis was conceived within the space opened by the international focus on community-based, decentralised and participatory approaches to urban services management. Such approaches have been touted as making a critical contribution to service delivery, as well as in relation to wider goals—including democratic practice, empowerment, or citizenship. While acknowledging this link, this thesis stems from the assertion that institutional responses to water provision (often focused on securing improvements in material access and/or representation in local organizations) must also take into account the sets of social and power relations which influence how people relate to different water infrastructures.

Accordingly, this thesis presents a framework (of everyday politics) as a way to make visible and analyse some of these relations. Conceptually, this thesis therefore holds impact with wider academic literature which has sought to explore an intersectional analysis of development interventions, offering an analytical lens which can be applied elsewhere. Furthermore, the application of this framework to the case study context also generated a number of practical reflections and recommendations related to equitable water provision Kathmandu, which are detailed within each analytical chapter, as well as in the conclusions of this work.

Beyond the contributions embedded within this text, the research process was in of itself linked with the ongoing advocacy of partner organizations Guthi and Mahila Ekta Samaj. To this end, a photography exhibition and several action-planning workshops were held at the completion of field research. This resulted in the production of a ‘Water Charter’ with residents from settlements across the city, presented to municipal and utility authorities. This Charter and the photographs produced for the exhibition continue to form a part of ongoing advocacy for these partners on the ground.
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAP</td>
<td>Bagmati Action Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENPHO</td>
<td>Environment and Public Health Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPE</td>
<td>Feminist Political Ecology</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>Gender and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>KMC</td>
<td>Kathmandu Municipal City</td>
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<tr>
<td>KUKL</td>
<td>Kathmandu <em>Upatyaka Khanepani</em> Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>KVTDC</td>
<td>Kathmandu Valley Town Development Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>KVWSB</td>
<td>Kathmandu Valley Water Services Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LICSU</td>
<td>Low Income Consumer Support Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLD</td>
<td>Million Litres Daily</td>
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<td>NMES</td>
<td>Nepal <em>Mahila Ekta Samaj</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>NTNC</td>
<td>Nepali National Trust for Nature Conservation</td>
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<td>NWSRC</td>
<td>National Water Supply Regulatory Commission</td>
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<td>PGN</td>
<td>Practical Gender Needs</td>
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<td>SDI</td>
<td>Shack/Slum Dwellers International</td>
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<td>SGN</td>
<td>Strategic Gender Needs</td>
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<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nation’s Environmental Program</td>
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<td>Water User Group</td>
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Chapter 1  Introduction

This research seeks to develop a concept of the ‘everyday politics of water’—as a way of understanding how diverse residents of a single settlement of Kathmandu, Nepal differently experience water services—and by extension—citizenship.

As a note to begin: I am first a sociologist and political scientist. Thus, I understand water to be a lens of analysis—a way of unfolding different social and power dynamics through the more visible nuts and bolts of water provision. As such, while the material artefacts of water (pipes and pressure, quality and quantity) are fundamental to this exploration, this is always explored in relation to the ways diverse individuals relate to these sources—the practices through which they are used, the narratives that are told around them, the priorities which inform different technological interventions. This is also approached with a deep commitment to social diversity, seeking to reveal the richness of identities and experiences related to water infrastructure, which exists even within a single ‘community’. This thesis therefore starts from the perspective that: “inequitable social relations ensure that some individuals, by virtue of their class, gender, ethnicity, and so on, are better placed than others to deploy resources, to shape rules, and to exercise power and rights” (Cleaver, 2012, p. 131).

On the one hand, this thesis draws upon significant literature which has sought to outline the influence of water and social power. These authors have been most influential in their examinations at the city-scale—exploring the interplay of major infrastructure in creating socio-spatial differentiation across the city (Bakker, 2003; Graham and Marvin, 2001; Loftus, 2009; Loftus & Lumsden 2007; Swyngedouw, 1999, 2004). On the other hand, a different body of work has explored the ‘everyday practices’ of residents—tracing the diverse strategies which are adopted by residents as a way of obtaining water resources in the absence of networked infrastructure (Hackenbroch & Hossain, 2012; Peloso & Morinville, 2014; Velzeboer, Hordijk, & Schwartz, 2018). Where this thesis offers a contribution however, is in the gap between these two bodies of work—seeking to bridge the analysis of urban drivers of scarcity and unequal provision, with the analysis of how localized social and power relations informs—and are produced out of—everyday practices. In doing so, this thesis proposes the concept of the ‘everyday politics of water’—exploring the everyday material practices around
water, and the values and perceptions which underpin them, for how this generates social differentiation within the wider contextual environment of Kathmandu. This thesis makes the claim that bringing these elements together is crucial in order to unpack the social-political implications of infrastructure provision and use—opening up discussions on how infrastructure itself can both reflect old or generate new power relations and social subjectivities. This is key for practitioners and academics alike working around issues of social diversity, water, and the upgrading of informal areas—making explicit the ways in which diverse sets of residents (differentiated by gender, caste, or ethnicity, for example) may have differing capacities to benefit or make use of different infrastructure, as well as how this can either challenge or entrench processes of social marginalization.

Secondly, this thesis seeks to embed this discussion of everyday politics within a citizenship framework. From the perspective of practitioners working towards equitable urban service delivery, the concern with citizenship is critical in the context of the international focus on community-based, decentralized and participatory approaches to natural resource and/or urban services management, which has linked infrastructure provision with normative aims related to citizenship, political participation, or empowerment (Chhotray, 2007; McGranahan & Satterthwaite, 2006). It is also adopted in recognition of academic literature which has outlined the links between citizenship and services—examining the citizenship tensions of water seen as economic good in line with waves of privatization (Bakker, 2003), or focusing on the ways in which everyday actions to secure basic necessities around water can be understood as a citizenship claim (Holston, 2009). Thus, an analysis on this level is valuable for outlining not only how people are managing water as a vital resource, but also for how this links (or not) with broader understandings around who is recognized as a citizen. As such, this thesis adopts the concept of substantive citizenship as an evaluative mechanism—a way of unlocking the implications of negotiations around water. In other words, the ‘everyday politics of water’ are understood as the terrain through which the experience of citizenship is being tested, defined and achieved.

In order to develop this idea, this thesis focuses upon Bansighat, an informal settlement in Kathmandu, Nepal—and the canals, wells, community tanks and pipes through which residents undertake daily negotiations around water. An analysis is presented at
three scales: the household, community, and city, each thematically focused on negotiations around access, participation, and belonging. These chapters seek to reveal that just as social relations can influence how infrastructure is used, so too can infrastructure reshape social relations. Ultimately, this thesis argues that looking at these ‘everyday politics of water’ helps to reveal the different opportunities or constraints diverse residents have to move closer to a sense of substantive citizenship in Kathmandu.

1.1 Situating the Research

This thesis was originally conceived in partnership with the international non-governmental organization (INGO) Practical Action—out of a research collaboration focused on a particular water intervention in Kisumu, Kenya. One of the striking findings of this research project were the multitude of symbolic roles and discursive framings that were linked with the laying of water pipes within the settlement, as well as the complex ways in which certain residents were able to take the benefit from this project, while others were not. Moreover, the outcomes of this intervention were also clearly influenced by the Kenyan policy environment related particularly to privatization and decentralization, which both opened up new spaces for ‘community’ participation, while also limiting infrastructural investment to profitable areas. At the time, these interactions were explored under the heading of ‘everyday water practices’ of residents, bringing together the material, discursive, and symbolic elements of water (Butcher, 2015).

This research highlighted many of the themes which will be explored throughout this thesis: representativeness and diversity within community collective action on water, the symbolic role of services for residents in consolidating security, the unevenly distributed (gendered) burdens, the importance of the location of infrastructure, the diversity of ways in which people were actually collecting and using water, and the ongoing and underlying influence of wider trends related to urban development and the water sector. What was clear was the connection between the material and the intangible—the ways in which water technologies themselves were linked with social power and recognition in the city. However, when composing the focus of this thesis, ‘practices’ seemed an inadequate term to refer to the diversity of factors which shaped how water (and power)
was experienced—encompassing not only daily routines, but also how practices themselves were both reflective and productive of social relations—expressed at different scales. This experience informed the motivation to develop a conceptual framework for understanding this dynamic interplay—what is named here as the ‘everyday politics of water’.

1.1.1 Theoretical Influences

1.1.1.1 Water and (Everyday) Social Power

Recent work particularly from the fields of political ecology and geography has sought to disentangle and demonstrate the associations of material practices and social relations, tracing the mutually constitutive nature of physical infrastructure, identities, and the exercise of power (Bakker, 2003; Loftus, 2009; Loftus & Lumsden 2007; Swyngedouw, 1999, 2004). Such examinations have outlined the ways in which infrastructure technologies are inscribed with power—an authority often rendered invisible through a focus on the de-politicized technical aspects of pipes, nuts and bolts (Coutard, 1999). In cities of the Global South, this has particularly been explored in relation to continued differentiation in networked provision, drawing on historical narratives related to colonialism, authority, and social stratification to outline how relationships of power determine who has access to and control over resources and technologies. Not only may the absence of services be emblematic of a lack of rights, but case studies have exposed the ways in which this lack of infrastructure provision may be used as the basis for further displacement, delegitimizing claims on services, land, and rights (Desai, 2015; Everett, 2001). Together, this scholarship has developed a deep political ecology to account for continued differentiation in networked provision, how infrastructure is accessed and controlled by different identities, and the role of service provision in ‘making’ different subjectivities across the city (McFarlane & Rutherford, 2008).

Adopting this political ecological approach is a constructive starting point to unpack the multiple and co-constituting governance processes at work within (the often de-politicized) context of infrastructure provision. It makes claims on the inherently political nature of service provision, mapping how social processes inform the investment and prioritization of different material technologies. This analysis becomes a
useful backdrop against which to examine the continued inabilities of many residents within cities of the Global South to obtain access to basic infrastructural services, such as water and sanitation.

At the same time, this analysis does not necessarily shed light onto how these inequalities are experienced at the day-to-day level by residents of the Global South’s informal settlements. Though these studies often foreground the role of space—exploring how and where infrastructural investments are made—this does not allow for an understanding of how this plays out, for example, in different settlements across the city. Likewise, it does not reveal the everyday ways through which residents themselves seek to address these inequities, focusing more on structuring factors rather than the everyday agency of diverse women and men around water infrastructure. As such, while serving as a critical diagnostic tool, literature focused at this scale can struggle with drawing conclusions on the opportunities for doing things differently at the microscale—for building upon positive processes which may already be ongoing in urban settlements.

As such, this thesis has also been approached with a deep political commitment to exploring ‘the everyday’. This draws from a rich literature focused on ‘everyday practices’—aimed at outlining the multitude of ways residents are actually manoeuvring in order to obtain the basic necessities of life. This manifests in the idea that the everyday, often routinized, actions of residents are a valuable and critical site of analysis, particularly for those that are differently excluded or marginalized from wider (in this case: urban) processes (Bayat, 2000; Scott, 1985, 1990). Authors within this tradition have made the claim that everyday actions represent the ways in which excluded individuals can carve out niches in unequal environments, offering lessons for how to potentially transform (an unequal) status quo.

With specific reference to water, several authors have examined ‘everyday water practices’ in different informal urban localities (Hackenbroch & Hossain, 2012; Peloso & Morinville, 2014; Velzeboer, Hordijk, & Schwartz, 2018). These authors reflect an interest in outlining the multiple ways through which residents actually access water—often outside of ‘official’ or networked infrastructure—as a way of shedding light on the complexity of factors which inform different practices (Allen, Dávila, & Hofmann,
These studies seek to make visible these multiple practices (whether considered ‘coping’ or ‘claims-making’), as a way of understanding how residents are actually managing sources, and how this may challenge the status quo.

At the same time, studies within this tradition may leave behind many of the valuable contributions highlighted above, around the structural conditions of the city which have shaped the allocation and provision of infrastructure. This therefore runs the risk of falling into the trap of a localized analysis, assuming that inequities can be rebalanced through everyday actions, without acknowledging the wider urban drivers which have given rise to these conditions in the first place. As such, this thesis seeks to work in the space opened up between these two bodies of literature. On the one hand, it seeks to identify those urban development trends and structural conditions unfolding within the city, for their influence upon the distribution and patterning of water infrastructures. On the other, it outlines the everyday ways through which residents negotiate or try and reshape this environment, with a particular focus on understanding the (often unequal) sets of relations through which these practices are enacted.

In doing so, this thesis most closely approaches the lens of feminist political ecology (FPE), which explores the everyday micro-politics of communities, and how this is experienced across intersectional identities (e.g. O’Reilly, Halvorson, Sultana, & Laurie, 2009; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, & Wangari, 1996; Truelove, 2011). This complements traditional political ecology by broadening the perspective from an emphasis on class relations, to encompass an intersectional approach to identity, stressing in particular the cross-cutting role of gender in shaping the experience of natural resources. It simultaneously reveals other scales of analysis—moving from the traditionally city-centred focus (e.g. Bakker, 2000; Gandy, 2008; Swyngedouw, 1995) to the micro-scale, to emphasize the everyday ways in which resource distribution and power is linked with different identities.

The lessons from this literature is adopted in this thesis in two ways. Firstly, is its emphasis on scale—as authors within this tradition have opened up an exploration of the (gendered) impacts of wider socio-economic shifts at the household scale. In relation to water, for instance, this lens is helpful in demonstrating how market pressures have led to an emphasis on ‘productive’ uses of water, and deprioritized reproductive uses of
water in the homestead, or highlighted the tensions between the principles of economic
efficiency and the aims of social equity (Ahlers, 2005; Ahlers & Zwarteveen, 2009;
Harris, 2009; Laurie, 2007; Nagar, Lawson, McDowell, & Hanson, 2002). This thesis
seeks to build on this, contributing particularly in trying to link scales—seeking to look
at the relations between the household/body, community and the city. It looks not only
at how wider urban drivers in Kathmandu have shaped the experience of water
infrastructure for diverse residents, but also at how different practices around
infrastructure seek to mimic, challenge or rupture some of the rationalities espoused at
wider scales.

Secondly, works within a FPE lens have also explored the mutually constitutive nature
of gender and resources. On the one hand, this tradition recognizes that gender shapes
the differential allocation and access to resources, highlighting the necessity of granting
women greater control over these services (Agarwal, 1997a; Cornwall, 2003). However,
this literature also goes further—making the claim that not only do gender relations
influence the experience of urban services—but identities are, in fact, constructed
through everyday practices and discourses related to nature and resource allocation
(Elmhirst, 2011; Nightingale, 2011b; Sultana, 2009). As such, the exploration of how
diverse residents negotiate around water can also be deconstructed for the ways in
which this reflects and generates social subjectivities—or “the ways in which people are
brought into relations of power, or subjected, which is part of how identities emerge” (Nightingale,
2011b, p. 123).

It is this motivation which drives the shift from everyday practices to politics. In other
words, this thesis looks at water as the arena through which (gendered) identities are
shaped, contested, and renegotiated. Taking an intersectional approach, it demonstrates
how different social categories (particularly around tenure status, location in the
settlement, and ethnicity) influence—as well as are consolidated through—material
practices around water infrastructure. Nor is this examined simply as a set of localized
negotiations, but as intimately embedded and in dialogue with wider process of urban
change. This is expressed here as the ‘everyday politics of water’.
1.1.1.2 Participation, Collective Action, and Gender

Secondly, this thesis also draws from discussions around natural resource management, and particularly work which has looked at new spaces of participation through community based management (Manikutty, 1997; Marks & Davis, 2012). This literature is helpful in developing the link between services and wider goals (in the case of this thesis: citizenship). Claiming a range of outcomes, the link between participation and resource management is a widespread priority in international practice, and has entailed the creation of spaces—such as water committees, councils, or management groups—which seek to grant residents greater decision-making authority at the community or municipal level. More narrowly, this may be understood as improving the efficiency and efficacy of service provision through the integration of diverse priorities into its administration and operation (e.g. World Bank, 1993). More ambitious are claims of the emancipatory potential of these new spaces of participation, seeking to engage excluded identities in governance spaces to support greater autonomy, authority, and decision-making (Cornwall, 2002; Gaventa, 2004). In particular, great expectations are placed on the role of women’s participation in local institutions of decision-making, including the management of water and natural resources (e.g. UNDP, 1990; UNICEF, 1995).

From an academic perspective, the international interest in spaces of participation in resource management has been heavily influenced by Ostrom’s (1990) design principles, which have outlined a series of supportive conditions for collective action. Work within this tradition (Gardner & Walker, 1994; Ostrom, 1986, 1990; 2010; Uphoff, 1992) has been fruitful in outlining the kinds of institutional structures that can better support the functioning of participatory user groups, and this logic can be clearly traced within international approaches to decentralized management, which have likewise emphasized ‘good governance’ through the creation of formalized spaces with clear rules (Chhotray, 2007; McGranahan & Satterthwaite, 2006).

While acknowledging the critical influence of Ostrom’s work, this thesis positions itself with approaches which have nuanced this tradition—outlining the ways in which an uncritical engagement of both ‘gender’ and the ‘community’ fails to account for the ways in which diverse identities are differently positioned to take part in collective institutions (Cleaver, 1998; Mosse, 1997). Studies within this approach emphasize the historical, ecological, and socio-economic factors which structure both formalized and
less visible spaces of decision-making, affecting the allocation of resources. This literature has offered valuable contributions on the ways in which even institutions that have been designed ‘justly’ may be adapted and altered through the interplay of power relations of communities (Cleaver, 2012). Such perspectives challenge the notion that ‘participation’ in the management of resources will automatically lead to emancipatory outcomes, and distinguishes between the act of ‘giving voice’ (particularly to static and homogenized identities), and the exertion of political agency (Robins, Cornwall, & Lieres, 2008). This literature is enriched particularly by adopting a feminist lens—drawing from a range of authors that have sought to outline the gendered nature of water collection, use, and management (Ahlers & Zwartveeen, 2009; Bapat & Agarwal, 2003; Meinzen-Dick & Zwartveeen, 1998; O’Reilly, 2010). In doing so, this research seeks to make visible some of the power relations which shape how resources are allocated, used, and controlled. Engaging with this literature is critical, as a significant portion of this thesis is focused on a particular pro-poor water intervention which was unrolled in Bansighat (amongst other settlements), aimed at granting greater decision-making control to residents over water services. As such, this thesis contributes to both empirical and practical discussions of community participation in the management of resources, seeking to unpack how identity shapes different entitlements around resources and within community managed institutions.

In order to do so, this thesis explores the work of a group of federated women working in Bansighat (and across Kathmandu and Nepal)—Mahila Ekta Samaj (‘women together’), and the ways they mobilized to advocate for infrastructural improvements in partnership with the local utility. While acknowledging the significant work of Mahila Ekta Samaj, this thesis also builds on discussions opened up by those (few) works exploring the localized internal hierarchies which can emerge through these ‘federations of the urban poor’ (Doshi, 2013; McFarlane, 2004; Roy, 2009). Adopting the lens of the ‘everyday politics of water’ (particularly at the community scale) is a fruitful way of opening up an analysis of how residents are collectively organized, how this is related to ‘institutional’ spaces of participation, and how these experiences are shaped for those inside and outside of these ‘community’ structures. As such, this thesis contributes to scholarship particularly through presenting an intersectional analysis of community collective action.
Lastly, while the significant contribution of this thesis lies in developing a lens to unpack the ‘everyday politics of water’, this also requires an evaluative mechanism to explore the implications of these differential outcomes for residents. As such, this thesis takes ‘citizenship’ as a key framing concept—outlining a normative set of values against which these everyday politics can be held.

This concept is engaged in recognition of the strong relationship between services and citizenship. With specific reference to the water sector, for example, citizenship exclusions have been explored particularly in the context of the wave of neoliberal privatization and liberalization of public utilities (Goldman, 2007). Work in this vein has examined how these policies have been wielded to systematically generate and legitimate uneven distributions in the name of efficiency—with detrimental effects for the urban poor (Bakker, 2003; Laurie, 2007; McFarlane & Rutherford, 2008). Similarly, empirical studies have sought to outline the ways in which devolved management transfers responsibilities from state or private utilities to communities, without necessarily a concurrent shift in authority, resources, or capacity-building to support groups in these new roles (Perreault & Martin, 2005). This can be understood as emblematic of a wider project which Harris (2009) refers to as ‘neoliberalized natures’, in which water users are recast from ‘citizens’ to ‘consumers’, thereby altering the mechanisms through which entitlements are claimed. This thesis echoes these authors in the perspective that marginalization from services can also be understood as a part of broader exclusions from citizenship, highlighting the value of examining the two concurrently.

At the same time, this thesis recognizes the inherently contested nature of citizenship. Traditional notions—particularly as understood as a set of rights and obligations bestowed by the nation-state—have become increasingly eroded with waves of privatization, migration, and the retreat of the welfare state in line with neoliberal globalization (Benhabib, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1999; Holston and Appadurai, 1996; Purcell, 2003). Feminist authors in particular have challenged the vision of liberal citizenship as equally bestowing legally enshrined rights upon the population, highlighting the range of gendered exclusions this assumption contains (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Lister, 2003; Young, 2011). Meanwhile, ‘the urban’ has emerged as a new locus for citizenship struggles and experiences, with a broadened attention on how
claims on basic necessities can hold the potential to build into a more radical citizenship agenda (Butcher & Frediani, 2014; Holston & Appadurai, 1996; Purcell, 2003).

This thesis particularly contributes to this theme by drawing together a feminist reading of citizenship, and literature which has politicized the link between citizenship and services. In recognition of this, this thesis develops a vision of citizenship which is consistent with a feminist approach, and which is grounded in the realities of the urban poor. Rather than seeking a defined notion, it outlines four normative principles which can be used as an evaluative mechanism to explore negotiations towards substantive citizenship—named here as recognition, redistribution, solidarity, and self-determination (Fraser, 1990; Kabeer, 2005).

Adopting citizenship in this way allows this thesis to draw conclusions on how the ‘everyday politics of water’ engaged by residents opens or closes possibilities to move towards these different values of substantive citizenship, and for diverse individuals. While there are a few key influential texts which have linked everyday struggles to obtain basic services with the concept of citizenship (i.e. Holston, 2009; Miraftab & Wills, 2005), this thesis complements and broadens existing discussions with a deep analysis of the internal politics of everyday actions. In particular, this thesis posits that it is necessary to avoid dichotomizing different spaces or practices of citizenship—from the ‘invited’ to the ‘invented’, from the ‘insurgent’ to the ‘institutionalized’—seeking to understand the fluidity through which residents move through different spaces.

Likewise, it moves away from ‘romantic’ visions of the everyday actions of residents in informal settlements, seeking to unpack the ways in which different practices may replicate, rather than rupture, unequal social relations, thereby not building towards substantive citizenship. In doing so, this thesis conceptualizes citizenship as a “set of political performances in different arenas” (Cornwall, Robins, & Von Lieres, 2011, p. 24), making the case for the everyday as a valuable site for the exploration of citizenship, and for the negotiation of social relations as inherently political.

1.1.2 Research Objectives

Drawing from these bodies of literature, this thesis makes the claim that exploring the everyday politics of water can help bring together the everyday material practices around
infrastructure, and how this is related with more intangible elements around social and power relations—across scales from the city to the body. This is linked with the claim that everyday negotiations around water are also representative of negotiations around identity—opening up new spaces and ways for exploring what constitutes politics, and for exploring the experience of citizenship.

Thus, key to this thesis is the development and exploration of the key conceptual categories that make up the everyday politics of water. In order to do so, a single settlement in Kathmandu, Bansighat, was chosen as the focus of analysis, as a way of delving deeper into the ways these everyday politics play out even within a single ‘community’. As will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter, this meant focusing on the dynamic interaction between the daily material practices of residents with different infrastructure, the values and perceptions which underpin these different practices, and how this is linked with social relations across diverse identities. Drawing from the tradition of feminist political ecology, these localized negotiations are held in tandem with ongoing priorities or framings as present within Kathmandu water policy and urban development priorities, as well as influenced by social and gender norms. This is undertaken as a way of outlining the mutually constitutive nature of these wider trends, and the everyday ways residents are manoeuvring within them—whether reflecting, contesting, or renegotiating. Ultimately these everyday politics of water are discussed in relation to citizenship—exploring the implications of these negotiations for different citizenship values—as a way of unpacking how diverse individuals are (or are not) able to move closer to a substantive vision of citizenship.

As such, this thesis is motivated by the following overarching question, and three sub-questions:

**What are the everyday politics of water, and how does this shape the boundaries and possibilities for diverse informal settlement residents to move towards substantive citizenship in Kathmandu?**

**Q1: How do ‘everyday politics’ shape the experience of water services for diverse informal settlement residents in Kathmandu?**
Q2: How are these ‘everyday politics’ embedded in, responding to, or contesting wider trends related to urban development in the city?

Q3: In what ways does this advance (or constrain) different values of substantive citizenship for diverse residents?

1.1.3 Empirical Focus

In order to develop this analysis, Kathmandu, Nepal was identified as providing an extremely rich ground for empirical exploration. Here, questions of democracy and inequality can be traced through the story of water, with a strong relationship between a stalled democratic project, and reforms in the water sector. This capital city demonstrates several characteristics which make it a valuable focus of analysis. Firstly, it represents a city rich with diversity. Nepal is a country containing 102 different ethnic groups, cross-cut with distinctions in language, religion, caste, across its distinct regions. Questions of identity have driven a deeply contested political history, linked with social exclusions emergent out of the Hindu monarchical rule, and a legacy of stratification out of the (once legally-binding) caste system. Contestations around politics and identity culminated in a devastating civil war (1997-2006) and ensuing Constitutional crisis, which paused local governance across a period of twenty years.

Secondly, the city is in the midst of a late but rapid urban transformation. While Nepal as a whole remains predominantly rural, Kathmandu has been expanding exponentially, generating belated conversations around urban planning as a result of the growing population and pressures on urban services. This is felt nowhere more so than in the city’s rapidly expanding informal settlements. Though their scale is currently small (representing less than 10% of the population), they are growing at twice the rate (12%) of the city as a whole (UN-Habitat, 2010). Rising land prices have squeezed the urban poor predominantly into precarious plots of land alongside the Bagmati or Bisnumati riversides, linked with risks both from physical threats (pollution and cross-contamination of water sources, flooding hazards), as well as more intangible threats related to stigma and blame for the pollution of the river. Improvements to these highly-polluted riversides have been outlined in the prolific Bagmati Action Plan, which has set out a future vision for the city based upon reclaiming the areas in which informal
settlement residents are living—placing cultural heritage in tension with the rights of the urban poor.

Thirdly, while Nepal is one of the most ‘water rich’ nations in the world, Kathmandu currently serves only 55% of its population with a highly erratic and poor quality municipal system (NGO Forum, 2005). The city has been in discussions for nearly thirty years over the (yet to materialize) Melamchi Dam project—with the promise of major infrastructural investment from donors such as the Asian Development Bank fuelling the shift to privatized service delivery. Meanwhile, the challenge of inadequate water provision has pushed residents (poor and wealthy alike) to engage in unsustainable groundwater drilling practices, further depleting the long-term sustainability of the water system—or simply to purchase expensive and unregulated jarred water, at considerable expense for the urban poor.

Finally, beyond these contextual features, the city also has a long history of social mobilization. In particular, the women’s federation of the urban poor—Mahila Ekta Samaj—has been active across Kathmandu and Nepal, working to address the material and recognitional exclusions faced by the urban poor. In Kathmandu, this has culminated in advocacy around bringing a pro-poor water intervention to select settlements, including Bansighat—decentralizing the delivery and management of subsidized water through community managed tanks or standpipes. This intervention provides a particularly fruitful point of analysis—examining both the shape of the social organization, as well as priorities held within the water sector to understand how well this intervention supports both access to services and broader goals around citizenship. Taken together, Kathmandu provides a rich terrain for exploring many of the themes that inform the theoretical motivations of this thesis—bringing together issues of identity, politics, and water—and particularly for the growing numbers of informal settlement residents.

1.2 Thesis Structure

The shape of this thesis proceeds as follows:
Chapter 2: Opens with a literature review of the key debates and theories which animate this thesis. This starts by outlining a vision of citizenship, opening up its lived or ordinary dimensions, before grounding this within a feminist perspective. It secondly outlines the infrastructural turn in urban studies, examining infrastructure as linked with social power, and exploring its gendered implications. It finally outlines the shift from everyday practices to politics—grounding this specifically through the lens of water, and drawing on authors which have explored how water practices can generate or reflect social differences. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to outlining the conceptual framework of the ‘everyday politics of water’, which will be employed throughout the thesis.

Chapter 3: Discusses the methodology which has informed the fieldwork research. It outlines four principles which inform the feminist research ethic. It explains the research design and sampling strategy across the Bansighat settlement. The last section offers reflections on a series of ethical tensions which emerged throughout the fieldwork process, drawing from my research diary.

Chapter 4: Gives an overview of the contextual terrain of this study. It examines the wider environment of political transition and social identity in Nepal, before scaling to Kathmandu. It outlines some of the major urban and water policy trends, before discussing the particular challenges of informal settlements in the city. Finally, it offers an introduction to the key characteristics of the Bansighat settlement.

Chapter 5: The first analytical chapter is aimed at the city-scale, in the sense that it uses Bansighat as an illustrative example for strategies used by residents of informal settlements across Kathmandu. In doing so, it engages with two material practices: the performance of ‘ecological’ behaviours, and the payment of bills on services, exploring how these are linked with perceptions of being clean and ordered and enhancing a sense of security. It explores how this has been strategically used to generate greater legitimacy for certain residents in the city- while simultaneously disenfranchising those that cannot comply with this imagery. As such, this chapter is labelled the ‘everyday politics of belonging’, referring to ways in which a sense of belonging (or exclusion) in the city is constructed through material practices.
Chapter 6: The second analytical chapter is focused at the scale of the community. In particular, it explores the pro-poor water initiative which was carried out across the neighbourhood, designed to grant Bansighat residents the ability to manage water services within the community. In doing so, it explores two material practices around the construction of community water tanks, and their spatial allocation, and how this became linked with different perceptions of ‘ownership’ and scarcity. Critically, while some of the installed tanks are managed by the women’s federation of the urban poor, others became linked with different kinds of user groups, creating rifts in Bansighat across space, and inside and outside of *Mahila Ekta Samaj*. As such, this chapter is labelled the ‘everyday politics of participation’—as it is focused upon the differential abilities for residents to become involved in both the management of services, as well as community life.

Chapter 7: The final analytical chapter is focused at the household scale—labelled here as ‘the everyday politics of access’. This focuses on the complex ways in which diverse residents assemble their ‘water portfolio’, which broadens the concept of access beyond an account of the numbers and types of water sources. In particular, it examines two material practices around the purchase of jarred water and the supplementation with free public resources, nuancing the perceptions residents have around their ‘willingness and ability’ to pay, and how well they are ‘managing’. This helps animate how well diverse residents are able to access different water sources, as well as how certain practices generate compromises on emotional or bodily autotomy for different people.

Chapter 8: This last chapter finally offers concluding remarks on the thesis. It seeks to draw links and lessons across the three analytical chapters, wrapping up the key messages from this research. This is reflected upon for its theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions. Limitations are identified, as are as key spaces for future research.
Chapter 2  ‘Everyday Politics’ and Infrastructural Citizenship: Building a Concept

2.1 Introduction

At its heart, the interest of this thesis in developing the ‘everyday politics of water’ stems from the recognition that institutional responses to water in informal settlements (often focused on securing improvements in material access, and/or representation in local organizations or water user groups) may not take into account the multiple and overlapping sets of social relations which affect how material technologies are used (Cleaver, 2012). Similarly, while active residents’ groups in Kathmandu (and cities throughout the Global South) have undertaken impressive work to address both material and recognitional claims around water and rights, these actions are also shaped by their own social categories and notions of entitlement. In other words, localized social and power relations intersect to dictate how water resources—and by extension, citizenship—is negotiated and experienced.

As such, the theoretical work of this thesis lies in examining this relationship between citizenship and water, unpacking how the everyday practices of residents around infrastructure is linked with a broader citizenship project. Key to this exploration is the recognition of intersectionality, with an attention to how gendered, classist, or racialized relations are played out through mundane practices, creating different possibilities for diverse residents to experience a sense of belonging in the city, participate in water management and community life, or access water equitably. In order to do so, this thesis develops a framework of everyday politics of water—explored as the ways in which social differentiation is produced through material practices, operating at multiple scales—in order to unfold the boundaries and potentials for diverse residents in a single settlement to feel like citizens in Kathmandu.

In order to develop this idea, this chapter moves through three overlapping bodies of literature. It firstly outlines the concept of citizenship, drawing upon authors that have written variously on ‘urban’ or ‘ordinary’ citizenship. This unsettles traditional liberal notions, outlining citizenship as a negotiated set of acts and practices, and locating this at the urban scale. It ultimately draws from a feminist perspective to propose several
values which can guide a vision of urban citizenship for the urban poor. Secondly, this chapter engages with the infrastructural turn in urban studies, making reference to authors which have outlined infrastructure as a socio-political process. This is likewise complemented with reflections from feminist authors, to explore the gendered dimensions of water and social power. Three prevalent ‘myths’ are deconstructed, troubling simplistic interpretations of gendered water management.

Finally, these literatures on gender, citizenship, and infrastructure are brought together with the concept of the ‘everyday politics of water’. In order to do so, this section firstly traces the theoretical roots of the early ‘practice’ theorists, before shifting from a discussion of practices to politics. It examines the implications of this shift, drawing upon key authors that have sought to make this link between infrastructure and citizenship, and complementing this with gendered reflections. It proposes the notion of a ‘water portfolio’ as a way to ground and make explicit the terrain through which citizenship is negotiated through the micro-politics of diverse residents. Together, this informs the analytical framework proposed at the end of this chapter, exploring how these everyday politics of water generates different possibilities for linking water infrastructure with citizenship—across scales, and diverse bodies.

2.2 Building a Definition of Citizenship

This thesis opens with an exploration of the concept of citizenship. This term is explicitly adopted with the understanding that it can be politically useful for groups who find themselves excluded from basic social and political rights, particularly within the unrolling practices of neoliberal globalization. For such groups, articulating these deprivations particularly as citizenship exclusions helps to make the connection between claims around material goods, and broader rights or entitlements in society (Friedmann, 2002; Gaventa, 2004; Holston, 2009; Holston & Appadurai, 1996). As such, this thesis posits that this concept holds profound relevance in the context of cities of the Global South, and in relation to water infrastructure.

Nonetheless, the linking of material needs (such as water) and citizenship also generates new questions around its form and substance, opening up a rich terrain around ‘the political’. That is, as traditional citizenship conceptions are challenged, this also opens
up new possibilities of how and where political agency is exercised. As such, the next section develops a definition of citizenship which resonates particularly with the struggles of the urban poor. It proceeds in three parts: it firstly outlines, and then unsettles, ‘traditional’ notions of the concept, drawing upon authors that have discussed both ‘urban’ and ‘ordinary’ citizenship as a new space to examine political contestations. It secondly bridges this work with feminist critiques, outlining what urban citizenship expressed in ordinary life means with attention to gender. And finally, it proposes a set of values which can underpin a vision of urban citizenship for urban dwellers.

2.2.1 Liberal Citizenship in Flux

The concept of citizenship is highly contested, used throughout various traditions to refer to a plurality of arrangements. As a starting point, many modern authors make reference to the definition offered by T.H. Marshall (1950) as a: “status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed” (p. 28-29).

This notion of (liberal) citizenship first emerged within modern western political thought (in the UK post-war era) to refer to the relationship between individuals and their democratic nation states¹, and entails membership in a community, rights, and duties. This relationship is referred to as the “social contract” between the state and its citizens, in which the state is responsible to provide social ‘goods’, and citizens are excepted to fulfil particular duties— such as paying taxes, abstaining from crime, or participating in decision-making and public life (i.e. through voting). The role of the state is largely seen as enabling citizens to act upon their rights, with the choice to do so left to individuals (Oldfield, 1990). As such, this vision is largely founded upon a conception of individualized, formal and legalistic rights, which is meant to support and protect citizens (Isin and Turner, 2002).

Marshall’s influential text Citizenship and Social Class (1950) played a seminal role in modern discourses of citizenship. It was particularly critical for outlining three levels of

¹ While there are several different ‘traditions’ of citizenship (i.e. communitarianism, civic republicanism, radical), the most prominent in contemporary capitalist nation-states today is that of ‘liberal’ (also known as ‘Westphalian) citizenship, and is accordingly the focus of analysis.
rights which comprise citizenship: civil, or the rights necessary for individual freedom (i.e. freedom of speech, thought, and faith); political (the right to participate in the exercise of political power); and social (i.e. welfare and security). This construction was particularly notable for the introduction of ‘social rights’: including the right to health, education, and other goods of social welfare. This reflected the idea of the basic responsibility of the state to provide a bundle of resources to support social and economic well-being—asserting that only through the fulfilment of these rights would people be able to participate fully in the political and civil realm. Marshall’s work thus deals largely with the intersection of citizenship and class, seeking to outline how justice could be experienced across social classes and within the changing capitalist economy.

This classic model of citizenship has increasingly come under pressure, and particularly with the changing relationship between the state and its citizens in line with (neoliberal) globalization, urbanization, and rising inequality (Benhabib, 1999; Holston & Appadurai, 1996; Purcell, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 1999). From one perspective, a growing number of inequalities—evidenced by tangible exclusions from basic rights such as food, water and shelter—have highlighted the fact that many people who enjoy the ‘legal’ status of citizenship are disenfranchised from its promises. In urban centres of the Global South especially, the deregulation of services, valuing of capital, and reduction of spending on social programmes has eroded the social contract, calling into question the fundamental guarantees of social rights the state was meant to provide (Friedmann, 2002; Holston & Appadurai, 1996; Purcell, 2003).

Meanwhile, calls from a feminist perspective have sought to demonstrate that the “universal” model of liberal citizenship—based on a vision in which class, gender, ethnicity, religion or any other social relation is treated equally—is a fundamentally flawed proposition (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Lister, 2003; Young, 1989). For authors such as Young (1989), an emphasis on universality masks deep exclusions across identities who do not conform to the “ideal” of the (white) man. Likewise, Lister (2003) problematizes the different elements of Marshall’s definition—membership in a community, rights and obligations, and equality. She makes the point that these terms cannot be taken for granted, and can themselves be contested—asking what makes a ‘community’; who is responsible for bestowing rights; and how equality is best served. These critiques call attention to the fact that even those who are formally included
within provisions for citizenship may, in practice, experience exclusions—experienced, for example, by those who may have different sexual, religious, or cultural practices from those in the majority of the nation-state.

Finally, trends such as globalization and migration have called into question the appropriate scale at which citizenship is practiced—either expanding upwards to talk about global, international, or ecological citizenship—or moving downwards to discuss democratic participation in the city (Baubock, 1994; Ong, 1999; Purcell, 2003). In both cases, this has shaken the relationship between citizenship and the nation-state, exploring other modes of accessing rights and entitlements. Calls have emerged to explore citizenship as historically contingent—seeking to explore the ways diverse individuals may conceptualize that state—or the state its citizens (Corbridge et. al, 2005; Isin & Nyers, 2014; Stokke & Erdal, 2017). Taken together, these discussions move away from the formal legalistic guarantees of citizenship to a discussion of substantive citizenship, or the ways in which roles and relationships (structured by identity) may influence its experience and practice.

### 2.2.2 New Definitions of Urban Citizenship

The above discussion has highlighted variegated ways in which citizenship is experienced, drawing attention to the reality that the normative aims of citizenship do not universally reach residents. That is, while citizenship exists as an ideal formulation of the relationship (and associated rights and duties) between citizens and the state, the reality of this experience is often a profound inequality in the ability to access this status, or the associated material rights.

Departing from this point, several authors have explored these contradictions particularly in light of ongoing urban transformations, drawing attention to the idea of ‘urban citizenship’. As identified by Purcell (2003), challenges to a nation-centric notion of citizenship have taken three forms. The first is the rescaling of citizenship—whether upwards to the international arena, or down to the regional, city, neighborhood (or other) scales. The second is reterritorialization in which the nation-state no longer becomes the unquestioned site of political loyalty. And finally, is its reorientation, in which notions of differentiated citizenship come to the fore to challenge the notion of
citizenship as universal and experienced equally. These observations assert that the nation-state is not the only significant territory of belonging, and introduce an important politics of scale. Critically, within these formulations, the ‘local’ is seen not as a static lower rung space of governance in a nested hierarchy, but rather as a dynamic political space. Terms such as ‘glocal’ (Swyngedouw, 1997) or ‘jumping scales’ (Smith, 1993) are indicative of these more active interpretations, in which the local scale is collapsed and brought in dialogue with scales above (or below).

Secondly, while questioning the scales and spaces of citizenship, other work has queried the notion of citizenship as a legal status, opening up a discussion of how citizenship is actually experienced. Isin and Nielson’s (2008) ‘acts of citizenship’ moves away from the understanding of citizenship as a static set of rights, introducing the idea of citizenship as a series of actions played out in everyday life. They distinguish between acts—visible contestations or rights claiming moments, and practices, which are mundane activities carried out in daily life which nonetheless hold implications for citizenship. Echoing this, contemporary writing on citizenship has therefore broadened Marshall’s traditional definition—understanding citizenship as both a status and a practice (e.g. Cornwall, 2002; Gaventa, 2004; Miraftab & Wills, 2005). Such formulations have been explored under a variety of names—referred to as active, inclusive, or participatory citizenship (Gaventa, 2004; Kabeer, 2005; Lister, 2007). These terms highlight the importance of being attuned to more ‘socially embedded’ concepts, including “norms, practices, meanings, and identities” (Isin and Turner, 2002, p. 4). As outlined by Watson (2003), this also draws attention to the gaps between how the state views its ‘citizens’, and the everyday acts which marginalized women and men undertake in order to secure material and political wellbeing. Citizenship thus may not be understood as universal, but rather as geographically and historically specific.

Such conceptions take on a particular significance for residents of informal settlements in cities of the Global South. While by no means the only example of citizen disenfranchisement, here the pressures of intensive urban migration, neoliberal globalization, and inadequate planning have driven a deep wedge between the rich and poor, and the inability of much of the urban poor to access clean water, dignified housing, or secure livelihoods are indicative of a fundamental crisis. Such realities have
made evident the ways in which formal citizenship is increasingly divorced from the experience of substantive rights, generating the necessity of more active conceptions. Yet it is also from within these spaces of exclusion that authors have precisely sought to elucidate new citizenship formulations, moving away from the conception of the state as the dispenser of citizenship rights. To this end, key authors have outlined the potentials of an emancipatory politics of place emergent from disquiet in urban living (Isin, 2002; Holston, 1999, Wekerle, 2013). For example, James Holston’s (2009) conception of ‘insurgent citizenship’, explores the experience of citizenship in the ‘realm of everyday and domestic life’ (p. 246). Speaking of mobilizations in Brazil, he makes reference to grassroots groups which have organized and made claims around the right to housing and infrastructure in response to the inadequacies of the modernist project of the state. Critically, he raises the point that while these struggles are waged over the access to goods and services, they should be understood as a part of wider contestations around the recognition of diverse aspirations for living in the city. In his words:

the city is not merely the context of citizenship struggles. It’s wraps of asphalt, concrete, and stucco, its infrastructure of electricity and plumbing also provide the substance. The peripheries constitute the space of city builders and their pioneering citizenship (2008, p. 8).

Likewise, speaking of the federations of the urban poor in Mumbai, Appadurai (2001) outlined an arsenal of tactics through which residents seek to expand the horizon of citizenship, calling this ‘deep democracy’. For Appadurai, it is precisely because of the contradictory promises of the state and everyday experiences of marginality that grassroots groups mobilize, and in the process, make new claims on citizenship in the city. He presents the case of mobilizations in Mumbai, which draw on wider transnational advocacy networks to speak to the concerns of their locality, as a new kind of ‘governmentality from below’.

What these formulations share is that the urban is a critical arena for citizenship contestations, as explicitly linked to material deprivations experienced in daily life. In doing so, residents enact claims to the city on the basis of their contributions to the city, rather than through liberal conceptions of equality or rights enshrined in law. For informal settlement residents, this corresponds with Roy’s (2003) position that
citizenship is: “a claim that is always staked but never fulfilled, outside of any framework of enforceable rights” (p. 78).

Yet, following Isin and Nielson’s (2008) distinction between acts and practices, such negotiations do not only need to take place within visible contestation-based mobilizations. To this end, Staeheli et al. (2012) proposed the concept of ‘ordinary citizenship’, moving the analysis of citizenship negotiations beyond visible ‘rights claiming’ moments, to a “status, feeling, and practice” enacted through daily (and often mundane) acts (Staeheli et al., 2012). This formulation explores how the legalistic aspects of citizenship are enacted through everyday practices, and indeed, how everyday practices can reshape legal status and rights.

This interpretation supports a nuanced reading of the actions of informal settlement residents which may not correspond with the notion of ‘insurgent’ citizenship. Indeed, in the absence of property rights, informal settlement residents across a range of contexts have undertaken a variety of mundane tactics to demonstrate different forms of legitimacy to ‘the state’ – from the payment of bills of services, to obtaining ration cards, or undertaking enumerations. Das (2011), for instance, documents the importance of ration cards for residents in an informal colony in Noida, India—not only to claim welfare entitlements, but also as a valuable proof of residence in the absence of tenure security. She highlights the objects (whether cards, electricity, or water services) through which residents negotiate an incremental citizenship, identifying these infrastructures as the ‘material embodiments of the right to dwelling’ (p. 327). Nor are such practices confined to the urban poor. To this end, Ranganathan (2014), documents the assiduous payment of bills by property owners with informal tenure in the wake of a large scale infrastructural project. Focusing on the ‘peripheralized middle classes’ she examines these practices not as resistance or insurgence, but as a: “range of tactics and strategic positionings to advance material interests and respectability” (p. 595).

Recasting citizenship within this understanding calls for an approach focused not on the: “proceduralist realm of rights, but in a “material” realm grounded in everyday practice” (Anjaria, 2001, p. 65). In other words, it is through the material necessities of everyday life—housing and pipes, transport links and social services—through which the relationship between the citizenry and state is negotiated, with profound material and symbolic
impacts. Such examination draws attention to the range of tactics and instruments through which claims are negotiated, from the visible moments of protest, through to those quiet ordinary actions which may nonetheless be capable of generating political subjectivities (Turner, 2015). This opens up a fruitful space of discussion on how both legal frameworks and everyday practices are intertwined to open or close different processes of marginalization for informal settlement residents.

2.2.2.1 Urban Citizenship Through a Gender Lens

Drawing attention to the ‘everyday’ experiences of citizenship allows for a deeper understanding of how residents experience citizenship beyond a status or legalistic rights, or in contestations and claims-making on the state. Yet too often while opening up (crucial) discussions around ‘ordinary’ or lived experiences, authors have missed the discussion of gendered experiences of the city, with critical implications for citizenship. Indeed, feminist authors have brought to the fore the particular ways in which urbanization is gendered. That is, as the urban form changes, this intersects with gendered norms to shape how diverse women (and men) can move through the city, with consequences that can reify, rupture, or renegotiate social relations. For instance, discussing a slum rehabilitation scheme in Mumbai, Walker, Frediani and Trani (2013) explore how the shift to high rise buildings generated new burdens particularly for young women with disabilities, severely limiting their possibilities to move about freely in the new site, which had not existed within the previous housing configurations. Other literature has examined planning interventions for their gendered impacts—examining, for instance, how the choice not to provide shopfront space on the ground floor of housing projects can limit the productive activities of women (Larsson, 2001). Likewise, Levy (2013), writing on transport planning, highlights the need to draw attention to the structural conditions which shape the different travel choices made by women and men. She proposes the concept of ‘deep distribution’, which:

builds the foundation for an understanding of transport based on the articulation of power relations in public and private space at the level of the household, community and society, which generates the structural inequality and dominant relations under which decisions about transport are negotiated and made (p. 5).

These literatures outline the ways in which gendered norms, roles, and responsibilities are negotiated through space, unsettling the dichotomy of public and private
experiences. Critically, these authors highlight the ways in which the changing urban form is linked with the production of social subjectivities, making explicit the intimate relationship between the city and the body.

Meanwhile, from another perspective, feminist authors writing on citizenship have challenged the supposedly universalistic claims held within normative discussions of citizenship. This conception of right-based citizenship has been critiqued for masking differences across identities, privileging dominant identities (often white men) over others (Young, 1989). For example, Kabeer (2005) has documented the ways in which ethnic or religious minorities may experience cultural or legal barriers even where they remain official ‘citizens’ of a state. These critiques hold clear resonance in the case context of this thesis, as the Nepali caste system denied social and legal recognition to certain groups for many years. In response, feminist authors point to the need for the construction of a ‘pluralistic’ citizenship, which recognizes:

- women participate in a variety of arenas in public life, the diversity of identities, interest, and ideologies that exist within the category ‘women’, the number of roles and identities that each woman has, and the number of formal levels within political institutional and organization in which women participate (Wekerle, 2013, p. 248).

Echoing the discussion above, feminist authors have been critical in querying the supposed distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres held within traditional notions of citizenship. Within liberal conceptions, politics—and therefore citizenship—has traditionally been the reserve of public arenas, what Fraser (1990) identifies as institutions of the state, paid employment, or public discourse. For Fraser, this focus has left behind issues which may occur within the private household, with critical ‘practical political’ (p. 57) implications for women. This is especially well-evidenced, for example, with issues of domestic violence or reproductive rights, where the need for state regulation within household spaces has blurred these boundaries (Moral & Dersnah, 2014).

These critiques offer a revised conception of citizenship, which informs this thesis in three key ways. Firstly, it opens up different possibilities for relating to a political project for those identities, such as women, who may be traditionally disenfranchised form the public sphere—as a result of exclusions from waged employment, restrictions on
mobility, or duties in the household (Pateman, 1995; Walby, 1994). That is, battles over everyday needs such as housing or water—traditionally considered within the ‘reproductive’ realm—can themselves be considered political, and therefore broaden the practice of citizenship beyond formalized spaces in the public sphere. This accords with accounts of the multiple ways women have accessed public political life—from voluntary associations, to using the language of motherhood as an entry point for advocacy (Fraser, 1990). Yet this also draws attention to the intersectionality and heterogeneity of women (and men). Thus, even while opening up new spaces for the construction of citizenship, this thesis calls for attention to the different social locations occupied by different individuals, and how this structures different practices.

This need to unsettle the dichotomies of public and private secondly draws attention to the ways in which citizenship is constructed in intimate spaces of the home. For example, drawing from the experience of post-apartheid South Africa, McEwan (2001) has demonstrated how the experience of unequal gender relations in the home—‘private patriarchies’—limits the realization of full citizenship for many women. In doing so, she demonstrates how conflicts in the home are critical in conditioning the extent to which women are able to participate in the public sphere. Oldfield, Salo, and Schlyter (2009) likewise used the metaphor of ‘crafting’ to express how citizenship is constructed in intimate spaces, played out across bodies through mundane activities of accessing and negotiating around material resources, or through gendered relations of the family. As stated by Fenster (2005), these mundane activities of the home are imbricated within a wider project of citizenship:

This construction of belonging, which is based on everyday ritualized use of space, has a clear gendered dimension as usually daily use of space is connected to gendered divisions of household duties (p. 223).

These reflections draw attention to the need to examine how micro-relations in home spaces articulate with, negotiate, or rupture broader narratives of citizenship, and how this may shift or concretize as the urban form changes.

Finally, feminist critiques also offer constructive suggestions towards the possibility of building new symbolic understandings of citizenship. Authors writing on ‘sexual citizenship’, for instance, have explored how claims of the LGBTQI community around
the right to public space or marriage rights, for instance, have challenged exclusionary norms which are inbuilt into liberal citizenship models (Bell, 1995). Likewise, Kaplan (1997), examined the way different women’s grassroots movements cycled at different moments through discourses of survival based on basic needs, to claims based on notions of justice or fairness. She makes the claim that this offers a challenge to the liberal conception of the ‘ideal citizen’, by bringing to the fore other dimensions, such as justice and care.

Bridging these works on gender and the city with feminist critiques to citizenship allows for a deeper reflection on how women or men’s everyday actions may be circumscribed by different cultural norms which shapes the experience of urban citizenship. That is, if the city is the battleground through which to negotiate new conceptions of citizenship—whether in ‘ordinary’ or ‘insurgent’ moments—a feminist lens indicates the necessity of exploring the links between these negotiations in the public sphere and ‘everyday lived experiences in the private’ (Schlyter, 2009, p. 25). This highlights the necessity of unsettling the supposed dichotomy between public and private spaces, the critical relevance of examining the negotiation of urban citizenship at scales including the body, home, or neighbourhood, and the exploration of the diverse values which underlie conceptions of citizenship.

2.2.3 Citizenship Values

These reflections highlight the contested and complex nature of the political, and by extension, citizenship. Citizenship negotiations can occur outside of traditional spaces—emergent from everyday exclusions, blurring the boundaries between public and private concerns, and fundamentally redrawing the boundaries of who is included within different ‘communities’. As such, these emerging conceptions of citizenship as lived in everyday life are in need of being re-defined to reflect a gendered understanding.

In order to make this more explicit throughout the empirical chapters, this thesis takes inspirations from two places. Firstly, is Kabeer’s (2005) notion of ‘inclusive citizenship’. Drawing upon multi-country research, Kabeer has sought explicitly to reframe citizenship discourses—grounding these values in the everyday perspectives of groups that have been ‘excluded’ in different ways. She outlines this vision as containing the four elements of: justice, recognition, self-determination, and solidarity. These are
defined respectively as: “justice: when it is fair for people to be treated the same, and when it is fair that they should be treated differently” (p. 3); “recognition: of the intrinsic worth of all human beings…and respect for their differences” (p. 4); “self-determination: as people’s ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives” (p. 5); and “solidarity: the capacity to identify with others and to act in unity with them” (p. 7). This shift towards ‘values’, rather than the production of a singular definition, supports a vision of citizenship which is contingent and specific to local context. In other words, while Kabeer’s four principles offer entry points, the way in which diverse residents of Kathmandu understand and negotiate any one of these will define the shape of citizenship within the city.

Secondly, this work also holds resonance with theoretical explorations from a feminist perspective. With more specific reference to ‘social justice’, Nancy Fraser (1990, 2005) has outlined the mutually reinforcing principles of redistribution, recognition and (later) representation in order to achieve what she terms a ‘parity of participation’. It is her notion of the ‘social arrangements’ (whether economic resources, social status, or political voice) under which people are able to participate as equals which chimes with new conceptions of citizenship as a practice. Echoing other feminist authors (i.e. Kabeer, 2006; Young, 1989), Fraser’s framework calls attention to the critical role that identity plays in structuring access to rights. For Stoke and Erdal (2017) this formulation helps bring to life the substantive elements of citizenship, making the link between the (economic) redistribution of material goods, the cultural recognition of different worldviews and interests, and political representation. In particular, this thesis adopts Fraser’s notion of ‘redistribution’ in place of Kabeer’s concept of justice—in recognition of Fraser’s assertion that the notion of ‘justice’ itself must be unpacked. Furthermore, the addition of redistribution also helps to draw out the materiality of exclusion, represented in this thesis by water and its infrastructure.

It is this combination of the empirical grounding of Kabeer, with the theoretical richness offered by Fraser and feminist authors writing on identity, which informs the values of citizenship explored here (Table 2.1). In the three empirical chapters which will follow, discussions will explore the implications of the ‘everyday politics of water’ presented at each scale, in relation to these principles. This allows for an analysis which, on the one hand, explores how everyday exclusions felt by diverse residents in an informal settlement in Kathmandu are experienced in relation to citizenship, but also
the inverse, that is, how residents themselves are able to “redefine, extend and transform given ideas about citizenship” (Kabeer, 2005, p.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Acknowledgement of equal social status of different groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redistribution</td>
<td>Reallocation of social, political or economic goods for equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Determination</td>
<td>People’s ability to exercise a degree of control over their life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>The capacity to identify with others and to act in unity with them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 2.1: Citizenship values (compiled by author from Kabeer, 2005; Fraser, 1990)

2.3 The Infrastructural Turn

The discussion above has already hinted at the connection between ‘ordinary’ urban citizenship and infrastructure, highlighting how informal settlement residents negotiate a sense of legitimacy or belonging through the materialities of housing or services. The following section builds upon this idea, positioning this thesis within the work of authors which have examined the experience, appropriation, or negotiation of infrastructure in daily life, particularly by low-income residents in the Global South. This echoes the proposition made above that infrastructure can be a valuable lens through which citizens, and particularly the urban poor, ‘see’ the state (Corbridge, et. al, 2005).

These ideas are secondly developed with a specific focus on gender—borrowing from authors within feminist political ecology who have made the case for the political nature of negotiations around identity, and as embedded in material practices. Ultimately, this section lays out a discussion of urban infrastructure from a gendered lens, laying the groundwork for how this is connected with the negotiation of citizenship.

For scholars of the Global South, it is clear that the everyday ways in which women and men of the urban poor access water and sanitation infrastructure is a far cry from the “modern infrastructural ideal” (Graham and Marvin, 2001) of universalized provision. Whether seen as ‘splintered’ (Graham and Marvin, 2001) as a result of modern neoliberal reforms, or rather reflecting the legacies of unequal provision emergent from
colonialism, infrastructure has been widely discussed as the material manifestation of a socio-political processes. In particular, the infrastructural conditions for the urban poor of many cities of the Global South—predicated upon partial, negotiated, or uncertain terms—calls for new theorizations of infrastructure, and for how residents are actually accessing services.

Drawing from Marxist theory, for example, urban political ecologists have critiqued capitalist logics, exposing the ways in which power works through infrastructure. Such explorations have identified the ways in which unequal social relations are imbricated in the process of urbanization and infrastructural development. These works have sought to disentangle and demonstrate the associations of materiality and social relations, tracing the mutually constitutive nature of physical infrastructure, identities, and the exercise of power (Bakker, 2003; Loftus, 2007; Loftus and Lumsden 2008; Swyngedouw, 1999, 2004). Such examinations have outlined the ways in which infrastructure technologies are inscribed with power—an authority often rendered invisible through a focus on the de-politicized technical aspects of pipes, nuts and bolts (Coutard, 1999).

In cities of the Global South particularly this has been explored in relation to continued differentiation in networked provision, drawing on historical narratives as well as more recent processes of neoliberal restructuring to draw out who has access to and control over resources and technologies. For instance, in Social power and the urbanization of water — flows of power Swyngedouw (2004) draws on his extensive fieldwork in Guayaquil, Ecuador to outline urbanization as a “socio-spatial process of metabolizing nature” (p.8), linking capitalist urbanization in the city to the exercise of social power and production of nature, contesting de-politicized readings of differentiated access: “the water problem is not just merely a question of management and technology, but rather, and perhaps in the first instance, a question of social power” (p.175). In rich historical and geographical detail, Swyngedouw traces how notions of ‘scarcity’ were politically and symbolically manufactured and connected to inequities in land-use, reflecting and reinforcing class stratifications. In doing so, Swyngedouw draws powerful linkages between infrastructure, ecology, and social relations, suggesting that struggles for the right to water are emblematic of struggles for the right to the city. Similarly, in colonial Batavia and post-independence Jakarta, Kooy and Bakker (2008) demonstrate how notions of modernity were inscribed
onto differentiated water systems separating European migrants and the indigenous population, physically and symbolically dividing populations and urban space. Access to the piped network became a signifier of different levels of modernity, hygiene, and sophistication—used in turn to reinforce decision-making on the provision of infrastructure to ‘suitable’ locations. In Mumbai, Gandy (2008) examines how narratives of modernization and commoditization attached to water provision led to uneven distribution and socio-spatial inequities, simultaneously countering “traditional understandings of use, entitlement, and social organization” as a part of a modernist project of the state (Gandy, 2008, p.124). These works have opened up a rich field of discussions on the political nature of infrastructure, identifying how it can both reflect and produce processes of social differentiation in the city.

While sharing links with this literature, a second strand of work has shifted the focus from the production and distribution of infrastructure, instead examining the everyday experiences of women and men at the point of use of different technologies. As identified by Graham and McFarlane (2015):

> While infrastructure debates have made important contributions to how we understand the ‘supply-side’ dimensions of infrastructure, there has been surprisingly little about how people produce, live with, contest, and are subjugated to or facilitated by infrastructure (p. 2).

Such discussions are deepened when placed within the post-colonial or developmental context, focusing on the (so-called) informal systems which proliferate in the absences of a wider municipal system which functions for the urban poor. Echoing many of the claims of UPE, work in this vein has explored the practices of women and men as they seek to access water, electricity, sanitation or other infrastructures. This has shifted the analytical focus from the production of infrastructure across the city, to everyday experiences of access and control, with clear resonance for the lens of citizenship adopted in this thesis.

This focus opens up a rich set of discussions on infrastructure as hybrid (Larkin, 2008), incremental (Silver, 2014), or sustained through the daily improvisations of people (Amin, 2014; Simone, 2004). Linking these authors is the understanding of infrastructure as heterogeneous, embedded in social experiences, and defying easy
dichotomies between formal and informal provision. For instance, Amin (2014), presents the concept of ‘lively infrastructure’ as a ‘hybridization’ of socio-technical processes—seeing infrastructure not merely as a technical good, but also a social one. In doing so, this work outlines how infrastructural improvisations stimulate wider forms of sociability and collectivity, operating as a potential site for a new kind of urban politics. This idea is echoed in Simone’s (2004) conception of ‘people as infrastructure’, which examines the production of infrastructure as comprising the intersections of bodies, spaces, practices, and material artefacts. This concept helps elucidate how infrastructure actually reaches people – speaking to the daily improvisations of residents of inner-city Johannesburg, and how this facilitates access to ‘spaces of economic and cultural operation’ in situations of precarity (p. 407). These formulations share an understanding of infrastructure which is embedded, incremental, and improvised through daily life, sustained by social collaborations and circulations.

Other authors have challenged the idea of ‘informal’ water practices, drawing attention to the ways alternative supply systems sustain and extend state power. In Jakarta, for instance, Kooy (2014) deconstructs the myths that informal water collection activities are transitional, confined to the urban poor, or somehow antithetical to the city’s development. In doing so, she echoes Roy and AlSayyad (2004), in understanding ‘informality’ as foundational (rather than exceptional) to the broader urban development project of the state. Allen et. al (2006) have likewise challenged the duality between formal and informal water practices—developing the metaphor of the ‘water wheel’ as a way of outlining the range of service delivery arrangements which exist within informal settlements, and which defy simple categorization between formal and informal provision.

This focus on the everyday practices of access and use opens up a rich set of discussions on the daily improvisations of people, extending the understanding of what infrastructure is. In doing so, these authors have broken open the discussion of how infrastructure operates, not simply as material pipes which cross the city, but rather as a “multitude of practices and elements” (Björkman, 2014, p.40). As such, this thesis echoes the call of Lawhon, Nilsoon, Silver, Ernstson, and Lwasa (2018) to think in terms of ‘heterogeneous infrastructure configurations’—a move designed to acknowledge the broad set of arrangements, deconstructing the formal and informal, and incorporating
an understanding of the role of various technologies and practices which shape infrastructure.

2.3.1 Gendered Experiences of Infrastructure

While these discussions have opened up a powerful set of reflections on the lived experience of infrastructure, what isn’t always made explicit in accounts of ‘everyday water practices’, are the social-power relations which delimit different practices, or how gendered bodies sustain the city’s infrastructures. In other words, in contexts where women are still overwhelmingly responsible for water collection and management—everyday improvisations around infrastructure are also intimately linked with uneven bodily and emotional impacts.

Indeed, it is well documented how women’s bodies and emotions are placed at higher risk where infrastructure is lacking—through the time and physical burdens of collection (Crow and Sultana, 2002), social stigma around hygiene, menstruation, or pollution which is intensified in contexts of scarcity (Joshi, 2011), vulnerability and violence especially around sanitation (O’Reilly, 2010), and emotions of shame or fear (Sultana, 2011). These dynamics hold implications not only for the discussion of the everyday infrastructural practices, but also for the concept of citizenship. In other words, it is necessary to examine these heterogeneous, incremental, and improvised practices from a gender perspective to understand how patriachial, classist, or racialized norms are played out and negotiated through everyday practices.

This shift is supported through a feminist reading of urban political ecology (UPE), which has a long tradition of opening up the relationships between physical infrastructure, identity, and subjectivity (Mohanty, 2003; Nagar et al., 2002; Rocheleau et al., 1996; Sultana, 2009; Truelove, 2011). With a particular focus on embodied experiences of risk, for instance, Truelove (2011) examines how the localized ‘micropolitics of water collection’ in Delhi are both a product of, and produce different sets of gender, class, or other power relations. She examines how interventions which sought to ‘legalize’ water access in one settlement actually increased the burdens for poorer women—as they had to traverse to more public areas and with greater danger and time burdens to collect from the erratic but ‘legal’ tubewells. As a result, she found that many poorer women often resorted instead to ‘illegal’ practices of tapping, thereby
becoming criminalized or at greater risk. In doing so, Truelove highlights how “gendered ideologies, structural power relations, and processes of both local and global change” (p. 144) continued to generate water inequalities, despite the provision of ‘improved’ infrastructure. Importantly, she arrives at this reflection through an examination of bodily experiences of risk, as a way of highlighting how ideologies and power relations continued to work unequally on some women.

Similarly, Sultana (2007, 2009) looks at localized water politics in rural Bangladesh. In these works, she outlines the ways in which intersecting facets of identity generated differential outcomes for women and men in a particular village. In order to do so, she examines how symbolic understandings of women’s and men’s roles intersected with ecological conditions to shape water collection practices, and how this generated additional burdens particularly for poorer women in the context of a water contamination incident. This emphasis on symbolic narratives is similarly echoed by Nightingale (2011b), who explores in Nepal the ways in which ideologies around women’s ‘polluted’ state during menstruation are produced and expressed through material practices such as sleeping outside, or refraining from water collection. These works are important for highlighting how processes of ecological change and spatial distribution intersect with ideological constructions of gender—raising the importance of examining symbolic narratives for how they may generate or reproduce inequalities as attached to material practices.

Finally, other authors have pointed to the critical role of discourses in shaping the relationship between resources and identity. For instance, adopting a specific focus on sanitation, Desai, McFarlane, & Graham (2015) explore the everyday politics of open defecation in two neighbourhoods of Mumbai. While not explicitly positioned within FPE, this work similarly looks at the intersection of infrastructure and the body, and how (a lack of) sanitation facilities is linked with uneven impacts across different identities. Elsewhere, McFarlane and Desai (2015) similarly explore the micropolitics of urban services, opening up the idea of ‘sites of entitlement’—the “coexisting principles, laws, and norms” which shape the everyday ways people access urban services (p. 2). Through case studies in Mumbai, these authors explore how, especially in the context of scarcity, exclusionary discourses were used to delegitimize the claims of poorer garment workers, preventing them from accessing improved sanitation facilities. As with the previous
works, these authors share the preoccupation with the ways in which social difference is produced through infrastructure—emphasizing the discursive framings which were used to legitimize or delegitimize the entitlements of certain residents.

Together, these authors have highlighted unevenness of infrastructural experiences across infrastructure, bodies, identities, or neighbourhoods. Such experiences are both rooted in localized social and spatial realities, as well as wider urban discourses and trends. Whether focused on embodied experiences, discursive framings, or symbolic narratives—significant work has outlined the complex interaction between material practices, infrastructure, and values and perceptions, exploring how this is constitutive of social relations.

### 2.3.2 Gender and Infrastructural Practices: Three Myths

This reflections from feminist political ecology helps elucidate the ways that the inequitable access and control over resources—including water—is a result of context-specific and embedded social and power relations. This understanding is critical for opening up discussions on the fact that the different ‘positions’ of women and men are not naturalized, but vary across time and place— influenced by different historical, cultural, religious or economic realities. These different social roles and responsibilities generate different needs or interests (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1989), which can lead to differential outcomes in development or urban planning, as linked with infrastructure.

What is evident from these discussions is that (the changing nature of) gender relations, and as intertwined with infrastructure, is a critical site for the exploration of broader concerns such as equity, rights, or citizenship.

Drawing from these debates, this section seeks to outline the implications for planning practice. That is, as a ‘participation’ agenda has increasingly taken hold within the wider developmental sector, water interventions have increasingly centred particularly on women’s participation in the implementation and management of water resources—posing a range of positive outcomes following women’s increased control over community assets and infrastructure. Grounding these theoretical discussions of infrastructure and social power in practice is critical, as this thesis takes as one of its entry points a water intervention undertaken in partnership between a local women’s
organization, Kathmandu municipality, and the privately-operated water company. Accordingly, this section outlines three related ‘myths’ which continue to proliferate in discussions of gender and infrastructure, with reference to the debates outlined above. In deconstructing these myths, this thesis makes clear its own perspective on the connection between gender, power, and water.

2.3.2.1 Myth One: Women’s Participation in Infrastructural Interventions Automatically Supports Their Interests

Projects linking women and water often contain an implicit or explicit notion that participation in the management of services will lead to better outcomes for women—whether this is through the implementation of more ‘appropriate’ or well-managed solutions, or by appealing to wider ambitions of empowerment. However, feminist work has offered important counters to the unproblematized idea of women’s participation—particularly through the notion of gender needs and interests. This is most prominently explored by Moser (1989) and Molyneux (1985), whose highly influential works make the conceptual distinction between practical or strategic gender needs or interests.

These approaches propose a framework which can be used to distinguish between the different kinds of needs or interests infrastructural projects may address—and the extent to which this supports shifts in gender equity. For example, from a development planning perspective, Moser’s (1992) work in Guayaquil, Ecuador speaks clearly to natural resource management—outlining the “triple” role that women play (beyond productive and reproductive duties) as ‘community managers’. Moser understands this (often voluntary) role to more often be in line with supporting practical gender needs; fulfilling tasks for the good of the community as an extension of their reproductive caring duties. She warns of the danger of romanticizing this community managing role, which can limit participation to restrictively defined ‘safe’ sites:

If women’s mobilization is perceived of as an extension of their realm of interest and power in the domestic arena…it is most likely that it is in their gendered roles as wives and mothers, rather than as persons, that mobilization is legitimized both by the women and by their men kin (Moser, 1989, p. 168).
Similarly, though speaking of interests, rather than needs, Molyneux’s (1985) work in Nicaragua revealed that many women preferred to allocate their time to income generating activities, rather than through engagement in the voluntary management of collective services. She posits that participation may ultimately put the increased burden of (usually unpaid) work on women without necessarily increasingly their authority. Departing from these contributions, it is possible to see that while women’s participation in community-based service provision may support their practical gender needs, it does not necessarily challenge the existing division of labour. Nonetheless, Moser does highlight the fuzziness between these two domains—in which participation in a community managing role can be an entry point to broader strategic aims.

In addition to these discussions around practical and strategic needs or interests, research in other contexts has also demonstrated the ways in which such projects may not sufficiently address the significant opportunity costs of participation. For instance, looking at community-based waste management in Cape Town, Miraftab (2004) makes the point that while a degree of ‘empowerment’ was identified by women who took part in the project, she found this to be largely economic and individualized. She attributes this to the fact that discourses of participation were largely justified on the basis of understanding women to be a cost-effective source of labour. Echoing Moser, she concludes that: “the significant role of women in waste and garbage collection is not coincidental, but entrenched in patriarchal gender relations that extend women’s domestic responsibilities to municipal housekeeping” (p. 251). These authors help to question the notion that ‘participation’ within community-based services is an automatic route to the transformation of inequitable relations in the body, household, or communities, claiming that it may conversely be used to maintain the unequal division of labour.

2.3.2.2 Myth Two: Women Suffer Equally (and Therefore can be Empowered Equally)
Secondly, feminist scholarship has helped to deconstruct the notion of the singular ‘woman’ often present within development discourses—obscuring a diversity of experiences, interests, and responsibilities. These works (e.g. Mollett & Faria, 2013; Nightingale, 2011a; Truelove, 2011) have sought to outline the way in which different identity attributes intersect, indicating a range of reasons women might be disenfranchised from services, including age, ability, location in the settlement, or
localized power relations. These works problematize the notion of a spatially-bounded ‘community’, unpacking diversity within assumed boundaries.

For instance, in her study of an NGO-led water supply project in Rajasthani, India, O’Reilly (2006) explored how the inattentive installation of stand pipes exacerbated existing inequalities in the settlement around caste. While the standpipes provided ‘purified’ water safe for drinking, this did not accord with socially constructed notions of purity, which prohibited members of lower castes from entering certain public areas. As such, women of lower castes were unable to use the newly constructed infrastructure in areas inhabited by higher castes, reinforcing social and spatial divides. Similarly, in an exploration of residents’ access to water points in a rural community in Zimbabwe, Cleaver (1999) highlights the significance of household dynamics in the mediation of water and sanitation services. She draws attention to the negotiations between men and women at water points, which meant that some women were less able to gain access to resources as a result of their familial dynamics and social positions. This resonates with the discussion of how socially constructed relations in ‘intimate’ spaces dictates how different women experience water inequalities.

Such works accord with critical scholarship from the field of natural resource management, which has demonstrated that neighbourhood institutions to manage communal services do not emerge from a ‘neutral’ playing field, but reflect existing social relations. Work within this vein has questioned the notion that fair institutional rules are enough to shift deeply embedded social norms. For instance, Agarwal’s (2005) examination of forest management demonstrates the ways in which social constructed identities around gender and caste conditioned participation in locally-based participatory management initiatives, despite the existence of “fair” institutional rules. Similarly, in the context of a rural irrigation system in India, Mosse (1997) traces the ways in which history, tradition, and moral codes shape decision-making and structure access. From another perspective, discussions of ‘elite capture’ have likewise highlighted the ways in which more powerful groups (whether better resourced, with leadership positions, or representing dominant ethnic/religious/social groups) are the most typical beneficiaries of participatory programmes (Dasgupta & Beard, 2007; Rigon, 2014). These authors share a concern with the tendency to romanticize the community as a harmonious site, overlooking the sometimes deep divisions and exclusions which may
be present. Echoing the work on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) these empirical studies have offered evidence to counter the myth that ‘women’ as a whole share similar interests—that they suffer in equal ways, and therefore can be empowered equally. Such logic tends to overlook the intra-community divisions and pre-existing hierarchies—falling into the trap of treating ‘the community’ or ‘the urban poor’ as a homogenous entity.

2.3.2.3 Myth Three: ‘Efficiency’ Can Be Achieved with Equity

Finally, taking a wider sectoral perspective, it is important to unpack the gendered dimensions of community managed water systems within broader governance shifts in the water sector. This is particularly poignant in the context of the recent wave of privatization and liberalization of public utilities, and in line with the cost-cutting logic of neoliberalism. Here, numerous authors have expressed scepticism that such programmes are truly intended to be a vehicle for greater participation, claiming that they are rather engaged as an ‘efficient’ mechanism for service delivery for the state or private sector (Bakker, 2003; Goldman, 2007; McFarlane & Rutherford, 2008; Miraftab, 2004). Feminist work within this tradition has highlighted the fact that water markets may function more efficiently only because of the unacknowledged and unpaid contribution of community labour. In this sense—women (or community labour more generally) can be understood as subsiding the sector through voluntary contributions (Ahlers & Zwarteveen, 2009). Such critiques also highlight a fundamental tension which underlies international approaches to water, between Dublin Principle 3 (women’s involvement) and 4 (water as an economic good), in which the ‘costs’ borne of economic efficiency are absorbed by female bodies through labour or time.

Empirical studies have examined how the understanding of water as an economic (rather than social) good have led to the prioritization of ‘productive’ uses of water, undermining or failing to recognize the value of reproductive uses (Harris, 2009; Laurie, 2007). For instance, in a study of local environmental management in informal neighbourhoods of Accra, McGranahan et. al (2001) highlighted that many of the most pressing environmental challenges for women occurred within the ‘private’ space of the household, therefore falling outside of the remit of traditional planned interventions:
Once the water has left the tap, the fuels have been purchased, and more generally the environmental problems have entered the home, they are considered less important ‘private’ problems. But since ‘private’ environmental problems tend also to be ‘women’s’ problems, the seemingly rational emphasis on ‘public’ problems can easily mask a lack of concern for women’s problems (p. 153-154).

Similarly, focused on the case of a delegated management model of water service provision in informal settlements in Kisumu, Kenya, I previously explored how broader shifts within the Kenyan water sector to privatization and cost-recovery saw the prioritization of the economic sustainability of the model (Butcher, 2015). In this case, the ecological conditions of the settlement and the spatial location of infrastructure intersected to lock out residents in the low-lying interior (and unprofitable) areas of the settlement. As such, it was found that the system was unable to cater to the diverse needs within the settlement—particularly affecting marginalized residents with the least capacity to participate in the market.

In this vein, authors have examined how such policies have been wielded by more powerful actors to systematically generate and legitimate uneven distributions in the name of efficiency— with detrimental effects for the urban poor. These contributions highlight the importance of understanding localized social relations in relation to wider trends within the water sector, and how priorities are set.

2.3.3 A New Agenda

Together, this scholarship has developed deep accounts for the continued differentiation in networked provision—exploring how infrastructure is accessed and controlled by different identities. In doing so, it has contested technocratic and apolitical approaches to resource allocation and control, demonstrating how gender relations play out through the everyday practices around water provision and management. What this suggests is that positionality within sets of social relations is as important in mediating access to water resources as infrastructure and its management structures. This illustrates the point that vulnerabilities are linked to social context—and that exclusions from water services are likely to also reflect broader recognitional exclusions linked with different social signifiers, including age, gender, caste, class, or religion. It also draws attention to the wider sets of infrastructural relations—how trends in the water sector,
ecological conditions, or the spatial location of infrastructure intersects with gender or social norms.

Critically however, the acknowledgment that the experience of water services is impacted by social power also suggests the inverse—that is, the possibility to *remake social relations* through the renegotiation of practices of resource management and allocation. The following section departs from this point, developing the conceptual lens which animates this thesis. That is, it bridges the debates around gendered water management, infrastructure, and citizenship—proposing the concept of ‘the everyday politics of water’ as way of exploring how diverse bodies interact with the materiality of water infrastructure to expand, negotiate, or contest different citizenship values.

### 2.4 The ‘Everyday Politics of Water’: Citizenship and Services

This section outlines the conceptual framework for this work, bridging the debates around gender, infrastructure, and citizenship. In order to do so, it proceeds in the following way: it firstly positions itself in relation to wider theoretical discussions of ‘the everyday’, before making the conceptual jump from practices to politics. It secondly explores these debates in relation to the gendered politics of infrastructure and its link to citizenship—proposing the concept of the ‘water portfolio’ as a way of reflecting the heterogeneity and socially embedded nature of water access and management. It finally brings this together in a framework for the ‘everyday politics of water’—defined as a set of interactions between material practices around infrastructure, values and perceptions which underpin these different practices, and the negotiation of social relations—occurring across scales from the city, community, household, and body.

#### 2.4.1 Everyday Practices

The concept of ‘everyday politics of water’ developed here draws inspiration from a number of sources, but is rooted in the ‘first wave’ of socio-cultural ‘practice’ theorists: including Foucault, Bourdieu, Giddens and de Certeau (Appendix 1). These theorists share a common interest in outlining the dialectic through which structural forces impose meanings and identities, and agent-oriented practices which respond to or resist this wider environment. These early practice theorists are differently focused on
unpacking the nuanced ways in which power is produced and manifested through everyday and routinized interactions.

For instance, Giddens’ (1984) ‘structuration theory’, outlines his social theory through which individual action (agency) is exerted within wider structures of enablement or constraint. For Giddens, this is articulated through *praxis*, those creative practices in everyday life through which agents can overcome societal constraints and enrol in their own life projects. As such, this approach is cautiously optimistic on the possibilities for individuals to alter their own life situations through reflexive action. Similarly engaging an emphasis on the tension between agency and structure, though with perhaps less emphasis on the power of the individual agent, is Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*. For Bourdieu (1977) the shaping forces of structural conditions is encapsulated through the idea of ‘doxa’: elements of tradition, history, and culture which are so pervasive as to have become naturalized. As such, for Bourdieu, the ability to creatively innovate is inherently limited by these unconscious elements of habit, according somewhat more authority to structural conditions than does Giddens.

Such theorizations grant more or less weight across the structure-agency divide, but resonate with a decentred and circulating view of power, advocated and outlined by Foucault (1988, 1998). This vision breaks open the dichotomy of resistance and domination—understanding the interdependencies of each. An understanding of the constitutive nature of agency and structure is a key proposition of this thesis, and holds resonance for understanding processes of social change. For instance, following Foucault, Sharp et al. (2000) posit that: “where power is more diffuse and clearly not restricted to formal processes of governing, researchers need to take cognizance of the more nuanced ways in which the ability to shape social action takes place” (p. 4). This proposition therefore starts from the assumption that power is embedded and reinforced through mundane experiences—and as such, actions emergent from the realm of quotidian activity hold the potential to challenge, reinforce, or renegotiate dominant forms of power.

Departing from these theoretical propositions, several bodies of work have taken up empirical studies exploring the exercise of power through everyday experiences. On the one hand, work has been done to elucidate the ways in which ‘everyday practices’ operate as a critical form of *resistance* particularly for subaltern or marginalized identities.
This approach is clearly embodied within James Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak*. For Scott, (1985, 1990) these ‘hidden transcripts’ contain the seeds of resistance, allowing for the challenge of power through subtle actions concealed behind a screen of consent, rather than through direct confrontation:

The term infrapolitics … convey(s) the idea that we are dealing with an unobtrusive realm of political struggle. For a social science attuned to the relatively open politics of liberal democracies and to loud, headline-grabbing protests, demonstrations, and rebellions, the circumspect struggle waged by subordinate groups is, like infrared rays, beyond the visible end of the spectrum (Scott, 1990, p. 183).

For Scott, such ‘everyday acts of resistance’ include any action taken by subaltern actors in order to advance their own claims vis-à-vis dominant classes, such as non-compliance, theft, or feigned ignorance. Here, Scott also distinguishes between ‘real resistance’, which refers to organized and sustained action, from ‘token resistance’, which may be singular or unorganized acts without ‘revolutionary significance’, or without recognizable outcomes (Scott, 1985, p. 292). In offering this idea, Scott opens up the possibility for small or mundane actions to have political significance, with clear links to the discussion of ‘insurgent citizenship’ later proposed by Holston (2009).

Undertaking a similar exploration of quotidian actions, though without such explicit claims to resistance, is Asef Bayat’s concept of the ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’. For Bayat (2000), the interest in outlining daily activities is to help unfold the multiple and commonplace experiences of marginalization, to understand the ways in which these quotidian routines help subaltern actors carve out niches in the city on different terms. Following long work in the Middle East, Bayat distinguishes himself from the resistance literature, outlining that these ordinary acts may not necessarily contain a conscious intention to challenge the hegemonic system. However, for Bayat these activities nonetheless remain an important site of analysis, as they represent both ‘meaningful’ and ‘manageable’ (p. 553) ways in which the urban poor can take actions and set agendas. Moreover, he claims, when these “silent, protracted but pervasive” (p. 545) actions become threatened (i.e. by eviction), these individualized acts hold the potential to coalesce into a collective dissent. Bayat’s framing has been explored by a number of authors (Gillespie, 2017; Hackenbroch & Hossain, 2012; Perera, 2009) who have
worked in contexts where there isn’t an explicit social movement. In doing so, this work more closely approximates the discussion of ‘ordinary’ citizenship.

Recent work has continued to push the boundaries of this framing; in particular, nuancing the ways in which everyday practices may in fact reproduce (rather than challenge) hegemonic power structures. For instance, drawing from the case of Bangladesh, Hackenbroch and Hossain (2012) discuss the way localized political leaders were able to negotiate a differential access to public water supply, further consolidating their political and social power, and contributing to inequitable access for those (socially and physically) unconnected informal settlement residents in Dhaka. This work serves as a helpful reminder that everyday practices may also be predicated upon unequal sets of relations, and therefore may not necessarily meaningfully challenge structural relations. While these different approaches may adopt different positions on either the intent or the outcome of everyday practices (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004), they share the underlying message that the daily rhythms and routines of residents are a valuable and meaningful point of political analysis.

2.4.2 Everyday Politics and Power

Emergent from the practices literature is the understanding that the ‘everyday’ is a critical site of investigation, with clear resonance with the debates on citizenship outlined above. Works within this vein have highlighted the dynamic interplay of structure and agency, exploring how everyday practices can offer alternative ways of being and doing for those disenfranchised by the status quo. In doing so, this literature seeks to outline the ways in which these practices can be seen to (intentionally or unintentionally) contest structural trends. While not necessarily articulated in the language of ‘citizenship’, these authors share similar interpretations of the relationship between everyday experiences and power as those expressed in insurgent or ordinary formulations of citizenship.

A shift from a discourse of practices to politics helps to make this link more explicit—seeing the ‘everyday’ as the political terrain through which citizenship is contested or negotiated. This shift is supported by the work of a number of scholars. It can be traced, for instance, in the work of Chatterjee (2006) in *Politics of the Governed*. This text
makes a distinction between the concepts of ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’. For Chatterjee, the classic notion of civil society refers to formalized structures expressed through the Constitution and laws, which only a few (elites) are able to access in most post-colonial societies. He instead outlines how the experience of the urban poor—predicated upon an informality or illegality—means that they must engage in informal or clientalistic relations to achieve basic opportunities relevant to daily life, including housing and jobs. Yet this disenfranchisement does not mean that inhabitants are either “outside the reach of the state or even excluded from the domain of politics” (Chatterjee, 2006, p. 38). For Chatterjee, residents of India maintain a political relationship with the state, but one characterized by strategic negotiations over which rights are extended on a flexible, ad hoc, or case-by-case benefit; what he deems the ‘political society’. While Chatterjee’s work can be critiqued (e.g. Millstein, 2017) for developing an overly dichotomous relationship between these two spheres (in which the urban poor and elites alike are likely to move fluidly between different kinds of relations with the state), or for failing to delve in depth to social difference within subaltern communities (i.e. Datta, 2012), it remains useful in the sense of questioning normative assumptions around how politics occurs, and how power relations in everyday life structures experiences with the state.

While influenced by this literature (particularly in foregrounding the everyday as the analytical focus, the interplay between structure and agency, and the expanded notion of where politics takes place), this thesis posits a concept of ‘everyday politics’, which explores how everyday practices are linked with different gendered, class, ethnic, or other identities. In doing so it draws from the debates outlined above within feminist political ecology, as well as more recent work focused on gender and urban development, which has explored the ways in which women and men perform, negotiate, or experience particular identities or roles though actions in everyday life—making the explicit claim that these negotiations are themselves a critical kind of politics. Adopting this approach helps answer the question of how residents might unequally employ different practices, as well as how material practices themselves may generate particular inequalities for some—even while making claims on the state. In other words, this thesis takes as its starting point the assertion that: “daily practices are produced by, and productive of, gender, class and other social power relations” (Truelove, 2011, p. 144), and that this is crucial in understanding how inequalities in private spaces are
intimately linked with public organizations or social action—with key implications for citizenship.

There are a number of authors focused on urban inequalities who have employed the concept of everyday politics in this way. Oldfield and Greyling (2015), for instance, explore the politics of housing in South Africa, drawing attention to practices such as waiting, encroachment or drawing on housing support as a way to obtain shelter. Critically however, (and going further than the practices literature), these authors open up a discussion on the ways in which residents strategically mobilize around different forms of self-identification to subvert housing eligibility requirements. In doing so, they start to tease out the role of different subject-positions for shaping the different practices residents undertake in order to obtain housing. Likewise, and similarly working in the South African context, Millstein (2017) highlights the ways in which different localized subject categories—such as ‘householder’, ‘backyarder’, or racial identities politicized in the apartheid state—emerge and become more (or less) relevant through the practices of claiming housing entitlements. In this way, she explores how: subjectivities can be politicized in various ways, framed by governmental categories, as well as local social identities (p. 255). In doing so, these authors start to tease out the role of different social categories in shaping the boundaries and possibilities for action for different individuals—highlighting in particular the perceptions around entitlements which underpin different practices, and how that shapes different subject positions.

From another context, though similarly focused on housing, Doshi (2013) presents a rich analysis of a slum relocation project in India, highlighting how collective action around two sites slated for redevelopment generated new forms of differentiation between the evicted urban poor communities. She links the production of class, gender, and ethnic subjectivities with capitalist land markets in Mumbai, demonstrating how market-based resettlement projects differentiated between eligible and illegal residents often along ethnic lines. Given this, she finds that the actions of the mobilized federation of the urban poor enabled a resettlement process, but then simultaneously generated internal inequalities along ethnic lines, reflecting these pre-existing perceptions around legitimate and non-legitimate residents. In this work, she challenges a singular reading of urban poor communities, demonstrating the ways in which
“dynamic articulations of class, ethno-religious, and gender inequalities and differences fundamentally shape political subjectivities” (p. 845).

With a similar intersectional analysis, exploring the context of a squatter settlement in Delhi, Datta (2012) opens a rich discussion of how everyday and gendered practices of the body or home are linked with wider framings of legality, morality, or modernity. With ethnographic detail, she demonstrates the ways in which the law intersects with, and is transformed or renegotiated by, gendered social relations inside a ‘community’ or household. Critically, this work thus offers an examination of not only how everyday acts shape relations between residents of a particular squatter settlement with the wider developmental state, but also how these daily practices are productive of localized social and power relations. In doing so, she links the politics of the home with the public politics of the city, exploring how gender performances in daily life are inextricably linked with negotiations, contestations, or redefinitions of what is considered ‘legal’.

These authors have informed the approach of this thesis, in moving from a notion of practices to politics. What emerges is an emphasis on how social identities are negotiated, challenged, or defined through everyday practices, and how this ultimately shapes the boundaries of social or political agency. This thesis makes the claim that fundamental to the exploration of these authors is the intersection between material practices, and the values and perceptions which underpin these practices—as a way to explore how this ultimately reflects or shapes social relations across a range of identities. Such analysis can break open the dichotomy often posited in ‘practices’ literature between ‘marginalized communities’ and the state, offering a rich reading of the ways in which social difference manifests through everyday practices, and along different identity lines.

2.4.3 The Everyday Politics of Water and Infrastructural Citizenship

Drawing the previous strands of literature together through the lens of water is a productive way of deepening the concept of ‘everyday politics’—exploring water infrastructure as an arena through which identities are negotiated. Critically, this is positioned within a citizenship framework, understanding everyday politics (around water) to be the terrain through which citizenship battles are fought. However, if
citizenship is understood to be constituted through a series of ‘ordinary’ negotiations played out across pipes, taps, tanks, and wells—a gender lens highlights the necessity of outlining the patriarchal, classist, or racialized norms which differently shape how residents both relate to infrastructure and experience urban citizenship. Thus, the question is: what does a gendered discussion of heterogeneous infrastructural practices mean in light of discussions around urban citizenship?

Indeed, while this link between infrastructure and citizenship has been introduced by a small but emerging number of authors—this work has not yet significantly engaged with the gender dimensions. With reference to infrastructure and citizenship, for instance, in Durban, South Africa, Loftus (2006) examined the ways in which the implementation of pre-paid household water meters functioned to regulate the supply of water, as residents ‘self-disciplined’ themselves into consuming less. Taking the same case, von Schnizler (2008) likewise posits that the pre-payment of the water meters in black townships linked civic duty with fiscal responsibility. She explores the ways in which meters contain moralizing and discipline features—cutting off without negotiation if the fiscal responsibility is not met. In this sense, she describes infrastructure as itself having political agency in the constitution of citizenship—transforming residents from citizens to consumers, and in a social contract that is temporary and renewed at each payment cycle. These authors share the assertion that residents are enrolled into political projects around what it is to be a ‘good citizen’ through the material objects of infrastructure.

Other authors have focused more on the micropolitics of residents as a critical terrain for the negotiation of citizenship. For instance, Anand’s (2011) exploration of water provision in Mumbai draws together an analysis both the material artefacts of water distribution, and the forms of social capital (in this case—sustained by patron-client relations) which opens or closes different possibilities for slum dwellers to obtain water access. Critically, he formulates this as a form of ‘hydraulic citizenship’, highlighting the centrality of social relations in producing and sustaining infrastructure, as well as a conception of belonging. Similarly, Rodina and Harris (2016) examine municipal infrastructures as sites of ‘everyday citizenship engagements’ (p. 339), in which ‘getting connected’ to water pipes was referenced by residents as a kind of citizenship contract, with associated rights and duties from both residents and the municipality. This work
also explores the uneven ability to connect—fragmenting a sense of citizenship across settlements with different levels of formality, and reflecting different migration histories.

Most recently, Lemanski (2018) has proposed the concept of ‘infrastructural citizenship’ as a way of understanding how “citizens’ everyday access to, and use of, infrastructure in the city affect, and are affected by, their citizenship identity and practice” (p. 350). Referring again to the case of South Africa, she examines the perceptions of residents linked with the provision of low-income housing – in which the house, and its associated infrastructure, was often linked symbolically to the sense of ‘becoming’ a citizen in the post-apartheid state. She calls for more explicit theorizations of the link between infrastructure and citizenship, and how ‘ordinary’ practices of extending homes and infrastructures intersects with other dimensions of civic and associational life, as well as moments of protest and contestation.

These literatures bring to light a number of critical dimensions examined in this thesis: the moralizing project of citizenship, the analytical importance of examining residents’ perceptions, the various tactics through which residents relate to the state through infrastructure (and vice versa), and how this shapes the social contract—both through the experience of rights and duties, as well as a more intangible sense of belonging.

While echoing these ideas, this thesis also posits that what is either missing or often not made explicit in these accounts is an engagement with the reflections emergent from feminist literature in relation both to citizenship and infrastructure. That is, unpacking how social location is both produced through and evidenced within different infrastructural practices. In doing so, this thesis offers a discussion of infrastructure and citizenship which is intersected by gendered, classist, or racialized power relations, and enacted not only in relation to the state, but also in private spaces of the home or in community life.

2.4.3.1 Water Portfolio

In order to contribute to this gap, this thesis proposes the concept of the ‘water portfolio’, as a way of opening up the complex set of factors which impacts the assemblage of resources adopted by diverse women and men. At its most fundamental, this term is adopted to refer to the assortment of sources residents (often women) acquire in order to meet the daily water needs of themselves and their families.
However, building on the discussions above, this thesis proposes this concept also to draw attention to the wider ‘conditions of possibility’ (Allen, 2002) which open or close different options for residents to negotiate around water infrastructure – and by extension, citizenship. In particular, this thesis posits an expanded definition of the water portfolio across three key dimensions.

It firstly recognizes the heterogeneity and socially embedded nature of water sources. This seeks to make more explicit the decision-making processes residents undertake when drawing from different infrastructures to obtain their daily water needs. This includes a discussion around the kinds and quality of water—whether used for drinking, washing, or cooking—and how choices are impacted by settlement conditions and seasonality, individual aspects such as physical or financial ability, or social factors including friendships or conflicts. The multiplicity of infrastructure—both physical and social—requires and understanding of how choices around different kinds of infrastructure is also reflective of different possibilities for social marginalization or emancipation.

It secondly makes reference to the intimate and embodied experiences of water collection and management. If people perform and extend infrastructures (Simone, 2004), this seeks to make explicit which people and what kinds of bodies bear the risks of assembling and improvising. This draws upon the well-documented health and safety burdens of water collectors, as well as feminist work which has explored embodied or emotional experiences within participatory resources management (Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Morales & Harris; Nightingale, 2011a). How do these uneven physical and emotional tolls, expressed in intimate experiences of the body and household, intersect with gendered discourses or expectations at the community or city scale to circumscribe the agency of diverse residents across class, gender, or ethnicity?

Finally, this term draws attention to the symbolic aspects of what it is to be a ‘good citizen’—and how this is linked with different infrastructural practices. From one perspective, authors have discussed how state restructuring in line with the privatization and marketization of water has had a profound impact on people’s capacity to meet their daily needs, while symbolically redefining the relationship between citizens and the state (Bakker, 2003). This raises the question of how the experience of citizenship...
relates to the ‘second wave’ of water reforms (Smith, 2004), which has placed increasing responsibility upon users for financing and managing water services. This involves examining the kinds of values expressed by residents in their daily water practices, and how this corresponds with (or ruptures) values expressed within neoliberal restructuring, especially around financial sustainability. From another perspective, a gender lens also draws attention to the ways in which narratives around being a good citizen are linked with discourses around hygiene and pollution (O’Reilly, 2006). This also suggests the need to examine how symbolic notions of purity and profanity are ascribed to certain bodies (through caste, gender, or religion, for example), and how that intersects with or is exacerbated by different infrastructural options.

Adopting the conceptual lens of the water portfolio allows for the discussion of the unequal set of adaptive responses adopted by diverse women and men. This helps makes more explicit the ‘everyday politics of water’—exploring the ways that social difference is evidenced within and produced out of material practices around water infrastructure, operating across multiple scales. In doing so, this thesis pushes forward on the ideas of gender, citizenship, and infrastructure – seeking to draw an analysis across identities, spaces, scales, and temporalities to explore how daily negotiations around water are linked with variegated citizenship experiences across diverse bodies.

2.5 Analytical Framework

In the analytical chapters that follow, this thesis takes as one of its entry points a visible form of collective action—the woman’s movement, Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj (NMES)—working in informal settlements throughout Nepal. This group has mobilized around the collective management of water—chiming with the debates on the gendered implications of participation in natural resource management. However, this thesis simultaneously engages with the subtle nuances of everyday life in relation to water—and how this shapes subjectivities for residents inside and outside of this movement. In other words, this work asserts that everyday political negotiations occur not only in the visible movements of collectivities to claim rights against the state, but also in the daily negotiations and practices undertaken by individuals—exploring the ways in which social relations are shaped, contested, or renegotiated through material practices.
Drawing from the authors and debates outlined above, this thesis proposes an analytical framework for exploring the overarching question which guides this thesis (Figure 2.1):

What are the *everyday politics of water*, and how does this shape the boundaries and possibilities for diverse informal settlement residents to move towards substantive citizenship in Kathmandu?
Figure 2.1: Analytical Framework
In order to unpack the overarching question proposed above, this thesis engages with three sub-questions:

**Q1: How do ‘everyday politics’ shape the experience of water services for diverse informal settlement residents in Kathmandu?**

‘Everyday politics’ and its relation to water is proposed here to consist of four elements: material practices, infrastructure, values and perceptions, and social relations. These elements have been constructed from the different theoretical influences as outlined above, and are understood to be in dynamic interaction with each other. These four elements are defined as followed:

First, **material practices** refers to the daily interactions and human activities which structure water collection, use, and management. Contained within this category are the everyday observable routines of residents—purchasing jarred water, collecting from wells, standing in queues, adopting filtration techniques, installing infrastructure, using particular sources, or paying bills. This is the starting point for analysis, in recognition of the vast literature which has made the claim that everyday practices are a valuable arena for exploring the interplay of power (Bayat, 2000; Hackenbroch & Hossain, 2012; Scott, 1985).

Second, the interest in **infrastructure** refers to the physical technologies (reticulated pipes, wells, tanks) which are present in the settlement. However, this also refers to the types and kinds of water that are available from each source—picking up on debates around quality and quantity, as well as the kinds of activities water is intended for—whether drinking, cooking, or washing. The emphasis on infrastructure echoes literature which recognizes that the modalities and placement of infrastructure itself is politicized, and may influence the production of social difference (Gandy, 2008; Swyngedouw, 1999; 2004).

Third, this framework explores how different material practices are underpinned by different **values or perceptions**. This refers to the deeper aspirations, expectations, or assumptions for what water and infrastructure provision is or should be, who is entitled to use different sources and in what ways, or the assumptions around how (especially
collective) sources should be managed and allocated. The interest in this dimension stems from those authors who have discussed the micropolitics of how entitlements are framed (Doshi, 2013; Oldfield and Greyling, 2015; McFarlane and Desai, 2015), gendered analyses of institutions of natural resource management (Agarwal, 1997; Cleaver, 2012), or work on how wider political ideologies come to bear upon different bodies (Bakker, 2003, Harris, 2009, Nagar et al., 2002).

Finally, these interactions are explored for how they shape or produce social relations. This draws predominantly from literature within feminist political ecology, which explores how social differentiation is linked with natural resources (Nightingale, 2011, Sultana 2009, 2011; Truelove, 2011). In addition to exploring how social difference influences the experience of water, this also entails an examination of how the experience of water and its infrastructure shapes social difference.

Following the lead of authors writing from the tradition of FPE, the intersections of these four are traced and made visible by looking at either embodied experiences, discursive framings, or symbolic narratives which have been expressed through interviews with diverse Bansighat residents, or by key stakeholders working in the urban water sector.

**Q2: How are these ‘everyday politics’ embedded in, responding to, or contesting wider trends related to urban development in the city?**

These four dimensions of everyday politics are understood to be in productive tension with wider structural forces. That is, everyday negotiations cannot be separated from the context in which they are embedded, but are understood to reflect, contest, or renegotiate debates occurring at wider scales. Drawing upon the understanding of power as circulating, this relationship is understood to be dynamic and mutually constitutive. That is, the space for agency is shaped by structural forces, while structural forces can also be contested and shaped through everyday practices.

This thesis identifies four areas in particular which emerge as critical, and will be discussed in greater detail in the contextual chapter: processes of environmental change, gender relations and social norms, shifts and values of the water sector, and
urbanization trends and policies. Together, these explore questions such as how water sources are changing over time (via depletion or contamination), social or gender norms throughout Nepal which influence the roles and responsibilities of diverse individuals, the role of privatization, pro-poor policies and investment in the water sector, and the exploration of key urban policies and programmes in Kathmandu for how they affect the urban poor. Critical to this analysis are the debates and myths proposed around the role of gendered participation in water management (section 2.2.3), as this is a key policy and programmatic priority present within Kathmandu, which has been reproduced and fragmented at the micro scale. Thus, in each analytical chapter, this thesis seeks to trace the mutually constitutive nature of these everyday politics and wider trends.

**Q3: In what ways does this advance (or constrain) different values of citizenship for diverse residents?**

Finally, the dynamic interplay of the everyday politics of water is explored against the values of citizenship outlined in section 2.3.3: redistribution, recognition, self-determination, and solidarity. This thesis posits that understanding how these everyday politics play out and are negotiated by diverse individuals is critical for understanding the possibilities for moving closer towards substantive citizenship. The questions of how politics is practiced, what it can be about, and who participates as a political agent animates this discussion (section 2.3.2). Accordingly, each chapter will engage with two or more of the most relevant values, to better understand the implications of these everyday politics of water.

In the following chapters, this thesis examines the dynamics of the everyday politics of water at three scales: the city, the community, and the household, to understand how it manifests and shapes how citizenship is negotiated. This deepens reflections on social power and water infrastructure—drawing from literature on the gendered participation in water management, feminist political ecology, and citizenship studies. This thesis makes the claim that exploring the ‘everyday politics of water’ is critical not only for understanding how policy and planning approaches can better address the needs and aspirations of diverse informal settlement residents, but also for understanding the extent to which collective mobilizations across the city are able to make claims that are representative of a diverse spectrum of residents. Ultimately, this helps to explore how
water (and its infrastructure) may reinforce or construct social difference, creating different possibilities for diverse individuals to relate to citizenship.
Chapter 3  Methodology

Knowledge is not something we can eat or wear; it has to be shared
( Programme Coordinator, Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj).

3.1  Introduction

I remember the feelings of those first nights in Kathmandu. I arrived in January 2016, in the middle of a crisis. The country was wracked by a debilitating blockade taking place at the Indian border. Fuel, medical supplies, people—all were stopped from entering the country over a six-month period. It was shockingly, frustratingly, damaging for a country just starting to rebuild after the earthquake of April 2015.

It was cold. The kind of cold that sinks into your bones and stays. In middle class houses we turned instinctively for gas heaters that could no longer function in the midst of the black-market rationing of supplies. Those without solid walls were even less fortunate. Nights were candlelit, flickering shadows from small fires burnt for warmth, the odour of garbage—uncollected and piled on the side of the road. Sometimes I felt sorry for myself. I secretly despaired first at the ice-cold of the shower, and then second from guilt I wasn’t grateful I had a running tap at all. Lesson one: navigate the contradictions—the embodied and personal.

As it was winter, electricity was provided only about six hours a day—a complicated system which divides the city into zones, with each area operating on a different daily schedule. Energy might be supplied from two-to-four on a Monday, and not again until nine-to-twelve on a Tuesday. Though the city couldn’t (or wouldn’t, as indicated by a scandal which emerged after I had left) supply enough energy to power the homes of its citizens, there was an app (’Batigayo’ or Light’s On!) to let you know the exact timings of when you could use your power. Lesson two: find a quick fix to a big problem. Those early days were lessons in absorption. Four AM comes the rumble of shopfronts being opened, the loud cries of men on bicycles selling newspapers, fruit, household goods. 25,000 stray dogs roam the city. Honking traffic is constant, functioning as a polite warning that someone is behind you—useful in the absence of other discernible road laws. Bikes, cars, rickshaws, tuk-tuks, motorbikes, scooters fill the street with
constancy. Bells from every temple on every corner are rung in succession, a raucous greeting to the gods. People smile; I’m told because I look foreign, but then again not too foreign. I am small like them—“Nepali-sized” they say. Lesson three: what I represent is not always my own to define.

The narrow crammed crisscrossed streets (now comfortable and familiar) were a source of anxiety at first. Crossing the traffic-choked road was a schizophrenic affair—a mixture of brash confidence to stride boldly into the road, and frozen paralysis as I waited for the right moment. Most of the time I ended up standing uncomfortably close to a stranger, shadowing their movements and standing on their heels in fear of getting hit. Lesson four: read the city through the rhythms of those who own it.

There is a common traffic scenario in which two cars would meet from opposite directions and get wedged in a too-small road. Unfazed by the blockage, new cars and motorbikes push into small gaps behind the cars to try and drive through. The honking continues; intensifies. Cars pile up four lanes thick as the gap gets smaller, closing any possibility of the original cars to reverse and easily fix the problem. It is a testament to the little absurdities of Kathmandu that this happens routinely, mundanely. And yet, inevitably, the situation resolves when a passing stranger begins directing traffic. Motorists comply willingly and without abuse, and after minutes of total blockage the traffic creeps slowly onwards. Lesson five: the city is under pressure.

It isn’t possible to see Kathmandu without understanding the ways massive population growth has outpaced service provision. It was evident in the private vendors I called to supply the enormous water tank on my roof, the routine power outages, the visible consequences of sewage dumped directly into the (once-sacred) Bagmati and Bisnumati rivers. Yet (lesson five) things are going on. What I saw in both my own daily routines and the research presented below was genuine commitment to navigating whatever challenges arise. In the absence of traditional provisions, the city runs through a steady stream of daily improvisations. And in these improvisations are the seeds of alternate possibilities, as residents make the city.

I’m opening this chapter with the acknowledgement of my emotions navigating through a new city and the fieldwork, in recognition of the vital role this plays in the analysis.
The following chapter outlines the epistemological and ethical grounding of this research, and explores how this feeds into the research design and case study selection. Drawing from my research diary, the final section reflexively explores the production of knowledge in its messiness and delight, presenting a series of ‘lessons’ which offered challenges to the ethical principles of the research—exploring how this informed the approach and analysis presented in the body of this work.

### 3.2 Social Constructivist Approach to Knowledge

The objective of this PhD is to develop and explore the notion of the ‘everyday politics of water’, to understand how this produces different citizenship experiences for residents living in an informal settlement in Kathmandu. Critical to this approach is a sensitive approach to intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1991), which in this case refers most particularly to gender, ethnicity, and class. Positioning these against the wider contextual environment of water and urban politics in the Kathmandu Valley is intended to provide a basis for how people themselves are defining and experiencing their citizenship rights, through contestations at different scales.

This exploration assumes an approach to knowledge, or epistemology, which privileges the thoughts, experiences, and perceptions of informal settlement residents, as situated within wider social and political processes. This emphasis on context and personal interpretation lends itself to a social constructivist approach—which informs the methodological choices and assumptions of this PhD.

A social constructivist epistemology understands knowledge to be ‘constructed’ through human experience, perception and positionality. It acknowledges that any research process is conditioned by historical, social, and situational contexts, and shaped by the researcher’s (and participant’s) interpretation in data and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, ‘meaning’ is always mediated through language or other social processes, and what is considered knowledge or truth is matter of perspective (Gergen, 1992). This approach can be held in contrast with the positivist claim that an objective truth can be ‘found’ by the neutral observer. Drawing from the influences of feminist researchers, this PhD replaces the notion of an independently-verifiable objectivity with the concept of ‘situated knowledge’ (Haraway, 1991; Hardin, 1968). In other words, knowledge is
created through the fluid interaction of ‘lived experiences’ between researchers and participants, and narrated through this lens.

In specific terms, a social constructivist approach acknowledges that different residents of Bansighat, political authorities, local organizations (or myself, as the researcher) may have different (and at times contradictory) understandings of “what’s really going on”. Thus, in analytical chapters representing different scales— the household, the community, and the city—this research has sought to explore multiple narratives and ‘framings’ of problems (related to urban development; informal settlements, or water provision, for example), and their proposed solutions from varied perspectives. Productively engaging these contradictions forms the rich basis for analysis and discussion.

Also critical to this research is the commitment to exploring how it can support or contribute to a process of ongoing social advocacy in the city. This is an important point to make in regards to epistemology, as social constructivist approaches have sometimes been criticized for falling into the trap of relativism (Creswell, 2012). In other words—if competing truth claims are taken as equally valid, this can be an impediment to revealing injustices and taking action. Thus, while this PhD is not a ‘participatory action-research’ project, there is also a considerable exploration of the principles which underpin such approaches. To this end, the distinction made by Jacobs and Manzi (2010) between “ideas and concepts”, which are socially constructed, and “social and spatial processes” which have a material grounding, is helpful. As such, this PhD engages an analysis of both the ‘big’ social and spatial processes underpinning urban developments and the wider water sector of Kathmandu, as well as the more subjective ideas and concepts which shape how this is experienced and understood by different actors in daily life. This allows a ‘critical’ reading of daily life in the city, which is: “connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, p. 140).

3.2.1 Four Research Principals

Knitting the above together, this PhD takes inspiration from a social constructivist epistemology, feminist research ethic, and certain principles of participatory action
research. At its core—and connecting the three—is the commitment to a “reflexive” approach to knowledge production, encouraging moments to reflect on issues of context, power, and relationships. To this aim, this PhD is motivated by four ethical principles which have guided the methodology. The section below expands upon these principles, before exploring how this informed the research design and methods. The final section presents a reflexive analysis of the ethical tensions and choices that were encountered, with reference to these principles.

3.2.1.1 Acknowledges Positionality

The concept of ‘positionality’ is concerned with the ways in which the researcher’s identity may affect the research process and outcomes (Haraway, 1991; McDowell, 1992). This is particularly poignant within ‘cross-cultural’ research, and where authors have highlighted the risks of replicating uneven power differentials through the ‘extraction’ of information for foreign or academic audiences—critiqued both as a form of appropriation, or at worst a new form of colonialism (England, 1994; Mohanty, 1988).

Many reflexive accounts start from the assumption that the researcher comes from a place of power—in my case, wielding more privilege to shape the conversation as an ‘outsider’ from a ‘global’ university located in the Global North. While acknowledging the power imbalance of the research process (which I can enter and exit, as well as author the final narrative), this can also be turned around in different ways. In fact, there were moments with my institutional partners where I was profoundly small—for example, seen a ‘student’ looking to conduct more trivial ‘surveys’. Thus, the aim of this research is also to move beyond essentialist characterizations of identity, to better explore how my own relationships with the organizations I partnered with—as well as the women and men I interviewed—shifted and changed throughout the field research. This entails an awareness of both my own individual characteristics (which can be modified and shared differently to a certain extent), as well as the wider ranging set of relations that I am embedded within (i.e. the privileging of ‘expert’ knowledge, the legacy of aid in Nepal, the global political economy of the ‘North’ and ‘South’, a history of development interventions and studies in Kathmandu informal settlements). Doing so helps to shed light on the mutual and multiple ways in which I perceived residents and organizational partners, as well as how they positioned me.
3.2.1.2 Builds Relations

Following from the previous point, both a social constructivist epistemology as well as a feminist research ethic have been active in challenging the positivist assumption of the distinct separation between the researcher and the researched. It instead seeks to “work the hyphens” (Fine, 1994)—or understand the spaces in-between the researcher and those interviewed. As a research ethic, this informed the choice to work in collaboration with several local organizations—firstly, Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj (NMES), the women’s federation of the urban poor, who are the most well established and organized group working around settlement upgrading and rights, and secondly, Guthi, an organization working specifically in Bansighat, and with close links to the water sector. It is also important to mention the crucial role of the research assistant and interpreter from the local University of Social Work, who played a critical role in mediating this relationship, becoming an active participant in the production of knowledge. Building this ‘team’ around the PhD was a both a mode of strengthening the research process, as well as establishing a base through with whom the research reflections might be taken forward.

However, beyond this relationship with local partner organizations, it is also true that the small settlements of Kathmandu—while perhaps less saturated than other cities—have also seen many local and international researchers, which does generate questions around power and representation. Furthermore, I encountered a set of localized power relations within Bansighat itself, which at different moments I sought to work around, acknowledge, or—at times—disrupt. Navigating these relations—particularly in the final stages of the research—while remaining attuned to both risk and confidentiality was a key and ongoing challenge.

3.2.1.3 Grounded in the Everyday

The privileging of ‘the everyday’ is already embedded within the research question, which explicitly takes this as the site of study, making the case for a political reading of mundane activities around water. This is in line with the epistemological position of knowledge as something inherently situated: “not something that people possess in their heads, but rather, something that people do together” (Gergen, 1992, p. 270). Exploring the everyday lends itself to an approach and analysis which favors thick description (Geertz, 1977),
individual and collective discussions, and a gendered analysis of different realities. It cuts through the research design which involves both more traditional qualitative and ethnographic research methods, including semi-structured interviews and focus groups in a single place over a long period of time, as well as the use of participatory photography—which opened up possibilities for people to frame their daily routines and values and perceptions in a different way.

Importantly however, this is not to romanticize a localized vision of ‘the community’, but to understand how everyday experiences are reflected, reinforced or challenged at wider scales. This commitment has also informed the selection of the case study city. Kathmandu has an interesting history of water struggles and policy shifts, and it’s not just the very poor or landless that struggle with accessing supply from the utility, Kathmandu Upatyaka Khanepani Limited (KUKL). This allowed for the possibility of a multi-scalar analysis in the tradition of feminist political ecology (Truelove, 2011; Rocheleau et al., 1996) that links micro-level ‘everyday’ experiences with approaches at the city-scale to cope with more systemic issues. This commitment both to linking scales and foregrounding diversity, while exploring ‘everyday’ interactions around practices, perceptions or social relations runs through the three analytical chapters.

3.2.1.4 Explores Social Action

Finally, this PhD stands firmly within the position that research is a political process. This means seeking to produce knowledge that works towards supporting, catalysing, or exploring a form of strategic social change. As such, this thesis takes clear inspiration from the tradition of action-research—informed by Friere’s (1970) work which understands the research process as holding the potential to lead to emancipation through education and social action. Work within this tradition is “explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society” (Lather, 1986, p. 50-51). At its best, action-research proposes itself as an antidote to those critiques which pose research as another form of colonization through hierarchical knowledge production.

Nonetheless, this approach is not immune to its own critiques, and is beset by a number of ethical tensions which must be navigated. Moreover, the commitment to truly collaborative action-research is also limited by the academic endeavour of a PhD. The nature of it—in which the aims of the work were developed without the local research
partners, the solitary role of the researcher, and limited time and resources, present challenges to embedding doctoral work within an action-research framework. This potential ‘clash’ has been noted by Klocker (2012) who outlines the sometimes-competing demands of ‘traditional’ academic work (“individualistic, outcome-focused, timeline driven”) and PAR (“collaborative, process-focused, time-intensive”) (p. 152).

These different institutional priorities meant that, despite any (perhaps naïve) initial intentions, I cannot position this PhD within the world of action-research. Nonetheless, this PhD does reflect the desire to explore the possibilities for “research as praxis,” or in other words, seeking to understand how and where research can contribute to a process of social change—either in leaving behind something politically or strategically useful, or in creating spaces for people to collectively share or reflect upon their own realities (Nagar, 2002). In practical terms, beyond working closely with local organizations, this also entailed a process of ‘translation’ of the academic analysis into a set of recommendations that could be useful for partner organizations, and a separate stage of research (six months post-fieldwork) in which future actions were collaboratively designed with institutional partners and research participants. In this way, I have sought to explore the possibilities of researching with local partners, and to unsettle the boundaries between academic pursuit and activism.

3.3 Research Design

As identified in the introduction, this research was designed in the initial stages in collaboration with the INGO Practical Action. This informed the intention to generate reflections that might be useful in Kathmandu, but also more generally for practitioners working with urban services in cities of the Global South—developing a framework for understanding the complexities around infrastructure provision and wider goals, such as citizenship.

In fact, Kathmandu provides a rich terrain to explore the theoretical and methodological motivations outlined above. Nepal itself is hugely diverse, crisscrossed with strong identity-associations around ethnicity, religion, language and region. This complexity is represented in the informal settlements of Kathmandu, with visible implications for an intersectional analysis. There are deep social and spatial divisions
within the single ‘community’ of Bansighat, which mirrors wider exclusions in the city and country. Water practices are deeply gendered, access remains a challenge for the majority of the population (rich and poor), and for many is still linked with symbolic notions of purity and profanity. Finally, there was the presence of NMES — the strong and active ‘women’s federation of the urban poor’ — which has worked to link both the physical aspects of upgrading with broader claims around citizenship. The aims of this organization share many complementarities with the theoretical exploration of this PhD, as well as representing an obvious organization to potentially support, in line with the aim of exploring ‘research as praxis’.

3.3.1 Staging of the Research

The basis of this research is qualitative, drawing upon ethnographic and participatory methods. A single case-study approach was adopted in line with the aim of facilitating a deep empirical analysis within one locality, and in light of trying to understand the social and spatial complexity embedded within even a single neighbourhood. However, while the majority of interviews and the subsequent analysis is grounded in the particularities of the Bansighat informal settlement, the findings from this case are at the same time used to interrogate broader patterns in the city.

Methods used include a mixture of participant observation, semi-structured interviews with key informants and residents of informal settlements (68 interviews in total), participatory photography, focus group discussions, a final ‘action-planning’ workshop, and an analysis of policy and programmatic documents and media sources—carried out over five distinct ‘phases’ of the research (Appendix 2). Access to the research areas in the initial stages was facilitated by key ‘gatekeepers’ at the city-level organization of *Mahila Ekta Samaj* (though this was not without complications, as discussed later). Phase 1 of the research (Feb 2016) entailed a pilot study of 15 resident interviews carried out in the neighbourhood of Jagriti Nagar, and 2 participatory photography workshops focused on multiple settlements. Jagriti Nagar was chosen as the starting point for the study in collaboration with NMES, as it demonstrated a very high level of consolidation (a high level of participation in the federation, more solid housing typologies, smaller population). While findings from the pilot study site are not intended to support a deep analysis, this first stage helped to establish some of the broader
contextual issues faced by settlements. It was used, for example, to map the range of water sources and collection practices that exist throughout Kathmandu’s informal settlements, as well as to understand how the women’s federation was structured. This review helped to refine the hypothesis around key study themes, which were weaved into a semi-structured set of interview questions to be undertaken within the case study settlement. Some of the reflections from this area are used within chapter seven, focused on issues cutting across the city.

Phase 2 of the research began in April 2016, when in discussion with leadership of NMES, Bansighat was chosen for the main focus of the research. This site demonstrated several key characteristics which made it suitable for study. Firstly, it represented one of the larger and oldest settlements in the city. The larger size (over 200 households) was more appropriate than one of the multiple smaller sized settlements (between 20-150 households) so as to represent a broader spectrum of residents, and not to overwhelm the settlement over the longer time-frame of the research. Similarly, an older settlement was preferred to some of the newer ones established in the past decade, as this helped to open up the dynamics between older householders (the original settlers), those who purchased land and/or housing from previous residents, and newer renters, which was hypothesized to be a key tension point within the community, as hinted in the pilot study. The settlement also demonstrated a history of community advocacy particularly around water and sanitation, with a number of ‘improved’ services, including waste collection, community water tanks, and the installation of sewage lines which were implemented in partnership with the municipality. Finally, its highly-centralized location has meant that it has expanded more rapidly than some other settlements, as well as being a site of significant interest for wider urban development priorities of the municipality.

Data collection continued in Bansighat for six and a half months in two phases (phase 2: April – May 2016; phase 3: July – November 2016.) Research was staged in this way to allow a period of analysis and refinement in between phases. In total, 33 household interviews and two participatory photography workshops were carried out in this site. In addition to household interviews, phase 2 and 3 of the research entailed observation in the settlement, and interviews with key informants from the local government, the utility, NGOs, academics, and other practitioners working in the field of water and
sanitation or with informal settlements (Appendix 3). These interviews were geared at obtaining a wider understanding of the context and sector-specific knowledge. In total, twenty key informants were interviewed. This was complemented with an analysis of key policy and programmatic documents or media accounts related to informal settlements or the water sector, to unlock values and perceptions which underpinned more officialised or popular approaches.

The series of four participatory photography workshops carried out in phases 1-3 were particularly designed to unlock some of the more routinized experiences around water, and the values that underpinned them (Image 3.1). The first workshop was held with youth workers in Mahila Ekta Samaj, which helped generate reflections on water conditions and collection practices across five different settlements. This facilitated a broader discussion of the wider challenges shared by residents across the city. The second was with five women from Jagriti Nagar to map water practices in the settlement with an emphasis on community adaptations. A final two workshops were held in Bansighat—the first with younger women (aged 16-18) to explore the relationship between changing gender dynamics and household responsibilities, and the second with a collection of women representing different viewpoints across the settlement, aimed at producing photographs and stories for advocacy.

Following the phases (1-3) of data collection, a number of workshops were carried out in phase 4 (Oct 2016) of the research to discuss the initial analysis with Bansighat residents, as well as to explore how the themes explored related to concepts of citizenship. This involved a photography exhibition of a selection of photos and captions from the participatory workshops, followed by a presentation and discussion, attended by over forty people, including residents of Bansighat, a local newspaper, and representatives from relevant organizations. A second smaller discussion group was subsequently held with selected Bansighat residents aimed at discussing some of the key tensions points and prioritizing water challenges in the short and long-term. A closed presentation was also conducted with institutional partners in NMES and Guthi.
Finally, following an extensive period of analysis, an additional two-week trip (phase 5) was carried out in April 2017, six months after the research period, which allowed for a deeper analysis of emerging themes. At this time, a series of three workshops was carried out as a way of disseminating key issues, as well as opening discussions on the practical implications with groups that may be able to use it in their ongoing advocacy. The first workshop was a closed meeting with five members of the academic and NGO community to internally strategize and plan the subsequent two workshops. The second workshop was hosted in collaboration with NMES with a group of twenty-one federation members, representing six different settlements. This was aimed at the development of a “Water Charter”, outlining seven basic principles and concrete actions which would support residents with their water challenges (Appendix 4). This charter, and key research findings, was presented by two federation leaders to the local utility, the Kathmandu Valley Water Services Board (KVWSB), and WaterAid in a third workshop, which secured tangible commitments relating to infrastructure provision in Bansighat.
3.3.2 Sampling Strategy

The phased staging of the main body of the research (with pauses in between each stage) allowed for space to undertake rounds of data analysis, which reflects the iterative approach of the research. Practically, it also helped to refine the sampling strategy. In the initial stages of the research, key contacts from *Mahila Ekta Samaj* were relied upon to make introductions in the community, and for guidance on which households to speak with. Beyond a practical strategy, this approach was a manner of working collaboratively, and a product of the political decision to align myself with the federation. While this was an invaluable starting point, it also quickly became clear that working through these ‘gatekeepers’ was likely to be a barrier to understanding alternative perspectives from the settlement—especially from those residents that might not feel represented by NMES. From field notes from the third interview in Bansighat:

> There was an obvious sensitivity in some of the things being shared with us today. The community leader followed us into the house, and started heavily directing the conversation. At some point, she literally told us that the things he [the person we were interviewing] was recounting were wrong. His face was very tense at this moment (Fieldnotes, 05/04/2016).

As such, by phase three of the research I adopted the strategy of asking to speak to residents across five distinct areas the settlement—linked with the five community tanks in the area. This helped to access different kinds of social networks, as each tank had different management structures—with the federation distancing itself from those on the western half. Relationships were developed across the settlement in this way, with key residents asked for referrals to others, using snowball sampling. Finally, I asked different residents across the settlement for introductions to those who “did not use” these communal sources (Table 3.1). By the final weeks of the research, key nodes in the community were asked for referrals to groups that had been harder to reach in these ways (purposive sampling) – especially renters, recent migrants, or those of a particular ethnic group. After nearly six months of research, the research was understood to reach ‘saturation’, in which no significantly new stories or accounts emerged (Morse, 1995).
This PhD is informed by an ‘inductive’ (or theory-building) approach, seeking to look at existing phenomenon from a new lens. While categories for research may be defined, an inductive approach requires a period of evidence-gathering in order to identify if and how the proposed categories are related (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). This approach is particularly appealing because of its iterative nature—meaning theory can flexibly evolve in relation to the issues and themes that emerge. This is a comfortable fit with the experimental nature of the research question, as there isn’t yet a large body of scholarship that unpacks the concept of everyday politics. It likewise mirrors the commitment to being grounded in the ‘everyday’—allowing thematic categories to emerge from the words and experiences of residents.

In the context of this research, this meant that the initial categories of what makes up ‘everyday politics’ were proposed as a starting point—material practices, infrastructure, values and perceptions, and social relations, as was the heuristic used to link these concepts (embodied experiences, discursive framings, and symbolic narratives). However, the categories of ‘politics’ that this generated—access, participation, and belonging—were fleshed out and defined with greater rigour throughout the data collection and analysis process. This analysis was conducted after each phase of the research, in which interviews were translated and transcribed, and categorized into open codes using NVivo software, from the words of residents. These codes were then clustered into master themes, or ‘core variables’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)—related to material practices, social relations, infrastructure, and values and perceptions.

Table 3.1: Interviews across the settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tank Use</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Location in Settlement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (broken)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconnected</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Data Analysis
The approach which informs the three analytical chapters proceeded as follows. First, I started data analysis with the different material practices around infrastructure which were articulated by Bansighat residents. Following the lead of feminist political ecology, which seeks to link scales of analysis from the house to the city, I clustered these practices according to scale—looking at those which occur in individual households, within the Bansighat community, and those articulated by federation membership as a collective practice occurring in settlements across the city. Categorizing the practices in this way revealed three overarching themes related to each scale—relating to water access, participation in water management and community life, and a sense of belonging forged through (water, and other) entitlements. Accordingly, each chapter is organized in this way, opening with a definition of these three overarching themes—contextualizing them within wider discourses related to water infrastructure and urban development in Kathmandu or internationally.

Secondly, within each scale, these material practices were further examined for the perceptions which underpinned them. It was through this that the heuristic of embodied experiences, discursive framings, and symbolic narratives was critical, as the values and perceptions could be expressed or analysed in these three ways. In other words, perceptions around different practices were revealed in the ways in which people accepted different physical or emotional loads, the justifications that were expressed around them, or the ideological or representative value that was accorded to these practices. This was used as a way to link the different conceptual elements of the ‘everyday politics’ framework. As such, each analytical chapter presents first two different material practices around infrastructure, and explores this heuristic as a way to draw out and reveal the different values or perceptions which underpin these practices. The subsequent section explores how these material practices and perceptions in turn generate or reflect embodied, discursive, or symbolic divisions between residents—and how this impacts social relations in the settlement. Doing so speaks to research question one—outlining the ‘everyday politics of water’ (and according to scale) in Bansighat, and linking the different elements of the conceptual framework.

Thirdly, this analysis is bridged with the wider urban drivers in Kathmandu, referring to processes of ecological change, social and gender norms, urban development or water policy. This particularly refers to research question two—positioning ‘everyday politics’
in relation to these broader trends. Thus, each analytical chapter returns once again to the overarching themes of access, participation, and belonging—seeking to unpack how these concepts are embedded in different approaches to water policy or infrastructure provision—and how this conditions, and is linked with, the everyday experiences of residents.

Finally, the last section of each chapter brings this discussion of everyday politics into dialogue with the concept of citizenship—thereby referring to research question three. Each chapter closes by engaging with at least two of the most relevant citizenship values proposed in the theoretical framework. This is used as a way of reflecting on the implications of everyday politics—demonstrating how and why this analysis can shed light on the experience of substantive citizenship.

3.5 Anonymizing Identity

In line with the ethical considerations outlined in greater detail in section 3.6, this thesis has anonymized the names of all residents interviewed in Bansighat, as well as the names of the photography participants across different settlements. In most cases, quotes are referred to only using an interview number, and an M or F designation to indicate the gender of the speaker. This is prefaced by either a ‘B’ to indicate a Bansighat resident, or in a few cases a ‘J’ where referring to an interview from the pilot neighbourhood, Jagriti Nagar. In certain cases where names are used, these are aliases designed to help with the narrative flow of the text. In all cases, residents were advised as to the nature of the study, and following the interview were re-asked if they were happy for their stories to inform the research and the PhD publication, with the use of the alias. Similarly, any photographs displaying individual faces which are used within this text have been cleared both with the original photographer and the model. In general, while there would not be a high level of risk associated with using the real names of participants, this is adopted as good research practice, as well as in the few cases where certain intra-community tensions are discussed, and are better left anonymized.

The decision to keep the settlement name as is, however, is adopted in light of the unique placement and services present in the site, which would mean that it is easily
recognizable. Moreover, it is understood as important in light of the desire to generate reflections which can be of use to community organizations working in Bansighat. As such, in public presentations and meetings—while individuals were anonymized—it was important to identity Bansighat specifically. This approach has therefore been mirrored here.

3.6 Interpretive Authority

The emphasis on social constructivism requires engaging with multiple realities—which necessarily generates “dissonant data” (Perlesz & Lindsay, 2003)—or narratives which may seem divergent or contradictory. These contradictions were embraced, and throughout each of the analytical chapters the narratives which are shared explicitly seek to represent different daily routines, assumptions, or social groupings. This is intended to generate a rich portrait of the diversity which underpins a “community”, in acknowledgment that residents might share different perspectives on the same events. Nonetheless, there is still a need to demonstrate a kind of ‘validity’ (or ‘trustworthiness’ as renamed by Lincoln and Guba (1985)) within qualitative research from a social constructivist position. This requires a balance of the ‘rigour’ of scientific enquiry with the ‘art’ of seeing meaning in context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To this aim, this PhD has employed a number of strategies which can support the demonstration of validity within plurality, including: triangulation, speaking from perspective of the marginalized, and member checking.

3.6.1 Triangulation

“Data triangulation” (Denzin, 1978), or the use of a variety of sources, was critical in the process of constructing a narrative that may not represent a singular ‘truth’, but is nonetheless coherent. Within a social constructivist framework, triangulation is sought not to demonstrate an objective reality, but rather to add depth to analysis through the inclusion of multiple perspectives. Interviews with key institutional partners operating at different scales helped to illuminate wider trends related to, for example, broader ecological changes or historical social exclusions, which play an important role in the understandings laid out in chapters five through seven. This was also supported through the review of secondary resources, including policy documents, materials from programmes and interventions, media articles, and documentation and mapping
produced by local groups. For example, one reoccurring theme (explored in depth in chapter seven) was around the stigma faced by residents of informal areas as ‘polluters’. Though there were multiple accounts from residents which contested their responsibility for the pollution of the river, differing perspectives could be traced in newspaper articles, as well as reflected in assumptions within programme documents aimed at river restoration. In this way, the everyday experiences of residents could be contrasted with programmatic approaches and discourses embedded in media or policy documents—understood as different framings of the same problem—and leading to very different understandings of strategies or ways forward.

3.6.2 Speaking from the Perspective of the Marginalized

Working explicitly with perspectives from the margins underpins the general intent of this research, which takes as its starting point the realities of residents of informal settlements. This commitment is practiced through the reliance upon thick description and verbatim quotes drawn from transcriptions—creating space for residents to ‘speak’ for themselves. However, the intention was also to go deeper than this—seeking particularly to reveal those perspectives within a single community that might go unheard. To this aim, I feel confident in the claim that there were voices that were not getting represented in either the management of community water sources, or in neighbourhood planning or life more generally, as evidenced in the following quote:

I think I’m speaking too much, but I’m feeling happy to share my problems. I’m also telling you about other things in my life, but it is all related. Until now no one has come to talk about our problems, but you came and I’m getting the chance to share my problems. I feel very relieved to be sharing my grief (B17M).

This comment (and others like it) reveals a fragment of a larger story, and one that feels politically important. In particular, this phrase—“until now no one has come to talk about our problems” can be contrasted with the many residents I was introduced to in the first weeks of the research, who consistently (if usually good-naturedly) commented on how many researchers they had already hosted. What I understood is that in Bansighat ‘research fatigue’ (Clark, 2008) affected a specific population only—those that I was directed to in the initial stages of the research. Nor was this related only to research, but also impacted other NGO-led projects, in which resources were reported (by both
‘excluded’ residents and NGO practitioners alike) to nearly always be funnelled through the community committee, managed by the federation. Though there are important and understandable reasons for working through existing community structures, it was clear that this consistently disenfranchised particular residents that were disconnected from this group. Crucially, trying to navigate these internal dynamics in a deeper way was an important motivation underpinning the sampling strategy and in demonstrating saturation.

3.6.3 Member and Expert Checking

In order to address some of the concerns around representation, the narratives presented in the chapters below were also subject to several different stages and scales of ‘expert’ and ‘member-checking’ (Heller et al., 2011; Turner & Coen, 2008). Occurring in phase 4 and 5 of the research, a series of workshops and focus group discussions were used to present back interim analysis to different sets of residents or key informants. This process was understood as important not simply for gaining clarification on assumptions and interpretations gained from multiple interviews, but also as a way of undertaking a collective analysis of key issues and themes. Indeed, comments after a closed workshop with federation youth workers was indicative of the use of this process: “now I can see that where we are working, we are doing great things — but maybe we need to understand better how we are not reaching everyone.”

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Somewhat different from ‘techniques’ that can be practiced—is the commitment to the research principles outlined in the opening of this chapter. Following the lead of feminist research, this PhD also takes the opinion that the best mechanism to demonstrate the ‘trustworthiness’ of research accounts is to adopt a reflexive approach to key values and decisions which have shaped the research process (Reissman, 1993). To this aim, a research journal was kept to trace tensions, emotions, and transformations throughout the months of work. The following section draws reflections from this journal—exploring a series of ethical considerations, challenges, and choices which were present throughout the research, and which integrally shaped the production of knowledge.
3.7.1 Negotiating Partnerships

One of the common concerns when engaging with fieldwork is the process of negotiating relationships ‘in the field’. I was sensitive to this dynamic, as an ‘outside’ researcher without previous engagement in Kathmandu, and with the intention to explore the intersection of research and action. Thus, the need to work with ‘gatekeepers’ – local institutions or individuals that might provide insight and introductions to different communities (Eide & Allen, 2005)— was therefore important to me both as a matter of practicality, but also as a mechanism to deepen the research engagement through partnership.

As Practical Action did not have ongoing project staff in Kathmandu at the time of this research, my first point of call was Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj (NMES), the women’s federation of the urban poor\(^2\). This represented one of the only organized groups in Kathmandu working systematically in informal settlements (alongside their support NGO, Lumanti), and was a group that I felt my own political sensibilities aligned with. However, this generated a series of challenges in the initial stages of the research, as I needed to develop new relationships with partners that had not been a part of the research design.

Upon approaching the programme coordinator for the city-wide organization, I was initially told that it would not be possible to conduct any research—that residents in the settlement would be unwilling to answer any more questions, and the federation was not interested in this work. In other words, the programme coordinator of NMES clearly wielded her power to block what was seen as an unproductive study, seeing my position as a young, foreign student. At the end of this first meeting, I came home dispirited to write:

\(^2\) The decision to work in a city without an ongoing Practical Action intervention was twofold. Firstly, it reflected the desire to focus on Kathmandu—which compared with some of the smaller cities of Nepal is relatively understudied in terms of interventions and actions on urban settlements. Secondly, I wished this thesis to provide reflections which might be useful to practitioners in Kathmandu and more generally, without turning into a ‘programme evaluation’ of Practical Action work.
I felt like an intruder in the NMES office today. Everyone is clearly very busy, and I was not proposing something that seemed to be helpful to her [the programme coordinator]. She tells me many members of the community may not be willing to talk to foreigners. Perhaps they have had bad experiences in the past? She had a long conversation in Nepali, clearly about me, with several people, and I was wondering uneasily what she was saying. I understand that she is very protective of this space. She gave me the suggestion that I ask youths in the settlement to conduct ‘my surveys’, or that I combine with the local hospital that is doing research at the moment. I felt small, that she dismisses there might be value in this research. (Or could it be – she has a different conception of what I’m trying to do?) We left it as a wait-and-see situation. I will come back again later (Fieldnotes, 24/02/2016).

Given that few social organizations work within informal settlements in Kathmandu, as well as the strength and extensive reach of the federation, it was important to me that the leadership in the city office was convinced of and interested in the work that I was doing. I perceived this to be partially a challenge of doing fieldwork within the boundaries of a PhD—in which the topic and timeframe was relatively fixed, and had not been designed in collaboration with partners in the locality (Zavos & Biglia, 2009). With some level of fear, I returned a few days later hoping to build an alliance around a shared motivation, even if it did not encompass the entirety of the project. This emerged in a second meeting, where I discussed some of the methods I was proposing—including participatory photography. It was at this point that the discussion changed, as this was immediately perceived of as something that might be useful for the organization, and for the women that would get involved. It was suggested that I run an initial workshop with some of the youth workers in NMES—with the idea that storytelling through photos could be useful in their day-to-day advocacy work in the different settlements they work in³. In other words, while we may not have developed a collective vision on the content of the research, there was a level of collaboration on the methods used, and in the wider advocacy strategy that this might be embedded within.

This is in line with feminist research which seeks to identify the ways in which ‘situated solidarities’ (Nagar and Geiger, 2007) can be formed across identities and power—built around “shared interests, political aims or ideas of social justice” (Schurr & Segebart, 2012, p. 151). After discussing this proposal, when I queried again about the difficulties I might face in engaging residents tired of researchers, I was quickly told: “this won’t be a problem

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³ I also suspected this might potentially have been a safe “trial” space, where the programme coordinator could assess whether or not I was going to run something of use.
With this agreement, I was able to start my first visits to different communities, with a key contact point working in the federation as my introduction. This proved invaluable while working, and I depended upon this relationship in the hopes of distinguishing myself from the disconnected university researchers or NGO professionals that would ‘parachute’ into the area (MacKenzie, Christensen, & Turner, 2015; Sidaway, 1992) to conduct their own surveys, and then disappear. However, this partnership also came with its own difficulties. I soon realized the way in which power was fractured through my association with the federation, in which working with them might close down certain perspectives:

The politics of water unfolded quickly here, without even prompting. This is a family that was restricted to buying expensive water in jars because they are unable to access the other three community tanks. She expressed a distinct and ready sense of disenfranchisement from NMES, as the group that was excluding her family. I realized this was the first time I felt I didn’t want to offer the information that I was working with them [NMES] (Field notes, 07/04/2016).

This recognition in my field diary is reflective of the fact that research relationships with gatekeepers goes beyond the ‘logistical’ concerns of access, or the deeper concerns of wishing to link the research with the agenda of my local partners. In fact, in this moment I perceived that choosing whom to work with, and how this is represented, changes the production of knowledge—in that it might likewise impact how I was perceived, and what people choose to share (Campbell, Gray, Meletis, Abbott, & Silver, 2006).

As a result of this realization, I strategically identified with the federation at certain times, while in others introducing myself only as a university researcher. This also informed the decision to align with a second organization, Guthi, which was working specifically within Bansighat, and which had strong links with the water sector. This organization and the staff there became key allies in the research process, and played an
especially significant role in facilitating meetings with water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) professionals and the utility. This strategy was consistent with the research epistemology, embracing multiplicity through different partner perspectives and priorities.

### 3.7.2 Building Trust with the Research Assistant

A second key factor structuring this research is the fact that the majority of interviews in the settlement were carried out in Nepali. As such, in addition to negotiating research partnerships, a second task upon arrival was to engage a research assistant, Lajan Maharjan. This section seeks to share some brief reflections on this process of collaboration—thinking on his role as “translator, cultural broker, and mediator and gatekeeper” (Caretta, 2015, p. 490). This recognition is coherent with a social constructivist position, acknowledging that the ‘voices’ of participants are mediated through the process of interpreting or assisting. As such, the assistant and interpreter is considered integral in shaping knowledge production (Temple & Young, 2004; Turner, 2010).

Lajan is a young university graduate in Social Work, living with his family on the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley. From the outset, he was engaged as an assistant with his own stake in the research rather than as a translator—embracing the fact of his own interpretations and assumptions rather than seeking a ‘neutral’ translation of text. Practically, this involved an ongoing process of collaboration and mutual interpretation. Emphasis was placed at the beginning on developing a shared understanding of the theoretical content and practical implications of the research. We met several times before beginning any research activities to discuss the theory and content of the semi-structured interviews. This formed an important strategy for mutual meaning-making, supporting him to join in developing not just the questions asked, but the motivations behind the inquiry. In this way, this research follows others (Edwards, 1998; Neufeld, Harrison, Stewart, Hughes, & Spitzer, 2002; Temple, 2002) which seeks to engage translators in discussions around motivations.

Upon starting research, discussions were held after each day of work to clarify and discuss if we both similarly understood key points of content, as well as to get Lajan’s
opinion on moments that struck or impressed him as important. To this end, conducting a pilot study in a separate site was invaluable for practicing and refining our tactics for collective reflection on interviewing, translation, and transcription. His input was sought in rephrasing or ordering the types of questions asked, and in the final month of the research he was able to improvise and elaborate upon themes that emerged, or anticipate follow up questions. The impacts of this collaborative approach are evidenced within his transformation in understanding his position as a ‘job’, to the development of a deeper emotional commitment:

When I started this project, I had just graduated from my social work degree, and just before this research I was working for people affected by the earthquake. With my profession, I have always been interested in humanitarian work. This research was perfect for me to work on, but I had never worked with informal settlements. So, at first I was interested because it was a social project, and I was a social worker. But doing this work started to change my thinking that its more than a job, but rather my social responsibility. I was becoming a voice for the people we worked with, which really interested me afterwards.

The interviews we conducted were also transcribed by Lajan, and form the rich quotes provided throughout this PhD. While I considered engaging a second person to do the transcriptions as a ‘check’, ultimately, I decided the shared building of our team, demonstration of trust, and prioritization of Lajan’s own reflections and discussions that emerged while doing the transcriptions was more valuable. This is also reflective of the epistemological position that there is not necessarily a ‘correct’ version of the text, embracing the ‘bias’ within the transcription as understood by the assistant/translator as the most truthful interpretation (Simon, 1996).

Finally, encouraging Lajan’s own professional development and engagement with his study was also an important motivation of this research related to the principle of ‘seeking change’. His own expansion of knowledge and understanding was evident in the way he could articulate key themes with specific examples from interviews or transcriptions. As an accomplished photographer with a keen interest in using visual methods for social research (expressed in his interview for the position), he led the last participatory photography workshop himself:
To tell it honestly, every part of the research has inspired me—all the photography trainings, interview, amazing stories, our presentations, working with Mahila Ekta Samaj—these things taught me about different and better ways of approaching communities. The main thing it did, and what really changed for me, was photography. After that I started taking photography seriously, thinking that it was a fantastic way of portraying people’s story in a very effective manner.

He also played a key role especially in what Klocker (2012) refers to as the ‘practical’ analysis—“pulling out key issues, ideas, and suggestions that would help in developing an agenda for change” (p. 160), which generated different (if mutually reinforcing) reflections emergent from the ‘academic’ analysis, and formed the basis for many of the workshops and focus groups we conducted in the final stages of research. In this sense, he was himself an ‘active researcher’ who helped to construct the meaning and content of the research—as well as developing his own skills and a deeper understanding of his city:

My whole perception towards these communities changed completely after this project. With the experience I gained from this research, it has opened my eyes and has erased the negative preconceptions which I had before... When we went deep into those communities we could see only good people who were struggling with their own lives. I must be only one in my circle of friends, or in my family, who has seen this closely their problems. And this has happened from this research, which I am really thankful for. From this experience, in the future I will be definitely be working with such communities—and if someone is against them, I am going to speak for them.

These initial perceptions experienced by Lajan in regards to informal settlements are reflective of much of the stigma faced by residents in the city at large, and his personal transformation throughout the project represents a small-scale version of the wider perceptions we sought to challenge throughout the research.

3.7.3 Engaging the Contradictions, Constructing the Critique

Finally, I’m starting to pick up some of the key fault lines between identities. Today emerged a reference to visible tensions between the original settlers, and those that came later, buying houses or land. How do I start to look at these attitudes? Not that I want to go stirring something up! Why am I always interested in finding tensions? But how else do I understand if there is more going on below? (Fieldnotes, 25/03/2016)

Already I have heard inspirational stories of the transformation of people and their family lives through participation in the federation, arrangements
linking with officials, and creating innovative arrangements around services, but also in ongoing trainings and workshops. So how to walk the line of celebrating this work, while also exploring what it means to broaden their reach? (Fieldnotes, 05/04/2016)

The two notes above, referring to interviews first in Jagriti Nagar and then in Bansighat are evidence of an ongoing preoccupation I had with how to represent tension points or challenges within neighbourhoods, that in many respects were working extremely well. This concern with ‘disrupting official stories’ of partners and groups (Edelman, 2009) was something I felt particularly in combination with the academic mandate of “being critical”. I grappled with the trade-offs between wanting to ‘protect’ the work of the organization I was partnering with and admired, and the desire to raise the visibility of particular fault lines as a way to support future practice.

In fact, I entered the research already with the preconception from previous work in Kenya that the work of the federations of the urban poor may not be as representative of the full diversity of the community as might be assumed (Butcher & Frediani, 2014). Yet I also felt the ethical mandate not to expose these groups—who in many cases are working far better and more innovatively for informal settlement residents than any other groups in their locality—to anything that might be construed as criticism. At the same time, my previous work meant that I have often been unconvinced by the silence in scholarship of many of the internal power dynamics that occur through this group (with key exceptions of significant influence on this work, see: Doshi, 2013; McFarlane, 2004; Roy, 2009). This engagement with ‘dissensus’ (Mouffe, 2004) has always been an important motivation in shaping the research questions for this PhD—not as a way to question the legitimacy of what community groups are doing, but to shed light on the heterogeneity that exists within these spaces, as well as how their work can adapt to ongoing urban transformations over time.

In conducting this research, it was evident almost immediately that I was dealing with powerful women—who both had achieved significant successes within their communities, but who also might not always represent the entirety of the neighbourhood. This was reflected in my own ambiguity in some of the interviews I conducted:
Today, a conversation with the most powerful community leader. She can talk endlessly, without pause for translation. I admit I had already developed certain preconceptions about her, though I know the language barrier between us also makes it hard to judge that. I knew she was a powerful woman, but I’ve already seen her talk over others. Perhaps I also suspected that she might query me on my motivations for being here. She seems suspicious of researchers, and I felt defensive.

…however, as time went on, I tried to appreciate what a privilege it was for such a force of character to take so much time with me. Though I’m not always sure I believe wholly the narratives that are presented to me, there is no doubt she is an amazing woman. The networks she taps into and the work that she does ‘for the community’ to the sacrifice of her personal life sometimes is evident.” (Fieldnotes, 12/03/2016)

This raises important questions around representation and meaning-making. For one, I am aware that a different researcher with a different set of preconceptions might have emerged from a similar study with a very different narrative – focusing wholly, perhaps, on the strength of community collective action around water, which is impressive in this case. Or conversely, a different researcher might think less about the political trade-offs or contextual realities which underpin some of the tactics and strategies of the federation—focusing instead on the narratives of the ‘excluded’ without an attempt to understand the constraints faced by the federation. This follows the calls for reflexivity within a social constructivist epistemology—which recognizes that there is not a fixed or stable representation of ‘reality’—only multiple interpretations (Crang, 2003). As such, there was an important political choice in terms of how these challenges were portrayed throughout this PhD. As much as possible, I have explored ‘framings’ which both celebrate the strengths of the federation and tap into their ongoing work, while also creating space for the narratives of residents that do not fit within this community structure. This also means that where identifying limitations, I have also tried to position this within structural constraints—such as environmental degradation, population pressures, or rising land prices. Doing so provided a fruitful framing which could open up discussions on how to interpret sticky narratives and multiple experiences of both emancipation and oppression, and without assigning judgement.

3.7.4 Navigating Internal Power Relations and Risk

In engaging with the key fault lines outlined above I was inevitably engaging directly with power relations within the community. This has the potential to generate different
kinds of risk for residents: “embodied and grounded in everyday experiences and situated within a broader social, economic, political, and global context” (Cahill, 2007, p. 366). In the case of Kathmandu, this is intimately linked with both the ongoing spatial transformation of the city (including the influx of new migrants, especially as renters) as well as to different social categories (related to caste, gender, or ethnicity) which have been recognized as generating multiple axes of disadvantage in Nepali society (Bennett, Ram Dahal, & Govindasamy, 2008). While this is always a difficulty to be navigated by researchers, in this case it was made more challenging by the fact that those with the most power in the neighbourhood (if not always ‘powerful’ in the wider city) were also my partners and facilitators in the process.

Beyond the issues of representation and meaning-making identified above, this also had implications for confidentiality and risk. From my first introduction to the neighbourhood, I could see that the east side of the neighbourhood was better serviced and with higher quality housing and services than the west. It was also clear that these spatial divisions had an important social dimension. For instance, when I first queried the possibilities of speaking with residents from the western half settlement, I was first met with hesitation, told that “the other side is not safe, there is a lot of drinking, bad people there.” As I later realized, this was reflective of prejudices within the Bansi Ghat neighbourhood, and indeed, the city as a whole, around a certain ethnic group that lived on the western side. While engaging with these tensions points were important to me, how to safely represent these stories remained a key question.

In particular, I encountered several residents who offered counter narratives to that of the ‘unity’ of the community, highlighting deep divisions in the settlement. While many of these residents expressed their desire to share ‘their story’ to myself and Lajan, there were several occasions when I was also asked not to repeat examples of discrimination in the wider community. This was shared, for instance, by one participant:

I’m speaking in English now because people here don’t understand it, and I can express my feelings freely. Now you have come to my house to interview me, and you are happy to hear what I am saying. But as soon as you leave people here will start to interrogate me about what I said about the community: are you complaining about us? Immediately they could hold a meeting, make the wrong interpretation about my thoughts. They might even ask me to leave this community for that.
This suggests the very complicated nature of consent (Heller et al., 2011), in which verbal agreement may shift throughout the course of the interview, and additional risks might be acknowledged by participants around particular stories. This also raised important concerns for me, in terms of how this informed discussions and collective analysis in the final phases of the research process:

I need to tread carefully here. I was repeatedly told they didn’t want certain things to get back to the rest of the neighbourhood. And yet I wish these issues could be let out... (Fieldnotes, 11/05/2017).

In essence, this placed different ethical principles in tension with each other—on the one hand to do no harm, and on the other to ‘return’ the research to the city and community (MacKenzie et al., 2015). These concerns meant that I felt unable to raise these issues myself in public discussions with Bansighat residents, despite seeing these exclusions as a critical barrier to access to water resources, participation in the community, and a sense of belonging in the city. What this left is a fragmented sense of where research can support an ongoing process. This is reflective of the limits of my own positionality—in which there were some areas where I found this PhD research might be able to have an influence (i.e. in advocating for better water infrastructure), and other areas which turned out to be unrealistic (i.e. addressing exclusions faced by Madhesi renters).

As a result, during key moments in the presentations and material I generated and left with partners in Kathmandu, I opted to omit or reframe certain ideas for different audiences. For example, I spoke more generally of ‘newcomers’ or ‘renters’ (rather than of renters of a specific ethnic group) as a way to hint at some of these broader exclusions. With this soft approach in public arenas, I felt I could mitigate any chance of risk for the residents that I spoke to. While I have adopted more direct approach within this PhD, this is still done through patterns and generalizations and with anonymized quotes as a way to lessen the chance of individual identification. (Though it is likely that anyone familiar with the context will be able to identify the community leaders).

In Kathmandu, a second strategy I adopted was to explicitly invite residents I perceived as representing ‘non-dominant’ perspectives to the final photo exhibition and discussions, with the intention of creating a (physical) space for residents themselves to
raise these issues, if they so desired. In fact, this opportunity was taken up during discussions after the participatory photography exhibition, though this was also a lesson in the limitations of this process. At this time, a young resident (renter, living on the less-serviced western side, and representing a minority ethnic group) several times tried to offer comments on the unfair distribution of services in the neighbourhood—taking the opportunity to query this both to myself as the “researcher” as well as to the room, and the “community leaders” specifically. However, after several questions within this vein he was repeatedly ‘hushed’ by the moderator—one of the powerful community leaders, and my partners in the research process.

I felt initially disappointed that this ‘space’ did not allow for a more meaningful engagement with his concerns, replicating power imbalances in a visible way. It appeared to be the classic mistake of expecting that ‘bringing all voices to table’ would allow people to speak equally in a context of deep social inequalities (Couldry, 2010). Nonetheless, it also true that this young participant was exercising his own agency in raising attention to these inequities out of his own experiences, and perhaps in a more public forum than usual. This highlighted to me the complexities of the metaphor of ‘give voice’ (Rappaport, 1990) or ‘empowerment’ through research, in which the outcomes and impacts of this experience for those involved are not always visible or knowable to the researcher. Ultimately, what I found most realistic in this context was to raise more sensitive issues in ‘safe’ private spaces with local partners, anonymizing these reflections. In doing so, these more-challenging reflections could be left behind with organizations better equipped to make sense of them within their own context.

3.7.5 Contributing to a Change Process

The previous discussions hint at some of the opportunities and limitations of trying to embed the PhD research within a process of change. On the one hand, I cannot claim that this research fulfils the ambitions of participatory action-research. Nonetheless, there were a number of key moments in which the research sought to move towards action. This included (in phase 4) closed presentations with the research partners, a public photography exhibition, and an action-planning focus group with Bansighat residents; and upon a return visit to Kathmandu six months later (phase 5), a series of city-wide workshops to develop and ultimately present a ‘Water Charter’ to the
Kathmandu Valley Water Board and the Water Utility. The exhibition and Water Charter will be explored in more detail here.

3.7.5.1 Participatory Workshops and Exhibition

There is a rich history within social or anthropological research on the use of visual methods, including photography, for research. Importantly, while participatory photography (also known as photo elicitation, photovoice, or reflective photography) can generate a rich set of narratives, it has also been upheld as a method which allows participants themselves to drive storytelling, and opens up spaces for them to reflect upon their own lives (Singhal, Harter, Chitnis, & Sharma, 2007; Wang & Burris, 1997). In particular, linking the photography workshops with a final exhibition was aimed at generating discussions around issues faced by residents across different informal settlements, as well as creating a creative space for residents to become co-collaborators in the construction of knowledge. Participants were engaged in making meaning through the photos in different ways. Initial discussions around the photographs taken helped generate collective themes or individual narratives, particularly around collection or management routines, or perceptions and values related to different water sources. Beyond creating a space for subjective meaning-making on individual photographs as they were originally taken, these workshops also revealed a nuanced shift in how residents interpreted their own photos following group discussions. This can be seen in

**Pre-Discussion:** I took this photo to show the comparisons here- there is a lot of garbage being thrown into the river, but also there is a truck. So why are we throwing into the river if there is another option? But I also wanted to show the greenery on the left, so there is a little hope.

**Post-Discussion (Caption Chosen):** When will we understand our responsibility? It’s not that we don’t have any options, but it’s like we don’t want to improve ourselves or make improvements. Why are we throwing in the river if there is another option? We need to think! Is urbanization compressing our lives? Is urbanization separating us from the responsibility of protecting nature?

Image 3.2: Participatory photography exercise (source: Laxmi, Samakhusi)
the photo below, for example, in which the photographer, Laxmi, moved from a
descriptive analysis, to a more prescriptive and emotive reaction which she wanted to
use for the exhibition (Image 3.2).
Participants then had the opportunity to each select one or two photographs they
wished to display in the final exhibition. This allowed another round of collective
analysis, as participants discussed the combination which would ‘strategically’ represent
a range of perspectives. For example, several photos which had not featured
prominently in the previous discussions were included because they demonstrated more
positive work on water, which participants felt was important, in contrast with many of
the other images which displayed struggles (Image 3.3).

Image 3.3: Successful water fountain
My daughter is drinking water at a school tap that was donated by the NGO “Splash”. It is
different from a regular tap, because here you have to press the button, and the water comes
upwards! So children were having a lot of fun using that tap (Tika, Jagriti Nagar)

The exhibition itself served as an important moment of celebration of the research that
had been done, beyond the photography workshops (Image 3.4). A presentation was
made to communicate some of the major points of the research to residents, and a
collective discussion was stimulated around the issues that Bansighat raised. This was particularly valuable in creating a visible moment to ‘give back’ some of the research to the neighbourhood. Additionally, a number of external individuals were invited—from the local press, and relevant NGOs and organizations—reflecting the desire of the photography participants to use the opportunity to raise visibility and challenge negative perceptions of their settlements. A radio interview (in English) and newspaper article (in Nepali, “Annapurna Post”) was produced documenting the exhibition and discussion. There were also impacts which extended beyond the life of the exhibition. NMES continue to keep the photographs, and have re-displayed them to generate discussion and awareness in subsequent events. The first workshop with the NMES youth facilitators was also indicated by several participants to have supported them with the use of visuals for storytelling in their ongoing advocacy work.

Image 3.4: Photography exhibition and discussion (source: Lajan Maharjan)

3.7.5.2 Water Charter

The decision to return to Kathmandu six months after the completion of primary research, in April 2017, emerged out of the discussions in the final workshops held in October 2016 (phase 4). The idea was formed in consultation with partners NMES and Guthi, who had identified the upcoming months as a strategic moment in time: in advance of the first local council elections the country had seen in over a decade, and on the (purported) wake of the long-awaited Melamchi Dam. In particular, it was proposed to hold a ‘city-wide’ workshop with federation leaders across the city, in order to develop a ‘Water Charter’—a series of demands around water infrastructure and management—which could be presented to the utility and Water Service Board. In this workshop, reflections from Bansighat were presented, before twenty-one federation members from six settlements split into three groups to discuss and present back on
different questions related to their water demands, as well as ideas on what communities themselves could contribute (Image 3.5).

This Charter was subsequently delivered by two federation members, alongside a presentation of the research, to the Kathmandu Valley Water Board. This resulted in the commitment by the Board to several short-term measures to alleviate some of the challenges faced in Bansighat—including increasing access to subsidized water deliveries, and supporting repairs to broken infrastructure in the settlement. Moreover, additional discussions were held between Guthi, WaterAid, and the Water Board to carry out an assessment of water access and management in informal settlements throughout the Kathmandu Valley—linked with more strategic and long-term concerns around how informal communities might be included within future service provision in light of the Melamchi Dam. While the outcomes of these assurances and proposals relies upon the further work of organizations in Kathmandu—and is not guaranteed—it nonetheless demonstrates the possibility for research to support and generate momentum around particular issues. The intention to leave behind research that was politically or strategically useful was acknowledged by a close colleague in Guthi, telling me in a final interview: “when you first came here, I thought you were like all the others. They come here, they do some research, then they disappear. But now I can say that we are really lucky to be working together.”

Image 3.5: Production of Water Charter (source: author)
3.8 Conclusion

I do not use other people’s struggles as the basis of my research; I use my research as a basis for struggles of which I am a part (Kobayashi, 1994, p. 78).

In its own small way, this PhD has sought to explore the possibilities contained within the quote above by Kobayashi. But what does it mean to become a part of living struggles? The struggles that are picked, the ways this is framed, and the navigations of ongoing ethical dilemmas are all coloured by my own research values. The words and claims of this PhD thus can only be reflective of my own interpretations—strategic, partial, political. And yet these interpretations also have depth and weight. They have meaning-in-context—resonance for local partners and in conversations with the residents whose experiences fill these pages. While it may tell only one version of a story, there is a rigour and intent underneath its telling. Above all it is shaped by its ethical principles— and a deep commitment to exploring the multiple and diverse experiences of Bansighat residents, and Kathmandu.
Chapter 4  Context

4.1  Introduction

The case of Kathmandu, Nepal is a particularly resonant field for the exploration of water, identity, and politics. Nepal is often cited as one of the poorest nations in the world, with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of US $470, and an estimated 42% of residents residing below the poverty line. While it is still predominantly rural (representing an estimated 83% of the population), the country has a very high rate of urbanization, around 6% per annum since the 1970s (UNDESA, 2012). It is also richly diverse, with a history steeped in conflicts over caste and geography. Nepal contains over 102 different ethnic and caste groups, speaking around 100 different languages. It is made up of three geographical regions: the hill areas, the Terai (the plains), and the mountains, each with distinct cultural traditions (Image 4.1). While predominately Hindu, it also has active Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist communities. As will be explored, these intersecting identities have played a significant role in the national political transition, as well as in the everyday ways in which residents of Bansighat interact with each other.

Critically, the rapid urbanization process occurring in Nepal is highly centralized, with 30% of the urban population located in the Kathmandu Valley alone⁴. As such, it is urbanizing unevenly, placing extraordinary pressure on the ageing infrastructure and services in the capital region. These pressures are highly visible within the water sector, in which only 55% of population is estimated to receive piped water services, with high levels of variability in both quality and quantity (NGO Forum, 2005). These issues are felt most fiercely in the rapidly growing informal settlements of the city. Here, population pressures have squeezed residents into pockets of often precarious riverside lands. Water provision in these areas is considerably lower, estimated to be closer to 37% (NGO Forum, 2005). While social organizations of the urban poor have worked to implement a range of non-networked infrastructure, these are intersected by their own internal sets of power relations, as well as influenced by the particular hydrological conditions of the different settlements.

This thesis takes as its focus a single informal settlement, Bansighat, located within Kathmandu, Nepal⁵. However, following the theoretical imperative, this chapter first opens up discussions on some of the wider structural influences operating both nationally as well as within Kathmandu: representing social and gender norms, water policies, urbanization trends, and processes of ecological change. Following this discussion, it scales down to the urban level to explore the processes of urban change in the city, with particular reference to the water scenario. Finally, it discusses informal settlements within the city, ending on an exploration of the particular characteristics of Bansighat.

⁴ Recent Constitutional shifts have sought to redress this balance through the redrawing of districts and granting of greater authority to local municipalities, in the hopes of growing satellite cities to absorb the rural-to-urban migration.
⁵ Throughout this thesis, the phrase ‘informal settlement’ will be used to refer those areas where residents have occupied (usually government-owned) plots of land throughout the city. While certain policy documents and popular language in Kathmandu have often referred to ‘squatters’, in many cases this is done pejoratively. In the words of one resident of Jagriti Nagar: “about being a ‘squatter’, I think this word itself sounds so weird, isn’t it? Usually we don’t disclose of residing in these areas, and I don’t call myself like this” (JN15F). That being said, this thesis recognizes the political and contested nature of these terms, which are imperfect, and the fact that certain activists in Kathmandu do use the language of squatters in their ongoing work. In this thesis however, this term is used only where referring explicitly to policies or to wider narratives that employ this term—where squatter will be used in inverted commas.
4.2 Social Identity and Democratic Transition in Nepal

4.2.1 Nepal’s Political Transition

The process of political transition in Nepal has been bound up in identity-formation and social exclusion, with clear implications for the case study site today. The root of modern-day subject formation can be traced back as far as 1800, under the reign of King Prithivi Narayan Shah. Prior to this, the ruling dynasty had control over the present-day Kathmandu Valley, which existed only as a patchworked set of towns containing a vast plurality of languages, customs, and affiliations from the second century A.D. At this time, Narayan Shah initiated a unification of these disparate areas. This has been recognized as the critical moment in which social exclusion was fostered and made visible, as many of Nepal’s distinct ethnic groups lost political and economic control over their traditional and locally-based community structures, as smaller administrative centres became centralized. It was at this time that the Kathmandu Valley was broken into its three present-day districts: Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur, while expansions to the north and south steadily increased the reach of the Kingdom.

Following the reign of King Shah, the Rana period (1846-1951), built upon this social and spatial stratification more explicitly in two key ways. Firstly, was the seizure of previously communally owned lands from indigenous populations throughout the country. These confiscated lands were granted to those loyal to the new monarchy, or to civil and military personal as a form of political reward. This instigated a development pattern in which less-connected groups were removed from primary or high productive or high value land (Gurung, 2009). The second was the legal codification of the Caste system through the Muluki Ain (Civil Code) of 1854. This system classified the different ethnic groups in the country into five categories, or varnas, based upon symbolic notions of purity and pollution in the Hindu religion. The Muluki Ain set out explicitly discriminatory rules also reflected in the penal code of the time, for example, in which lower caste individuals would receive harsher punishments for the same crimes.

Brahmins represented the highest priestly caste, followed the Chhetri (kings and

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*The intersection of identity and politics within the Nepali context is a highly complex subject with a long history, and thus only a brief introduction is offered here. For more on how this has generated social exclusions, with particular reference to ethnicity, caste, and gender, see Bennet, 2008.*
warriors), Vaishya (merchants), and the Sudra (peasants and labourers). Those non-Hindu indigenous residents (comprising around 59 distinct groups), called Janajatis, were brought into the system within the middle castes. Below these four castes were occupational groups that were considered impure—the ‘untouchables’—who now refer to themselves as Dalits. The Muluki Ain established the basis for institutionalized discrimination, outlining differential rights and responsibilities for each of these different castes and sub-castes. Those occupying the lower castes were socially and economically excluded from accessing resources or more fertile lands, and prohibited from certain public spaces. These divisions have also been linked with ritualistic practices around water (and purity), in which those of a lower caste are prohibited from sharing the same sources as higher castes (Bennett, 2006).

The process of politics and identity formation shifted again following the ascension of King Mahendra Shah (1955-1972). Mahendra was responsible for undertaking a wider nation-building project, often referred to as ‘Nepalization’ (Rademacher, 2012). This nationalist project sought to restructure government institutions established during the Rana period, and entailed an emphasis on forging a common identity. Critical to this project was the abolishment of the Mulkin Ain and caste-based discrimination in 1963. Despite these progressive politics, this wider project of Nepalization was also critiqued for masking the country’s numerous fault lines around religion, ethnicity, caste, and language. Under the Nepalization project these differences were framed as barriers to the development of a ‘modern’ Nepal—with ‘Nepali identity’ defined as the culture of upper caste Nepalese from the hill regions (Bennett, 2006). As such, national ‘unity’ was forged through the erasure, rather than the recognition, of diverse ethnic, caste, and cultural groups. Furthermore, this period was also characterized by a series of policies and programmes which systematically disenfranchised particular groups. An extensive nationalist programme of clearing land, instituting national forests, and encouragement of migration from hill areas to Terai regions was undertaken as part of an effort to neutralize the close kinship and cultural ties residents of this region shared with India, particularly disenfranchising those of the Madhesi ethnicity. Likewise, women, Madhesis and Dalits were explicitly excluded from engaging in national-level politics (Gurung, 2009).
The first transitions to democracy were instituted with King Birendra Shah (1972-2001), opening up a new set of political implications for Nepal’s diverse sets of identity groups. Critically, the introduction of multi-party democracy represented the first time ethnic affiliation was permitted to take a central and recognized role in politics, as the new Constitution (1991) set out the parameters for a state that was ‘multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and democratic’. This period of time saw the proliferation of identity-based civil society groups—particularly related to ethnicity and caste, which had prior been suppressed under the ‘Nepalization’ process. This also represented the first time that the Nepalese government began gathering and monitoring data on caste, in recognition of continued discriminatory practices.

Despite this discursive political shift, this period continued to be dominated administratively and politically by the prominent castes and ethnicities of the past: the Brahmans, Chettris and the Newars—an ethnic group with its ancestral home in the Kathmandu Valley. Women, Madhesis, and Dalits remained significantly underrepresented in the parliament and civil service. Legal prohibitions on the use of languages other than the dominant Nepali (Khasa) in official business hindered indigenous and other linguistic groups (Gurung, 2009). Furthermore, at this time ethnic identity became loosely inscribed onto political affiliation, resulting in the continued authority of dominant ethnic groups within the major parties of the electoral system (Bennet, 2006). In response, the Maoist-Communist party adopted an explicitly anti-Bahun (anti-high caste; hill regions) rhetoric, to appeal to the lower castes and economically excluded—and sowing the seeds of the unrest which was to come.

By 1996, the widespread perception of the failures of this democratic transition sparked the beginning of the “People’s War”—a decade long conflict (1996-2006) between the Royal Nepalese Army and the army of the Maoist-Communist Party of Nepal. In particular, the affiliation of ethnicity, gender, and caste was strongly encouraged by the Maoist party, mobilizing support across broad segments of Nepalese society that had been disenfranchised under the monarchy and new democratic order—mainly, women, the Dalit caste, and those of other indigenous groups residing outside of Kathmandu. While this opened up new spaces of mobilization for previously marginalized identities, this lengthy struggle is also blamed for further stalling the economic development of the country, and displacing over 200,000 people.
The protracted conflict came to a resolution in 2006, with a peace deal and introduction of an Interim Constitution (2007); and on May 14th, 2008, Nepal was declared a ‘Federal Democratic Republic’. Several critical policy changes related to social exclusion were effected at this time. This included: women being able to pass citizenship on to their children; the state officially being declared secular, and the implementation of affirmative action policies in parliament (33% reserved seats for women, and a total of 45% for women, Dalits, Janajatis, and people with disabilities), and the discrimination of ‘untouchable’ castes rendered punishable by law (Bennet, 2008). However, this period also reopened long suppressed debates on decentralization and the political representation of Nepal’s different ethnic identities within new governance structures. Political disagreement on these issues continued for a period of eight years, stalling the introduction of the new Constitution until September 2015. Critically, this also meant that local elections have gone through two periods of decade-long stalls—firstly, from 1997-2006 when elections were paused as a result of the war, and again after 2006, when political infighting around the Constitution paused elections. While the Constitution was enacted as of November 2015, and the first round of local elections held in 2017, questions and unrest still remain over the allocation of powers and responsibilities to the newly created seven regions, as well as how Acts will be developed to uphold rights newly enshrined in the Constitution.

4.2.2 Identity Politics in Nepal Today

Today, identity and politics forms a complex web of associations. There are still distinct markers of caste and class, strongly affiliated with ethnic and religious identity. Despite the shift to secular governance, a high proportion of the most powerful political and social positions in Nepal continue to be occupied by those of the Hindu religion, a clear legacy of the hierarchical (Hindu) caste system (Bennet, 2006). Discrimination against the lowest castes has continued, particularly in village areas—resigning these groups to ‘ritually impure’ tasks, such as dealing with the death of humans and animals, refusing lower castes to enter high caste households, or resulting in economic and even physical violence (Bennet, 2006). Women, and especially those of lower castes, continue to face significant barriers to access property ownership, financial credit, and political power. In rural areas especially, menstruating women are also considered impure, and are often unable to touch public water sources, or in more extreme cases, are required to sleep
separately in small shacks outside of the household in a practice called _Chaupadi_ (UNDP, 2014).

With particular relevance for this thesis, while the country as a whole struggles with high levels of poverty, this also continues to be linked with geography, with the HDI of the western Terai and mountainous regions significantly lower than central hill areas (Image 4.2). Here caste and class discrimination also intersect with ethnicity, particularly affecting lower-caste, poorer residents of Terai region in the south of the country. In particular, the Madhesi ethnic group, who continue to live predominantly in this region, are often contrasted with ‘true Nepalese’ from the hill areas, and treated as ‘Indians’—hearkening back to discriminations embedded in the ‘Nepalization’ instigated in the fifties (Lawoti, 2010). Most recently, Nepal suffered an extremely damaging six-month blockade across the Nepali-Indian border from December 2015—April 2016, linked with protests at the new Constitution over the levels of autonomy on the Terai border region. This closure had devastating impacts on the import of crucial goods such as petrol and medicines, and halted the reconstruction process after the earthquake of April 2015. Critically, the blockade was reported by some Madhesi residents in Bansighat to increase their social stigma locally, demonstrating the ways in which wider political struggles manifested in everyday ways.

Image 4.2: HDI values across 15 eco-development regions (UNDP, 2011)
Importantly, a discussion of caste-based as well as gendered discrimination has entered mainstream discussions throughout Nepal, particularly through strong national-level women’s and Dalit organizations. In urban areas especially, discrimination across these lines is understood to be lessening, with many residents of Bansighat equally reporting a significant improvement in social hierarchies as compared to their villages. However, there are still substantial barriers for those facing intersectional deprivations. For instance, a study commissioned by the World Bank and DFID (2006) demonstrated that Brahman (higher caste) women are “significantly” more empowered than Dalit (lowest caste) men, while simultaneously Dalit women were found to experience the lowest level of empowerment and inclusion of any of the surveyed groups. Similarly, an ADB (2010) study found that the intersection of caste, ethnicity, and economic status was a limiting factor where seeking to engage residents in development initiatives. For instance, with particular reference to water and spaces of representation, this study found that:

Due to caste discrimination and prescribed social norms, even when Dalit men and women are on user committees they cannot always speak up and they feel less inclined to attend meetings. Although Dalits have access to drinking water facilities, their access can be restricted especially in mixed settlements, as they are made to stay at a distance or wait until the non-Dalits finish fetching water (p. 31).

Moreover, it is also critical to emphasize that similar efforts have not (yet) been placed on addressing the persistent discrimination between residents of the ‘hill’ and ‘plains’ (Terai) areas of Nepal. This is particularly problematic for those Madhesi residents of the lowest (Dalit) caste. A Save the Children report (2014) exploring livelihoods in slum areas found that Madhesi Dalits suffered the most deprivations across multiple dimensions: with the least number of household assets, lowest literacy rates, and lowest household incomes. This is compounded by structural discrimination in the workforce, where caste and ethnicity (easily identifiable through last names) are widely understood to be used to deny employment opportunities.

In this way, it is possible to see how the interlocking factors of ethnicity, caste and gender continue to contribute to socio-economic marginalization. These markers of identity continue to play a significant role in the everyday entitlements of Nepalese citizens, with a profound importance for development interventions aimed at informal
areas. Critically, there exists a profound gap between those tenets outlined in new Constitutional guarantees, and the everyday experiences of residents within marginalized socio-economic or identity groups, impacting the ability to substantively achieve citizenship rights.

4.3 Kathmandu Urban Development and Water Policy

4.3.1 Kathmandu Valley Urban Development

Against this backdrop of social and political change, the growth of Kathmandu has been definitive, drawing residents to the city from all manner of religious, ethnic, and caste backgrounds. For many years, the heart of Nepal has been located in the Kathmandu Valley (Image 4.3). It was from here that King Mahendra Shah launched his policy of unification, expanding outwards to incorporate the surrounding regions into present-day Nepal. In the 1950's, it represented 80% of the urban population, reflecting both its historical significance as an urban centre, as well as the overwhelmingly rural makeup of the country (UN-Habitat, 2010). It was the seat of the crown during the Hindu monarchy, and later, the site of struggles for democratic governance.

![Image 4.3: Map of Kathmandu (Thapa, 2008)](image)

Today the Kathmandu Valley is composed of three districts: Kathmandu City, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur—with the focus of this thesis on Kathmandu Municipal City
(KMC). Kathmandu City and Lalitpur are encircled by the major Ring Road, and crosscut by the mighty Bagmati and Bisnumati rivers. Bhaktapur is located 16km away, and maintains much of the traditional architecture and cultural traditions of the indigenous Newar population of the Valley. While Nepal is still a predominantly rural country (representing 86% of the population), Kathmandu City has been experiencing an exponential population boom – rising from 250,000 inhabitants in 1970 to nearly one million in 2010 (Table 4.1)\(^7\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of municipalities</th>
<th>Urban population</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Urban pop as % of total</th>
<th>Average annual grow rate</th>
<th>Total population in Kathmandu City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>238,275</td>
<td>8,256,625</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>181,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>336,222</td>
<td>9,412,996</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>202,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>461,938</td>
<td>11,555,983</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>249,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1,659,719</td>
<td>18,491,097</td>
<td>9.17</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>549,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3,227,879</td>
<td>22,736,934</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>907,380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Urbanization Rates in Nepal (CBS, 1997) cited in (Pradhan, 2003).

With a current growth rate of 6.65 percent, it represents one of the fast expanding municipal areas in South East Asia. It also represents a highly diverse population, with 44.2% of residents born outside the district, and representation from over 67 caste and ethnic groups (GoN 2001, cited in Subedi, 2010). Migration to the capital has occurred from every region of the country—a result of displacement ‘pushes’ from the ten-year war, and natural disasters such as flooding and landslides, or from the ‘pull’ of economic opportunities.

\(^7\) Several factors have been identified for the rapid increase in urban population in the Kathmandu Valley. Prior to the 1950’s, the Nepali state had adopted a policy of tight control over in-migration to the Valley, seeking to maintain the cultural monolith of Newari culture. These internal policies shifted in the early sixties, while at the same time the country opened up to global trade networks and tourism, particular with an increasing reliance on foreign aid. Centralized urban development policies concentrated resources in the Valley, and instability and violence in rural areas during the ‘people’s war’ led to high levels of in-migration. (Rademacher, 2008).
and educational opportunities and services. This rapid growth has resulted in a fivefold expansion of the built-up areas of the Valley between 1955 and 2010, (Image 4.4) leading to significant spatial change in land-use, instigating “sprawl, suburbanization, and a dramatic expansion of informal settlements”, and generating new ecological pressures (Rademacher, 2008, p. 107).

Image 4.4: Land use change, Kathmandu Valley (in Thapa, Murayama, & Ale, 2008)

In particular, Kathmandu Valley’s bowl-shaped topography has exacerbated the extremely high rates of pollution from car exhausts, construction, and industry. Unplanned growth and a lack of enforcement of building bylaws and regulations has been linked with increased environmental risk, with Kathmandu Valley considered one of the most earthquake-vulnerable areas in the world (Bhattarai & Conway, 2010). As will be discussed later in this chapter, a lack of adequate sewerage has led to the degradation of the once-sacred Bisnumati and Bagmati rivers, particularly affecting the residents of informal settlements situated riverside in Kathmandu City and Lalitpur. Ad hoc measures to obtain water in the absence of municipal provision throughout the Valley has seen the rise of unsustainable drilling practices which have depleted the water table across the city, impacting older public resources upon which much of the urban poor relied. A paucity of urban planning guidelines has seen the urbanization of poverty—represented by the rapid rise of informal settlements—largely alongside the riverbanks of the Bisnumati and Bagmati rivers, at twice the rate of the city as a whole (UN-Habitat, 2010). Today, the urban poor are estimated to represent about 15% of the population, and informal settlements have seen a sevenfold increase in the period between 1985-2003, reaching somewhere between 20000-40000 people (Lumanti, 2008).

4.3.1.1 Housing for the Urban Poor: Evolving Approaches

The rapid growth of Kathmandu Valley has meant that urban planning and policy has lagged behind growth, generating many of the pressures on land, housing and services
visible today. Planned development of urban areas ostensibly began following the end of the Rana Dynasty in 1951, but was only first enacted through the Town Development Act 1973. At this time, the government implemented several sites and services programmes aimed at addressing the growing housing deficit, overseen by the Kathmandu Valley Town Development Committee (KVTDC). However, these projects were aimed exclusively at middle income civil servants, the police force, and students—and accordingly did not address any of the needs of the emerging urban poor (Karki, 2004; Mattingly, 1996). Following this, the Town Development act of 1988 introduced two additional urban planning tools—Guided Land Development and Land Pooling. These instruments were used primarily to obtain land through eminent domain to construct access roads and create open spaces in response to the ad hoc developments that had prior taken place. While these projects are considered to have successfully delivered infrastructure, a lack of integrated planning across projects has been understood as fracturing the urban environment (Shrestha, 2006). As such, this period can be characterized by small government-led projects to ‘catch-up’ to housing demands in response to rapid growth—hindered by a lack of national urbanization policy, and without specific provisions for the urban poor.

More significant urban planning policies emerged after 1991 with the shift to multi-party democracy. This period saw the implementation of the ‘Kathmandu Valley Urban Development Plans and Programmes’, a series of integrated plans for the Valley’s development. These focused on urban expansion in the peripheral areas of Kathmandu and Lalitpur, and included recommendations related to land use, environment, infrastructure, financial investment, industrial policy and institutional frameworks for governance (Thapa et al., 2008). Representing a critical turning point was the 1996 National Shelter Policy, which for the first time outlined housing as a basic need. Despite this important shift, this policy also outlined the relatively limited role for government in providing this shelter support—focusing instead on the provision of basic services and the development of regulatory mechanisms (UN-Habitat, 2010). This period was also characterized by the shift to the private development of housing—leading to the proliferation of private real estate companies registered and contracted by the KVTDC (Shrestha, 2018). As such, while this era introduced the conception of ‘housing as a basic need’, this was understood to be facilitated primarily through the enablement of the private sector.
Also significant at this time was the rapid increase of informal settlements, as a result of the start of the civil war (1996), and high levels of rural-urban migration linked with displacement. This new growth led to the first recognition of the urban poor in policy discourse. At the municipal level, the Local Self-Governance Act (1999) granted the mandate to local municipalities of drawing up the land-use map, specifying the housing plan, development of building by-laws and provision of infrastructure. This Act was critical for first introducing several provisions for residents of lower-income areas. For instance, section 111 (4b) outlines the requirement to: “uplift the living standards… to support poverty alleviation” and section 111 (6c) indicates that development programs should be implemented for the benefit of marginalized groups (UN-Habitat, 2010). However, its efficacy was limited—attributed both to budgetary restrictions of local municipalities, as well as spatial constraints, as the majority of land in Kathmandu Valley is owned by either private individuals or the national government (Shrestha, 2018). The use of this Act for progressive planning has also been hindered by political instability, which has meant the municipality has not seen local elections throughout the civil war period, and until 2006.

Subsequent policy changes specifically acknowledge the growing challenges of informal settlements, ushering in a third era identified by this thesis. This is marked by the (2001) City Development Strategy of Kathmandu Municipality, developed in partnership with the World Bank. This is often identified as the first initiative instituted by the local government to substantially incorporate the needs and realities of informal settlements into the urban agenda. In it, it sets out a vision for future urban development which includes provisions for the upgrading of informal settlements, development of tracts of land adjacent to the Valley, extension of land pooling initiatives, and the implementation of environmental improvement programmes along the riverside areas. Similarly, the National Urban Policy (2007) squarely identifies the role of local government in managing informal settlement areas, in line with the Interim Constitution (2007), which included provisions relating to education, health, housing, land and social security—including the call for “housing for all” (articles 33[h, i]; 35 [10, 14, 15]). Likewise, the revised 2012 National Shelter Policy included reference to the provision of small plots of land or low-cost housing to internally displaced residents and those that are ‘economically weaker’ (section 4.7). As such, this period of ‘housing for all’, can be characterized for its recognition of the role of housing in relation to social exclusion.
Despite these important policy shifts, public sector involvement in housing (let alone housing for the urban poor) continues to be extremely limited. Shrestha (2018) notes that in total land pooling and sites and services programmes have provided only 8095 new housing plots in the period between 1997-2003—and the majority of which are inappropriate and inaccessible to the urban poor. As late as 2000 up to 90% of homes in the Valley were estimated to have been constructed and financed by owner-occupiers, and the emerging private sector involvement typically being focused on middle or high-income residents (UN-Habitat, 2010). Meanwhile, little budgetary allocation has been granted over the years for any kind of implementation of services, housing or other support for informal areas, nor do specific policies exist to prohibit forced evictions or violations of housing rights. This led the UN-Habitat (2010) in a review of the housing and land to conclude that: “no special attention has been given to the urban housing issue” (p. 18).

Today, the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works (MPPW) and Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC) are the government bodies responsible for the regulation of housing and urban growth. Most recently, the long-overdue promulgation of the new Constitution in 2015 has meant that the policy environment is in flux. However, there are a number of positive articles which can be drawn upon. In particular, Constitution Article 37 [1-2], guarantees that each citizen has the right to appropriate housing, and shall not be evicted from housing owned by him/her. Similarly, Article 42, section 51 recommends the ‘right to social justice’, which includes the rehabilitation of residents living in informal areas, and the provision of a small plot of land after their identification (GoN, 2015). This shift is critical—representing the first time the Constitution has enshrined these rights. However, this also generates some tensions for residents of informal settlements—in which the protections against eviction from “housing owned by him/her” may not fully enter into effect, as informal residents can be portrayed as not truly owning their homes (Director General of the National Survey Department, Personal Communication, July 2016).

Similarly—as will be discussed in further detail below—residents of informal settlements have also been placed at odds with wider strategic visions of the city which have sought to capitalize on the cultural heritage of the city, and particularly as linked with the restoration of the Bagmati and Bisnumati Rivers (Rademacher, 2008; Shrestha and Aranya, 2015). This is most clearly evidenced with the National Urban
Development Strategy (2017), which references informal settlements as a critical issue to be resolved, highlighting this in between concerns such as: “public space encroachment… disregard for cultural heritage and aesthetics, and environmental risk mitigation and disaster resilience” (GoN, 2017, 3.3.1). This pejorative framing holds clear implications in a context in which the vast majority of settlements are located riverside, creating tensions between urban development visions for a “clean green” Kathmandu on the one hand, and the inhabitants of informal settlements on the other. Meanwhile, the intensification of private real estate development has led to increasing fragmentation between the rich and poor. Average house prices in Kathmandu are estimated to cost ten times the average annual income of households, typically ranging anywhere from 3,000,000,000 NPR (£20,000) to 9,000,000,000 NPR (£62,000) (Shrestha, 2018). These figures can be contrasted with the typical incomes of residents of informal settlements, which vary between 28,000 NPR (£192) to 96,000 (£660) per year (Sengupta and Sharma, 2006). Newly emerging gated enclaves of the rich have led to further spatial segregation, particularly endangered residents of settlements, such as Bansighat, located in high value central areas.

4.3.2 Kathmandu Valley Water Scenario

Integrally related with rapid urbanization and population growth are the pressures this has placed on the city’s ageing infrastructure, and in particular, around water provision. Nepal is considered one of the most water-rich nations in the world, fed by a large system of rivers and lakes from the snow-capped Himalayas. As such, it is an irony that today the Kathmandu Valley suffers such severe challenges with adequate water provision and distribution, hindered by an inadequate and aging distributional network. Only 55% of the urban population in the Valley is estimated to have a legal connection provided by the Utility, with numbers closer to 37% in poorer areas and informal settlements. However, service even for connected households is intermittent and of poor quality, with connected households receiving piped water an average of just two times a week, and piped water remaining unsafe for drinking purposes (NWSC, 2001). Moreover, the city is experiencing a severe shortfall in the quantity of water needed. Estimates have indicated that the amount needed to service Kathmandu’s residents is about 195 million litres daily (MLD), while the current coverage only reaches around 140 MLD in the wet season, and 100 MLD during the dry. Up to 32% of water is
estimated to be lost through leaking pipes from the ageing infrastructure, illegal or poorly-implemented connections, and ineffective repair procedures (NGO Forum, 2005).

The insufficiencies of piped water provision have led to an increased reliance on groundwater resources for both small-scale and large-scale consumers alike. At the household level, this means drawing from dug wells or boreholes, from which residents collect water by the bucket. At the city scale, a thriving business of private tanker trucks has developed, with vendors extracting resources from streams and wells outside of the Valley, delivering bulk water to large storage tanks kept by households or businesses. While this system has been valuable in plugging the gaps in the absence of adequate piped water, it is also ecologically unsustainable. In particular, larger-scale companies—legally required to drill at least 100m below the ground to access deep water resources—are widely suspected to opt for (cheaper) extraction at a shallower depth, further depleting resources and lowering the water table (Jica, 1990). This process of groundwater extraction is largely unregulated, and is estimated to be exceeding the recharge rate by six times (MPPW, 2002). Likewise, though Nepal has established National Drinking Water Quality Standards (2005), the majority of private tanker deliveries operate without licenses or regulatory oversight, delivering water of variable quality. With little regulation on unsustainable extraction, pricing, quality, or delivery times, these private tanker trucks have in some cases been referred to as a ‘water mafia’, generating highly variable service provision for residents, while exploiting public resources (Executive Director of Guthi, personal communication, Sept 2016). Yet these tanker trucks remain key actors for the provision of water in a context where municipal service remains unable to cope with the existing (and growing) population.

This situation is considerably worse in informal neighbourhoods. A situational analysis conducted by the local NGO Lumanti indicated that 67% of residents in these areas have an inadequate supply of piped water (accessed at a communal point), with 15% lacking any supply whatsoever (Sengupta & Sharma, 2009). For residents unconnected to a household municipal supply, water resources can be drawn from a combination of bottled water jars purchased from private vendors, community taplines or 5000L tanks, as well as dug wells and boreholes or the traditional stone spouts, where they are still
functional (largely in the Lalitpur district). While there have been some NGO-supported interventions to bring in ‘improved’ sources (usually in the form of rehabilitated tapstands or tanks), a lack of legal recognition, combined with high tap connection fees has served to exclude many ‘ultra-poor’ households from the benefits of water and sanitation projects (ADB, 2010).

4.3.2.1 Melamchi Dam

Further complicating the water scenario is the ghost of the Melamchi Dam project, which has hung over Kathmandu Valley for over twenty-five years. First proposed in 1988, in its original conception it consisted of the construction of a 26.5 kilometre tunnel for piping, aimed at diverting 170 MLD from the Melamchi, Yangri, and Larke rivers from the neighbouring Sindhupalchowk district to Kathmandu. Led by the Nepali National Government, the project has been designed in close collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which has provided a loan of US$464 million. This project contains three components: infrastructural development, a social and environmental programme (focused primarily on compensation for those displaced in the Melamchi area), and a package of institutional reforms outlined by the ADB. As such, the Melamchi Dam project is intended to increase the capacity of the piped water network, while encouraging reforms in its management. The project, however, has been beset by a long series of delays related to political instability (the civil war), allegations of corruption, and most recently the April 2015 earthquake, leading to a 20-year delay in completion—largely becoming a source of amusement for many Kathmandu residents interviewed. Setbacks notwithstanding, it is now anticipated to be completed in 2018-2019, with the last 4km of pipeline being laid into Kathmandu at the time of the research.

Despite its lack of physical presence, the project has had a profound effect on the reshaping of the water sector as a whole. Financed through a mixture of government investment and grants and loans from foreign institutions, the project is a clear

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8 Traditional Dunge dara, or stone spouts, are community water systems with deep symbolic and ritual functions, and were the primary source of water in Kathmandu for nearly 2000 years. While the ancient water network continues to be utilized by a significant proportion of the population, the pressures of construction, the depleting water table, and damage after the 2015 earthquake have meant that they have increasingly become depleted. These are not located in any close proximity to Bansighat, and therefore are not referred to in the analytical chapters.
projection of the international agenda of privatization. In particular, in 2007 the ADB outlined loan conditionalities that the state-managed utility shift its daily management to the control of a foreign-based private Management Contractor, with a limited liability company set up to handle to delivery of services. This shift towards privatized management emerged in response to allegations of corruption, and mimicked the wider ADB Water policy (2001), which claims that "private sector initiatives and market oriented behaviour are expected to improve performance and efficiency, particularly in service delivery" (ADB, 2003, p. 21). This was later echoed in the (2009) Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Policy, which set out an emphasis on cost recovery in operation and maintenance of the system.

At this time, the responsibility for utility operation was shifted from the state-run Nepal Water Supply Corporation to the privately-operated Kathmandu Upatyaka Khanepani Limited (KUKL), under a public-private partnership model. The transition saw the creation of a new institutional arrangement which split management into three parts: the asset-holding Water Supply Management Board (WSMB), the implementing Water Utility Operator (WUO), and the regulating National Water Supply Regulatory Commission (NWSRC). Within this model, municipalities are considered shareholders of KUKL, meaning that profit from the water company is to be distributed to the municipalities. (Though this has not yet come to fruition as the current inadequacies in capacity means that KUKL is currently running at a deficit).

For residents in lower-income areas, the 2007 move to a privatized system is significant for the transformation of previously free ‘public taplines’ to paid ‘community taplines’. This discursive (and financial) shift occurred in line with the cost-recovery principles embedded within the mandate of KUKL, seeing the transformation from water as a social good to a paid commodity (Programme Officer of NGO Forum, Personal Communication, July 2016). At this time, the newly designated ‘community taplines’ were handed over to the management of water user’s associations (WUAs), with the municipality responsible for applying and collecting the tariff. This shift drew upon previous regulations such as the Water Resource Act 1992 and Water Regulation Act 1993, which set out guidelines on licensing water resources for management by individuals or groups of beneficiaries. Accordingly, these user associations were authorized to initiate, develop, and manage water systems at local level.
4.3.2.2 Water Advocacy

Critically, this shift to privatization was used as an important entry point for organizations working with low-income groups to advocate around water rights. In fact, discussions around water for the urban poor had begun as early as 2001, incited by concerns over the exorbitant cost of the Melamchi project, as well as fears that the benefits of this project would not be directed towards low income consumers. This led to the creation of the ‘NGO Forum’: a consortium of over 144 locally-based NGOs working on issues of poverty, governance, natural resource management, and public health and water. In 2007, concerned with the shift towards privatization, this consortium began to draw attention to the situation of the 25000-30,000 ‘unconnected poor’ in the city, raising questions as to how these groups would be affected when (and if) pipes began to flow with water from Melamchi.

This group launched an initiative in collaboration with the international NGO WaterAid, to map the placement and scale of these unconnected pockets. This project was significant for identifying 40-45 informal settlements in the city, as well as documenting the location of the different ‘community taps’ in the Valley. Significantly, it identified that while there were 989 taps already installed, only 613 were working (CIUD/NGOFUSW, 2005). This information was a critical factor in advocating for policy reforms in the water sector, and was identified by NGO Forum as the means through which to lobby the ADB for additional provisions aimed at the urban poor (Programme Officer of NGO Forum, Personal Communication, July 2016).

Advocacy on these issues ultimately led to the establishment of the Low Income Consumer Support Unit (LICSU) in February 2008, a department housed within the private water company, KUKL, with an initial contract for three years. This newly created body was given the mandate of constructing and/or rehabilitating 100 community taplines and installing 50 new 5000L water tanks located in public areas in or close to informal settlements (ADB, 2010; WaterAid, 2005). However, the construction of this infrastructure was also intended to build into a long-term pro-poor service delivery and operational strategy. Accordingly, the project defined three objectives: 1) short-term (1-2 years): provide interim services for the poor through rehabilitated or new tapstands; 2) medium-term (within 10 years): carry out network densification and add new connections; 3) long-term (post ten years): extension and rehabilitation of the piped water supply network. In line with the short-term aims, the
maintenance of these rehabilitated or installed sources was to be handed over to water
users associations to manage locally, with 20% of capital costs to be contributed by the
communities. Cross subsidies regulated by the municipal government ensured that water
was charged at half price from licensed LICSU vendors—at a cost of 920 rupees versus
1800—for tank refills (6£-12£).

Today many questions remain around the future water scenario for informal settlement
residents. As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six, the LICSU department no
longer exists—nor were there any clear attempts to meet the longer-term objectives of
the programme, which could have addressed more structural distributional issues.
Meanwhile, the water sector has continued to evolve in line with the principles of cost-
recovery and efficient management. One the one hand, new (2015) Constitutional
provisions have guaranteed the right to water and sanitation and a healthy environment
recognizes the social value of water:

Beyond fulfilling the basic human needs, which aims towards achieving
improved quality of life through providing safe, reliable, adequate and
enhanced services at affordable prices to all consumers, including the poor
and marginalized (GoN, 2014, p. 8).

On the other hand, however, these rights are expressed within a policy environment
that has equally articulated an understanding of water as a commodity. This is clearly
laid out in the Nepal Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector Development
Plan (2016-2030):

WASH services can be provided equitably, sustainably and reliably to all
sections of the population only if value for money is respected and a
conducive environment prevails such that water entrepreneurs, vendors or
service providers see opportunities for fair and competitive business in
WASH provision (GoN, 2016, p. 15-16).

Such tensions between water seen as a social good or as a commodity are particularly
critical in light of the eventual completion of the Melamchi Dam. Water tariffs – which
already rose with the shift to privatization—are anticipated to become even higher
following the Dam’s construction, given the need to recover capital investment and
repay the ADB loan (Advocacy Officer of WaterAid, Personal Communication, July
2016). While leadership of NMES has indicated that some initial discussions have been held on if additional taplines are to be extended to informal areas, this has not been fleshed out in any substantial way. This highlights the necessity of reopening discussions on how the urban poor are to be linked into the new municipal service if the Dam project is completed, and how diverse residents will be able to appropriate these technologies.

4.3.2.3 Urban Sanitation and River Ecology

Finally, while not the focal point of this research, it is also critical to briefly acknowledge the role of urban sanitation, and particularly how this links to ecological change in the city and water provision. In fact, Kathmandu also struggles significantly with the provision of adequate sanitation and sewerage. The Guheswori Waste Water Treatment Plant is the only functional plant in Kathmandu, treating less than 10 percent of the wastewater produced in the city. As such, the vast majority of storm wastewater from both domestic and industrial sources is discharged directly into the Bagmati and Bisnumati rivers without treatment.

While the lack of adequate sewage treatment is a challenge for Kathmandu as a whole, it particularly affects those residents living in informal settlements, who are primarily located upon the reclaimed land of the river banks. Not only are residents disproportionately exposed to contaminants, but they also bear the burden of blame for the poor environmental conditions, imaged as ‘polluters’ of the riverside (Rademacher, 2008). In most settlements, the lack of adequate drainage means pipes often overflow and spill onto the narrow and unpaved alleyways, while inadequate solid waste collection contaminates water sources. Where sanitation pipes become clogged, residents themselves are responsible for ‘pushing’ the stuck effluence through (Image 4.5 & Image 4.6). For residents who routinely rely upon public water resources such as dug wells, boreholes, or even the river itself, the continued pollution of the riverside and flooding has a serious impact upon their access to safe water.
Recent years have seen shifts towards reclaiming the riverside—outlined in the name of environmental health and cultural heritage. Particularly relevant in this case is the Bagmati Action Plan (BAP)—launched as a matter of national priority to help clean-up the riverside. Setting out its vision for a “clean, green and healthy river system” (BAP, 2009, p. iv), the BAP was first initiated in 2007, when a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the United Nation’s Environmental Program (UNEP) and the Nepali National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC). By 2009 the plan was developed, and in 2010 a governmental body was established to oversee the process, called the “High Powered Committee for Integrated Development of the Bagmati Civilization”. Key tenets of the BAP include a weekly river clean-up and development plans for riverside areas. This work is being undertaken concurrently with major investments through the Bagmati Area Physical Infrastructure Project, financed by the ADB, to install sewerage and storm drain piping, as well as to rehabilitate an additional four waste water treatment plants in the city.

While these projects have sought to implement critical improvements to the riverside, this process has simultaneously been used to delegitimize the claims of informal residents to land and housing. BAP project documents clearly set out “illegal encroachment...
along the river banks’ as a threat to riverside ecology, positioning informal settlers as invaders and polluters (Shrestha & Aranya, 2015, p. 432). As documented by Rademacher (2008), the BAP has used the language of ‘public interest’ as a way of legitimating evictions—threatening the security of informal settlement residents while proposing new urban development visions for the city. And indeed, a high-profile and violent eviction in 2012 of the Thapathali settlement was explicitly linked with discourses of ‘cleaning up’ the city under the BAP—leaving 10,000 people homeless, and impacting 35 other settlements which were simultaneously served eviction notices. These themes will be returned to in chapter seven.

4.4 Kathmandu Informal Settlements

4.4.1 A Situational Analysis

This final section unpacks the ways in which the above challenges play out particularly for residents in the growing informal settlements of Kathmandu. In Nepali, residents of informal areas are known as sukumbasi—a word referring to those that are displaced and landless, lacking a home or reliable income generating activities—either in the city in which they reside, or in their ancestral villages. While the scale of these occupations is far lower in Kathmandu than in many of its Asian neighbours, the city has also has seen a sharp rise in the incidence of informal settlements in the past thirty years. In 1985 there was just an estimated 17 informal neighbourhoods; by 2010 this number had risen to over 70, representing somewhere between 20,000-40,000 people (Lumanti, 2008). The growth rate of these settlements generates a clear picture—with increases at 12% per annum, they are expanding at twice the rate of the city as a whole (CBS, 2002). This extraordinary growth, combined with the persistent lack of infrastructural support, makes this a particularly valuable moment to explore these issues for Kathmandu.
Today, nearly two-thirds of these settlements are located on sites alongside the banks of the city’s five major rivers, the Bagmati, Bisnumati, Hanumante, Tukcha, and Dobikhola (Image 4.7). These are precarious locations, with risks related to floods and landslides particularly during the monsoon season, as well as due to the increasing pollution of the banks (Sengupta & Sharma, 2006). As previously alluded to, this riverside location also contributes to the perpetuation of a delegitimized identity: informal residents alongside the banks are at once blamed for the pollution of the river, as well as seen as a barrier to riparian redevelopment (Lumanti, 2008).

While informal neighbourhoods originally emerged on public lands located in marginal areas, in more recent years they have also begun to expand onto private lands. Sengupta (2011) notes that this is partially a result of the limited free public space left in the city (and heavy-handed response of government authorities), in combination with newfound speculative practices of buying up tracts of land for private use, leaving them undeveloped. Though settlements—particularly in well-located inner city areas—may not be able to expand outwards, the population has nonetheless continued to grow, driven by a new rental population as existing informal households partition their plots.
Sukumbasi neighbourhoods can be very small in size—ranging anywhere from 40-400 households, and are commonly bounded by geographical barriers such as the river or roads. Despite their small size they are also super diverse, drawing residents from all 75 districts of Nepal—representing different languages, cultures, and ethnicities (Lumanti, 2008). The population also cuts across caste, with an estimated 28% of the total population in settlements across the city coming from the higher castes. There is also evidence of a more transient population; particularly Indian workers coming on a seasonal basis to work in Nepal.

Structures in these settlements can range from temporary shelters of bamboo, mud, and plastic sheeting, semi-permanent housing of wood and corrugated iron, up to more permanent housing of concrete stone or bricks—found especially in the older more consolidated settlements. Basic service provision in settlements can also range—with some residents able to access individual electricity meter boxes and private toilets linked to a simple sewage system, while in others, groups of 10-15 residents ‘borrow’ electricity from neighbours and have communal access to poorly maintained squat toilets. Settlements likewise have a varied access to water services, and are supplied by multiple technologies, whether (in very rare cases) a private pipeline from the municipal provider, water tankers served by municipal or private vendors, community standposts, boreholes, or shallow wells. However, these sources tend to be inadequate in terms of quantity and quality, and instances of water borne diseases are high.

4.4.2 Rights and Recognition

For migrants to sukumbasi areas, a lack of secure tenure is compounded by legal and recognitional exclusions. In particular, the Nepal Citizenship Act (1964) laid out specifications that informal settlement residents must undergo additional measures in order to obtain citizenship certificates (Tanaka, 2009). This required residents to navigate an opaque bureaucratic system, and to obtain a ‘migration certificate’ from their village of birth, before presenting this in Kathmandu to obtain access to a citizenship card. For those migrants to Kathmandu who have not already obtained a certificate in their home villages, this leaves the option of traveling back to their (often remote) villages at a high level of financial cost, or to reside without their certificate or citizenship card, compromising educational and professional opportunities or access to
public support (UN-Habitat, 2010). A study undertaken by Lumanti (2008) identified that 78% of informal settlement residents have access to their citizenship card—54% male, and 46% female.

Importantly, the process (and exclusions) of obtaining a migration certificate and citizenship card is also linked with social identity. In particular, there are greater challenges for women—who face additional barriers without the support of their husbands or fathers as a result of historic discriminations—as well as for Madhesi residents from the Terai region, who may face difficulties demonstrating that they are ‘not Indian’. Beyond this, interviews with Bansighat residents also revealed anecdotal evidence that obtaining a migration certificate has become more difficult without proof of ownership, creating a circular trap:

> We have heard the rumour that the government may stop providing migration certificates without proof of a title of land or of a house. This might be a problem for my children in future…. if they cannot get a citizenship card then they will not be eligible for professional jobs, and the struggle we had to educate them will all go in vain. If they don’t believe us that we are living here, then they should be inspecting us here (B9M).

> It used to be that we could provide proof of the electricity meter or other legal documents as proof of our existence in Kathmandu, to get our citizenship cards. As our children started to grow and study in Kathmandu this created some opportunity to get it. But these days lately they are creating some trouble for us. More and more they want proof of house ownership before they provide us with any documentation. When they ask where we are from, and hear that we are from sukumbasi settlement, they will not aid us. So many people are stuck in middle (B16F).

As such, land, citizenship, and identity are inextricably linked in Nepal—in which proof of land ownership is increasingly required to obtain a citizenship card (and a citizenship card is necessary to purchase a new plot of land). Similarly, migration certificates are linked with voting rights, meaning that many residents are unable to vote for their interests in the Kathmandu area (Ninglekhu, 2012). These exclusions are gendered,

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9 Until the 1990 Constitution, citizenship was passed only through the father’s lineage to children. Women thus obtained their citizenship documents through the support of either their fathers or husbands. While these provisions have been eliminated legally today, several interviewed residents reported continuing challenges especially for women, or those residing in the contested Terai areas, to obtaining these documents (Richardson et al., 2009).
with certain identities (i.e. women, and particularly those from the Terai, or those of lower castes) facing greater structural barriers to obtaining this card, and poorer or illiterate residents less likely to be able to navigate the bureaucratic system. Nonetheless, in the absence of legal provisions, residents of informal areas have devised other mechanisms as a form of self-identification. This is a key point which will be returned to in chapter seven—especially in reference to how residents link bill payment on basic services with increased legitimacy and security.

4.4.3 ‘Fake Squatters’

Though incidents of eviction have not been nearly as widespread in Nepal as in many of its Asian neighbours, the rising prices of inner city land have placed increasing pressure on informal settlement areas. There have been several prominent eviction attempts in the past, often occurring in tandem with government policy or programmes aimed at the ‘beautification’ of the city, and particularly targeted at settlements located in central or strategic areas (Sengupta and Sharma, 2006).

One of the key and unique challenges related to the implementation of progressive policies in Kathmandu’s informal areas are the pervasive allegations of the ‘fake squatter’. In Nepali, the term hukumbasi is used derogatively in order to make the contrast with ‘real’ residents of informal settlements—considered only to be those residents that are quite literally ‘landless’, without any ancestral plots elsewhere in the country. In contrast, ‘fake squatter’ is used disparagingly to suggest that some residents have settled in the area for personal financial gain (to live freely, or to try and claim for compensation) or to obtain land for speculative purposes (ex: Nepali Times, ‘Slum Millionaires’, Dewan, 2012). A similar charge is that these ‘fake squatters’ have been encouraged by particular political parties to settle in informal areas, as a way of increasing their support base for rallies and protests (Paudel et al., 2014). This narrative was found repeated by diverse sources, from the media, to government officials, even to some residents of informal areas themselves:

There are people living here who have lands, a car, a bus, or a big property. So there are definitely people that are managing better economically, and because of them we are getting into trouble. They are residing in this community because of greed (J4F).
On the one hand, a level of involvement by powerful political party bosses in informal areas has been relatively well documented (Sengupta, 2011; Tanaka, 1997). Similarly, many settlements did rapidly expand during the Maoist election to power in 2008, as this party was known to adopt ‘friendlier’ policies around the growth of informal settlements (Sengupta and Sharma, 2006). However, it is unclear to what extent this population growth was actively encouraged by the party as a form of vote banking, or whether it was simply a reflection of the historical support base of the Maoists for vulnerable populations. These allegations are complicated by the fact that settlements do tend to be hyper-diverse, with migrants coming from a wide variety of backgrounds, and with a high level of economic variance. Moreover, many migrants to urban areas often possess plots of land back in their village areas, and thus cannot in the strictest sense be classified as ‘homeless’ (Un-Habitat, 2010). However, interviews within Bansighat indicated that even where this was the case, the land possessed tended to be unproductive, affected by natural disasters, or far from educational or employment opportunities. As such, many residents were also quick to point out that the vast majority of their neighbours were not living there out of choice, and often ‘pay’ significantly in other ways, given flooding, health, and eviction threats. Residents therefore largely contested the prominence given to this narrative of the ‘fakers’—invoking the risks they faced as evidence of the undesirable nature of their location, and making claims to their rights as citizens (Image 4.8). Ultimately, while there may be some level of truth to the narrative of the ‘fake squatter’, this thesis posits that its prevalence—especially at the expense of addressing other more significant challenges for residents of informal settlements—exists as a profound barrier to the provision of support to these areas.
4.4.4 Advocacy Work

Finally, it is critical to highlight that many of the informal settlements of Kathmandu have an extremely high level of social organization. In particular, this research is focused on the work of the community organization Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj (NMES), a key local partner for this research.

Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj—‘women together’—was founded in Nepal in 1996, and now holds a presence throughout 40 districts of Nepal with over 15,000 members (UN-Habitat, 2010). It originated as a loose network of informal settlement groups formed to improve the material conditions as well as challenge the social discrimination faced by informal dwellers in the country, particularly in response to the threat of evictions. It seeks to “advocate for the rights of the landless women who are… deprived from citizenship and victimized because of the hierarchical social patriarchal structure” (NMES website). It works closely with the Nepali NGO Lumanti, which is one of the only locally based NGOs working specifically on issues of rights for residents of informal neighbourhoods.

Image 4.8: Riverside environment

There are rumours that some people living here are fake, but we didn't come here by choice. I'm doing this for my family. Instead of paying rent, I can pay for my children's education. Here you can see the poor environment and risks we face when the river floods. The government should be helping, because we are also citizens of Nepal (Devi, Jagriti Nagar).
Together, NMES and Lumanti are a part of the wider network of Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) network, an organization of informal residents’ groups and local support NGOs in countries spanning Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These two groups are the most active and significant actors working on behalf of informal settlement residents, with the vast majority of international NGOs focused on smaller cities or rural areas.

NMES has emerged as a significant force in Kathmandu, particularly in the absence of state-led initiatives addressing the needs or rights of informal settlers: running trainings, focusing on capacity-building, and spearheading several water and sanitation upgrades in settlements throughout the city. As in the case of the wider network of SDI, the heart of collective mobilization is centred around a series of women’s saving groups, which have undertaken a number of activities including enumerations, precedent setting projects, and nurturing strategic partnerships. For instance, one of the significant activities undertaken by the group is the implementation of a ‘family photo documentation card’ (Image 4.9). This was undertaken as a part of community-led enumerations in 2001, when families in settlements across Kathmandu were photographed outside of their houses, and issued an ID outlining basic data of the household—including names, ages, household number, and the length of time they had been living in the settlement. These cards were signed by local ward officials, signifying that the cardholders were their constituents, and were intended to act as a proof of residence in the case of any future eviction attempts (Tanaka, 2009). Other work has focused on implementing small-scale infrastructural upgrades in particular settlements—including a simplified sewerage system, and the construction of shallow wells and tubewells (Sengupta, 2011). NMES was also involved in the critical advocacy work around the creation of the Low-Income Consumer Services Unit, and in the management of several community resources, as will be discussed in further detail, primarily in chapter six.

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10 The work of the international federation network has been extensively documented by Patel, Baptist, & D'Cruz, 2012; Mitlin, 2008.
Perhaps the most significant work undertaken by NMES and Lumanti, however, is the Kirtipur Housing Project. This project represents the first ever NGO-led resettlement project in the country, undertaken in collaboration between informal settlement residents, Lumanti, and supportive municipal authorities. In 2000, Kathmandu Municipal City (KMC) required the forced evacuation of 25 families living on the banks of the Bisnumati River as a part the ongoing Road Expansion Project. In response, in 2003 Lumanti initiated a process of negotiations, establishing the Urban Community Support Fund, which comprised savings from residents themselves, investment from KMC, as well as grants from SDI. This fund supported the construction of 44 household units on a plot of land in Kirtipur, located 11km from Kathmandu City, but within the Kathmandu Valley area. The purchase of land was subsidized by the municipality, and infrastructure provision was supported by a consortium of WaterAid Nepal, Kathmandu municipality, the National government, and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and UN-Habitat. Beyond the establishment of housing, this development also contained a number of ecologically innovative features, including a solar-powered borehole, and on-site waste treatment. While there are some features of the process which can be queried (i.e. how the selection of the 44 households occurred), this project is significant for representing one of the only attempts at housing provision for the urban poor in Kathmandu.
4.5 Bansighat: A Case Study Settlement

4.5.1 A Brief History

Finally, this chapter turns to a discussion of the specific settlement which is the focus of this thesis. Bansighat lies in the central core of Kathmandu, alongside the banks of the Bagmati river, and well-connected to major facilities including roads, hospitals, schools, and employment opportunities. It is surrounded by a dirt road and the Bagmati riverside to the south, flanked by the Bisnumati river on the western side, and a bridge crossing into the Lalitpur district on the eastern edge (Image 4.10). To the north lies a paved stone walkway, and beyond that a major road linking the settlement to the rest of the city. Importantly, while the neighbourhood is set back some fifteen feet from the river, it is still located on a ten-year floodplain, at the intersection of the Bagmati and Bisnumati rivers. As such, flooding is a significant and frequently cited concern for all Bansighat residents during the rainy season (June- August) and is experienced considerably worse on the lower-lying western edges of the neighbourhood, close to the Bisnumati.

Image 4.10: Map of Bansighat (adapted from Kathmandu Metropolitan City, 2006)

The story of Bansighat is one of incremental upgrades, transitioning over the span of forty years from wild overgrowth and temporary tents to its site today: a well-established community with government-serviced water and sewerage facilities, an active federation
of the urban poor, and a number of more permanent brick and stone houses. Many of the exteriors of the houses are covered from ground to roof in sprawling multi-coloured murals, and it’s common to hear residents speak of their emotional attachment to the place (Image 4.11).

Yet Bansighat is also a neighbourhood of contradictions and disparity. Disputes between the eastern and western halves of the settlement, original residents and new migrants, householders and tenants, and especially those from the ‘hill’ regions versus the discriminated Madhesi ethnic group from the Terai make up a complicated set of social and spatial divisions. While some residents live in multi-storied concrete houses, with positions in government, higher levels of education, and a number of high-value durable goods, in other cases entire families live in a single windowless room of a small wooden house, in unstable employment, and without access to adequate (or even any) sanitation facilities.

Taking a temporal perspective on the settlement development is key to understanding some of these divisions that exist in the present day. Alongside the neighbouring Shankamul, Bansighat is one of the first informal settlements to be established in the city. The first houses of the community emerged on the eastern side, on top of an old burial ground around 1975. Early residents describe their ‘struggle’ bit by bit to transform the space into a liveable neighbourhood:
Originally this place where I built my house was very dirty and full of bushes. It was a cemetery for dead children, and we found many remains of dead bodies while we were constructing. We have struggled so far, and have converted this damp place into a liveable place (B2F).

In particular, early times of crisis in the community sowed the seeds of what would later become a very strong set of (mainly women) neighbourhood leaders. A critical moment occurred in 1993, when a devastating flood profoundly impacted the neighbourhood. At this time, the armed forces of Nepal were deployed to aid with evacuation. This represented the first time in which data was collected on residents living in the area, and it was only after this that the settlement was officially registered and recognized by local government officials. One of the elder community leaders recalls her interaction with the ward secretary at the time:

We went to request help, but he gave us a very rude answer saying: “it would be better if the flood had taken whole sukumbasi community with it”. After hearing this I could not control my anger, and went straight to where he was sitting. I grabbed his hand and pulled him up from his chair and told him: this chair belongs to every citizen. It is not your property, or something you got in a dowry from your wife’s house. When you’re sitting in this chair we respect you, but after you get up from that chair you and I are both the same citizens. I told him that I was ready to fight. There was chaos in office.

But time passed and elections were coming up. They didn’t care about us, but we cared about them. Later when they needed support we went to their rallies, singing, dancing and shouting the slogans, throughout the streets of Kathmandu. Then they realized that sukumbasi people could be of some help. From that time until now we have had a good relationship with the local government (B7F).

Slowly the neighbourhood transformed from a place of temporary shelters to more permanent constructions, and the settlement continued to grow outwards and towards the west, as the higher-lying lands of the east became populated. By 2000 the first houses appeared in the western half the settlement, as the Bagmati river steadily receded from its original position, leaving large tracts of new land to be claimed. However, the settlement only experienced rapid expansion in 2006—after the end of the ten-year civil war, and the election of the Maoist party (Image 4.12). While not widely or openly discussed, many residents hinted at the system of political patronage which allocated plots of land to some residents over others: “when the Maoists came into power they took part
of this land and gave it to the new migrants” (B8F). This has generated a somewhat conflicted narrative, linked with notions around ‘fake squatters’. For some of the older residents of the eastern side, this new influx of people can be questioned for being ‘truly poor’, and are believed to have benefitted from the patronage of the Maoists. These early trends set up the basis for distinctions between the ‘east’ and the ‘west’ sides of the settlement.

4.5.2 Bansighat Today

Today Bansighat is a compact community, with an estimated population of over 300 households (Lumanti, 2008). The population is highly diverse, covering all castes (including the high caste Brahmins and Vaisya), residents of Christian, Hindu, and Muslim faith, and with migrants from all corners of Nepal. Interviewed residents shared a commonality of reasons for moving to the settlement: whether out of a loss of their ancestral home from natural disaster (landslide, floods, earthquake), suffering of an economic hardship (often illness), in search of new economic opportunities, to be closer to educational or health facilities, or even because of the ‘village-like’ community environment. However, the vast majority of residents interviewed indicated the critical importance of having existing family or friends in the neighbourhood before establishing their own homes: “everyone who is living in this community came here with the help of their relatives who were previously living here” (B2F).
In comparison with other informal settlements, Bansighat can be considered as having a medium-level of consolidation of facilities and services, with electricity, a simple sewage system, and some government-serviced water tanks. The housing typology is highly varied—ranging from multi-story structures of concrete, to simple one-roomed wooden shacks without a private toilet. In a few cases, residents were found to be living in the open-air public space of an old temple. As a general trend, the older eastern side of the settlement is more highly developed and contains more permanent structures of stone, while the western side appears to be denser, containing a higher proportion of renters, and with lower quality wooden housing (Image 4.13). While space restrictions mean that the settlement is unable to grow significantly in the number of physical structures, householders are more and more subdividing their plots or renting out rooms in their existing houses, creating a flourishing rental market. While there is a lack of quantitative information on how the rental population is changing, anecdotal evidence indicated that renters are growing in number—particularly on the western side of the settlement—attracted by the combination of cheaper rent, and better access to services and facilities:

Most of the renters have moved in because of the earthquake, and some because of the cheaper rent, and some for the water facilities because if you have money you can buy water in this community. You might rent a place in other parts of KTM for 5000 rupees (£35) and face a shortage of water, and here for cheaper rent you can have a place and water (B11F).

In general, renters can expect to pay monthly between 1500-3000 rupees (£10-£20) for a single room and shared toilet in a house. Bansighat residents can therefore be divided into three different tenure categories: original settlers that built their own homes freely, those that ‘bought’ land or houses from the original settlers, and renters.
Despite the existence of clear social and economic differences, residents across the
settlement identified a number of a shared vulnerabilities. By far the most pervasive
daily challenge is their proximity to the river, made worse by the inadequate sewage
system:

In the rainy season, the flood enters our home with garbage, and sewage
mixes with it. We have a second floor so we can move up here during those
times, but those who only have a ground floor have it much more difficult.
Because of the unmanaged waste there is horrible smell, and it also spreads
diseases (B4F).

Flooding was cited as a yearly concern for residents of Bansighat from June- September,
with little in the way of coping strategies other than moving their possessions to upper
floors or higher ground in the settlement, staying with relatives, or even sleeping
outside. The impacts of flooding have been made worse in recent years as the banks
adjacent to the settlement have been used as a temporary dump site while the
municipality seeks to secure a more permanent location. Residents complain of the bad
smell and frequent diseases as a result. In 2016, Bansighat suffered some of the worst
flooding in years, with water rising to the height of a single-story building on the western side of the settlement (Image 4.14).

In addition to environmental vulnerabilities, residents also face greater risks during times of insecurity in the city. Interestingly, informal neighbourhoods within Kathmandu were far less affected by the April 2015 earthquake than other areas, reflecting the fact that housing structures were largely single-storied, and made of more flexible semi-permanent wood structures. Where Bansighat residents were significantly affected, however, was in relation to employment activities. The temporary nature of much of the work most often engaged by residents (labourers, craftsmen, tailors, or owners of small snack carts) were highly disrupted during this time, generating extra difficulties for residents.

Finally, and without exception, all interviewed residents cited the pervasive fear of eviction. In both the pilot study site and Bansighat, the 2012 eviction of the Thapathali settlement continued to loom large in collective memory, and was often specifically referenced as a time of great insecurity for householders. For many residents, it wasn’t
simply the eviction itself that generated such anxiety, but the process in which it was
done: at night, and without warning:

At the time of Thapathali eviction, the Maoist party was in power and they
didn’t stop it. We know it was illegal, and that way that they were evicted so
suddenly was wrong, and many humanitarian organizations protested it in
the international sector…Though the Thapathali people were living at the
edge of the river and it was not safe for them, that was not a way to evict,
without a proper notice, and bringing in bulldozers in the night (B9F).

While there wasn’t a uniformity of opinions from interviewed residents on whether
they’d like to remain in the current site or would prefer support in moving elsewhere,
the desire for a form of recognition, via permanent ownership titles, or compensation
for relocation to alternate areas, was shared by all.

4.6 Conclusion

Emergent out of this brief introduction to Nepal, Kathmandu, and Bansighat is the
recognition of a complex political scenario marked by multiple legal rights and
recognition for different residents, intersected by the legacy of the politically stratified
caste system. This history has left an imprint of old hierarchies, whether religious,
ethnic, or along caste lines.

Meanwhile, rapid urban growth in the capital Kathmandu has generated unprecedented
pressures on the city, while land values have soared—leaving a dearth of affordable
housing for the urban poor. Piped water is out of reach for the majority of the city’s
residents, who rely upon large tankers supplied either by the municipality or the private
‘water mafia’ tanker trucks, which extract groundwater resources from outside the
Valley. Within this context, the struggle for services in the city is marked by debates
around the proposed large-scale private-led Melamchi Dam, shifts towards decentralized
service delivery, as well as the resurgence of more traditional or alternative water
sources. Large-scale projects supported by external donors such as the Asian
Development Bank have concentrated on addressing some of these shortfalls through
major infrastructural investment, including the construction of new sewage treatment
plants and drainage—to address the challenges of significant pollution and degradation
of the Bagmati and Bisnumati Rivers. However, these projects are also aimed at
harnessing the ecological and tourism value of the city, which contains inherent contradictions for informal settlement residents who have settled along the banks of these rivers.

These urban development patterns have serious implications for residents of the rapidly growing informal settlements of the city, such as Bansighat. Here residents contend with serious challenges related to seasonal flooding, cross-contamination of resources, degrading public resources, and insufficient water provision. However, a high level of social organization represented by Mahila Ekta Samaj has offered lessons for how residents themselves are actively seeking to address their urban environment. While this group has done critical work in supporting informal settlement residents in manoeuvring this unequal context, and moving towards a vision of citizenship, it is also critical to remain cognizant of the multiple social categories which exist in the settlement and city at large. Unpacking the ways in which diverse residents are experiencing a sense of belonging in the city, participation in the community, and household water access, is critical to understanding the ways in which substantive citizenship is being negotiated in the city.
Chapter 5  The Everyday Politics of Belonging

If the government is wanting to develop the country, then its citizens are also the source for developing. For example, they are intending to plant trees along the riverside, but solely planting trees will not develop the country. After planting them, who will look after them, care and protect them? It is the citizens of the country (Laxmi, participatory photography participant, resident of Jagriti Nagar).

5.1 Introduction

This first chapter of analysis focuses on the city-scale, and the material practices through which residents articulate and develop a sensation of belonging in Kathmandu. In doing so, it explores the manner in which water—as expressed both through infrastructure, as well as through the adjacent Bagmati river—is intertwined with wider urban visions for the city enshrined in policies and programmes, as well as with ideas of belonging as defined by residents of informal settlements. This chapter posits that symbolic narratives from the state (particularly in relation to riverside development) as embedded within urban priorities have sought to exclude these residents, in the aim of ‘restoring’ the ecological integrity of the Bagmati and Bisnumati rivers. Nonetheless it is also evident that these values are embedded, negotiated and contested within social-power relations locally, as residents struggle to articulate new visions for the future of their neighbourhoods.

In particular, this chapter explores how residents of informal settlements throughout Kathmandu (especially through the women’s federation of the urban poor) have advocated for new forms of development and recognition through two material practices related to ‘environmental’ behaviour and bill payment on services. In order to do so, this chapter presents accounts of environmental problems as relayed by federation leaders across the city, as well as the symbolic narratives of Bansighat residents who have actively engaged (or opposed) bill payment on the non-functioning pipelines in the settlement. Through undertaking environmental actions, the federation has worked to reframe narratives in the city which have positioned informal settlement residents as unhygienic or polluters of the Bagmati and Bisnumati rivers, advocating for a new kind of inclusion into wider developmental visions for the city. Simultaneously, the practice of bill payments on service are imbued with wider symbolic narratives.
around demonstrating ‘good’ or ‘citizenly’ behaviour—as a way of enhancing a sense of legitimacy or security for residents. What can be seen is that these practices are linked with broader symbolic imagery around belonging, built through demonstrations of being ecological and well-ordered, through compliance with government regulations. However, not all residents (or settlements) are able to conform to these symbolic narratives. As such, this chapter will also delve into these social relations, looking at who is unable to take part in this process of translating services into a sense of belonging. In fact, the strategies of the federation—linked with the demonstration of ‘legitimate’ behaviours and cleanliness—is predicated upon the exclusions of particular migrants or a more transient neighbourhood population—who, by virtue of their presence, place additional pressures on services and undermine the project of ‘ordering’ the settlement. This has generated an additional set of gendered and ethnic risks for these groups, linked with social exclusions from services and urban space more generally. Using the lens of water, it is possible to see how notions of belonging are constructed through material practices, and how ultimately this allows certain people ‘feel’ or ‘act’ like a citizen, while others become devalued in the city. As such, infrastructure plays a critical role in the everyday politics of belonging, fragmenting social relations particularly around tenure and ethnicity.

5.2 Competing Visions of Belonging

Looking at water practices occurring across the city is fruitful for demonstrating the ways in which a sense of belonging is constructed and contested through infrastructure. For residents of informal settlements, a sense of being overlooked ‘as a citizen’ is linked with a profound sense of material and recognitional exclusions from urban development processes. This is no exception for residents of Bansighat, as will be explored throughout this chapter, who often articulated a sense of disenfranchisement from the ongoing developments in their city. In fact, this sentiment is understandable within the wider urban development policies and programmes which have set out a vision for the future development of the city, that in many ways explicitly excludes or threatens informal settlement neighbourhoods. Unpacking these competing visions of belonging is therefore key to understanding the ways in which diverse individuals are able to flourish in the city. In order to do so, this chapter builds an analysis of the everyday politics of belonging—exploring the ways in which the values of city-wide development as linked
with social and gendered norms are experienced, contested, and remade by residents, with implications for how diverse people experience a sense of citizenship.

Nowhere are the contradictions of urban development priorities of the city and the aspirations of informal settlement residents more evident than in relation to redevelopment plans along the Bagmati and Bisnumati riverside. Together these rivers mark the city, both politically and symbolically, and are deeply intertwined with the story of urban development. The Bagmati in particular holds especial meaning for both Bansighat residents and the wider city. As well as forming an important natural boundary between Kathmandu City Municipality and Lalitpur Municipality, it is a site of great religious significance, flowing eventually to the mouth of the holy Ganges River in India. It is lined with many of Kathmandu’s most important temples, shrines, ghats (cremation sites along rivers), and monuments, including Pashupati Temple—a UNESCO World Heritage site, where the majority of the city’s Hindu residents continue to be cremated, both a deeply holy space and a significant source of tourism revenue (Image 5.1). Beyond this symbolic importance, the Bagmati also acts as a critical resource—with an estimated 82% of water volume daily extracted from the Bagmati River Basin to supply drinking water needs in the Valley (Dahal, Khanal, & Ale, 2011).

![Image 5.1: Pashupati Temple entrance - at a cost for tourists (source: author)](image-url)
The Bagmati river cannot be separated from the living functions of the city, and in particular, the growing informal settlements which have sprung up alongside its banks. For one, this land is being made increasingly vulnerable, as a result of both ecological and political challenges. In fact, over the past thirty years the Bagmati has been visibly and rapidly degrading—impacted by the pressures of rapid population growth, inadequate sewerage, solid waste management, and a lack of functioning waste treatment plants. Alongside the accumulation of garbage, this has also meant that the majority of the city’s sewerage has ended up untreated in the river, with clear health consequences for informal settlement residents. Moreover—despite clear challenges with the city’s sewerage and solid waste management as a whole—it is most often informal settlement residents across Kathmandu who face the blame for the rise in pollution, echoed by media, neighbouring residents, or the municipality. As narrated by one Bansighat resident: “the other ‘concrete’ communities despise us for living here. They treat us like we are dirt in their eyes which they want to remove immediately. They blame us for the pollution of the river and various other crimes such as robberies” (B2F).

In response, the state has undertaken a number of high-profile campaigns to ‘reclaim’ the river, particularly aimed at harnessing its heritage or tourism value. In particular, the Bagmati Action Plan (BAP), discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter, has had a significant influence for residents of settlements across Kathmandu. In a deep ethnographic study, Rademacher (2009) explored the ways in which ‘river restoration’ through the BAP has been envisioned as a complete transformation of the river—from a dwelling space for low-income groups, to a space for wealth generation—citing interviews with ADB officials, which have defined the ideal outcome as: “lined with parks, restored temples, and, most importantly, high-end housing” (p. 519).

Critically, within the BAP, the acknowledgement of informal settlements is visible only within the stated need to “control and relocate” informal dwellers as impediments to the development process. Meanwhile, the difficulties of distinguishing between ‘real’ and ‘fake squatters’ has often been offered from governmental authorities as a barrier to undertaking any comprehensive compensation measures in the case of resettlement or upgrading.11 As such, recognition as a ‘real’ resident from the local municipality is a key

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11 For instance, when queried on this in an interview, the Director General of the National Survey Department explained: “In truth the government wants to formalize these areas. But the
concern for residents, linked with the ongoing programmes to preserve and restore riverside areas.

Understanding the urban development visions, citywide perceptions and ecological changes alongside Bagmati and Bisnumati rivers is of critical significance for informal neighbourhoods. Redevelopment projects have increasingly proposed to revitalize riverside areas, positioning settlers as threats to ecological stability, or as illegal invaders that are blockages to the ongoing river clean-up initiatives. A history of unannounced eviction events alongside river settlements has exacerbated fears for residents, reinforcing the perception of ongoing risk, and with residents often portrayed in media narratives as ‘fakers’ as a way of evading comprehensive compensation measures. In these ways, the persistent narrative of the ‘fake’ (or polluting) squatter has been wielded to separate residents from their rights as citizens, denying a sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods or even the city.

The following sections explore the ways in which residents are caught up in these competing narratives of the river—between the sacred and the everyday, as a dwelling space and a heritage site, or as polluters or protectors—and how this influences a sense of belonging in the city. As quipped by one resident: “it is said that the Bagmati River is a holy river in Hinduism, and that we should protect it. But to deeply think about it—we, from every religion, are mixing our sewage into it. How holy can it be?” (B9M). In this sense, the river itself—both the water and the infrastructure that surrounds it—is caught up in a project of identity-formation and belonging for the city as a whole—a none more so than for residents of the settlements alongside its banks. As such, the everyday politics of belonging are evidenced in the ways in which distinctions of purity and profanity as

fear stopping us from undertaking any resettlement or improvements is that not all of the dwellers are real. That is the main problem here. We don’t have any kind of information on who is really in need, and there have been complaints that squatters already have their own lands elsewhere. Other people make claims that there are powerful landlords who have connections with top policymakers, and they will get the benefits of any resettlements” (Personal Communication, July 2016).

12 In the wake of the most large-scale eviction in recent years (2012) the (now-ex) chairperson of the governmental “High Powered Committee for Integrated Development of Bagmati Civilization” publically identified the “unmanaged and illegal” settlements alongside the river corridors as one of the most significant challenges to ongoing efforts (e.g. Kathmandu Post, ‘Shouldering Burden to Revive Lost Glory’, Shahi, 2012).
articulated in urban development priorities are ‘reworked’ (Datta, 2012) by residents themselves, and how this becomes linked with distinctions across social categories.

5.3 **Everyday Politics of Belonging**

5.3.1 **Material Practice 1: Demonstration of Environmental Behaviour and Perceptions of ‘Development’**

Understanding the ways in which informal settlement residents seek to establish claims to land, infrastructure and development in the city is intimately linked with symbolic narratives around the changing ecology of the river. In fact, if urban development visions which seek to ‘reclaim’ riverside areas for developmental, heritage, or tourism purposes are in contradiction with the realities of the urban poor, residents themselves—particularly through the federation—can also be seen to be ‘remaking’ their neighbourhoods in line with their own priorities. The following section thus explores how the women’s federation of the urban poor has sought to challenge wider perceptions of informal settlement residents as polluters, as well as the values of ‘development’ embedded in state-led proposals aimed at river regeneration. In particular, this section traces this through the example of material practices around service provision and river cleaning, as well as the narratives of ‘ecological living’ the federation has attached to these practices as a challenge to wider perceptions in the public arena. In this way, the federation (across settlements of Kathmandu) has worked to demonstrate how informal settlement residents make positive contributions to the future sustainability of the city. Through the symbolic narratives attached to these practices, it is possible to trace the ways in which residents of informal areas express their own perceptions and values around what constitutes ‘development’—as a process of asserting their sense of belonging in the city.

Far from opposing outright the ongoing developments impacting their neighbourhoods, residents in Bansighat as well as in the pilot site Jagriti Nagar often expressed instead the desire only to be considered within these processes, claiming they do not wish to ‘be a blockage to the development of the nation’:

> We don't want to be a blockage to the development of the nation, if the government brings its own plan for the area which includes a place for us to
live. If this is not possible then they should give us some alternate place to live where they should provide employment, health, education and other services for us. Until now they haven’t done anything for us—but if they only provide a place to live, it would be a great support for us (B9M).

If living here will hamper the development of our country or to someone else, we do not need to stay here. However, if so, then we should get a place to live elsewhere and the Constitution should provide us these provisions to help us. But this place is really good for us as it is near to the main city and is accessible to everything we need, such as education, jobs, the hospital, markets. We have an emotional attachment to this place (B1F).

In my view, if the government wants to develop this place we are not against it. But what I think is they should first try to develop us by providing a safe place to live. We have lived in this place for so many years (J10M).

In particular, with the majority of sites located on the banks of the river, informal settlement residents have a vested interest in seeing improvements to the environmental conditions of the Bagmati. Flooding and cross-contamination are reoccurring risks, particularly affecting water sources such as wells and canals. Pollution from the river is a major source of illness, shame, or aversion for residents. Beyond threats to the present state of the river, many residents were also nostalgic about its past, remembering the ways they used to bathe themselves, or do laundry or dishes in it. As such, moves to restore the river were also sometimes welcomed as an option to alleviate water stressors (Image 5.2 & Image 5.3).
However, the restoration of the Bagmati river has also long been a space of contention and contradiction for informal settlement residents, who often find themselves caught between advocates for ecological restoration, and maintaining their claims to the land (Rademacher, 2012). As such, while welcoming some improvements to the environment, this was simultaneously met with distrust, with many residents fearing this might increase the chances of long-term redevelopment, and ultimately eviction. These contradictions can be seen in the comments of residents, who indicated that they are ‘happy, but also worried’:

Development, improvement and progress are good things. Keeping the sewage out of the Bagmati river is a good thing. Black-topped roads are also good for us and our children. But at the same time, this may not be good for us. We are fearful this could mean the government might evict us at any time. We are happy but also worried (B24F).

If the Bagmati were clean then it would be lot easier for the next generation, especially in terms of water. But there are also rumours that after the Bagmati cleaning project finishes they will expand the road on either side of the community. They have already started marking the houses that fall within that area, and they may be evicted (B19F).

We are not sure what will happen after the Bagmati planning is complete. After the road widening project is done as per planning guidelines this will...
cut through half of our properties. Also, those people living in the concrete houses are against us. They think we are living illegally for free. But you can see those two tall buildings next to us, they are also on government lands. Some builders have captured this land illegally and have built private apartments to rent. So, our concern is if these lands are going to be misused in the same way, then why should we leave? (B16F).

Within this context, federation members and leaders in particular across the city have been active in adopting material practices which demonstrate ecological or environmental behaviour—positioning themselves as making valuable contributions to their neighbourhood and city environment. These practices can be understood as being in contrast to development initiatives which were perceived to increase the risk of eviction. Through “undertaking our own planning for the area” (B9M), residents have sought to recast what counts as development in ways which are compatible with the needs and aspirations of the city’s urban poor.

One area in which this can be seen, for example, is in the weekly Bagmati River Cleaning Campaign—a joint effort undertaken in 2013 between 30 government and nongovernment groups as a part of wider efforts to restore the river. This campaign has seen weekly community clean-up initiatives as well as sewerage improvements, and has expanded today to include nearly 2000 different partner organizations. The practice of attending weekly river clean-ups was often cited by city-level federation leadership as a way of working collaboratively with local municipality members (who often work alongside residents during the weekly clean-up) to improve the environment of their neighbourhood and city. Beyond the obvious benefits to having a cleaner environment, residents also expressed the idea that visibly participating in the campaign was a valuable way to challenge some of the negative perceptions faced by informal settlement residents:

We registered 25 people in the ward office every week, for the cleaning campaign. And every week 25 people from different households in turn would come to clean the Bagmati alongside the government. This meant that our contribution was clearly visible, and the ward realized that we are useful. Slow the ward office showed more care over our settlement people (B7F).

I’m taking part in the campaign, and I think it will help. Now with the Bagmati river clean-up we are more like a security guards, we scold those who try to throw their waste into it (J12M).
Thus, participation in the Bagmati clean-up campaign has offered a way for residents to publically recast themselves not as polluters, but as ‘protectors’ of the river. Or as identified energetically by one resident: “We are not the ones who are polluting the Bagmati, it has come from everyone in the city, but we get the blame for that. In fact, we are the ones taking the most care of it” (B9M).

A similar symbolic claim is evidenced with the Kirtipur Housing Project—a community-led resettlement programme, designed by the federation and supported by the local NGO Lumanti, to rehouse residents impacted by a road extension project along the Bisnumati river. This project is significant as the only major example of a resettlement project undertaken in the city (led by either government or civil society). Critically however, the narratives outlining the ‘success’ of this project are not limited to the provision of housing, but also reference its ‘ecological’ design, involving rainwater harvesting, solar powered boreholes, and onsite wastewater treatment. For example, a WaterAid project report (Rajbhandari, n.d.) frames it as “an inspiration for providing ecologically sustainable design solutions in a broader context...open[ing] up avenues for sustainable alternative solutions for managing the water crisis” (p. 7). In this way, the federation has used material practices around water collection to position themselves as at the forefront of ecological urban living, in stark contrast with policy and popular narratives which have blamed informal settlement residents for the environmental decline. Rademacher (2008) has likewise identified this strategy elsewhere in the work of the federation, pointing to the way in which the city-wide interest in ‘ecological sustainability’ has been repackaged by activists in advocacy forums—used instead to refer to the need to upgrade settlements to make them less vulnerable to flash flooding, seek improvements to sanitation conditions, and address health concerns related to water quality and cross-contamination.

Finally, the installation and management of infrastructure also plays a key role in how residents seek to establish themselves as being ‘clean’ and ‘ordered’ as a part of their

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13 The full statement reads: “The Kirtipur Housing Project aimed at the urban poor has not only brought the community based water resource management concept forward but also opened up avenues for sustainable alternative solutions for managing the water crisis as well as generated municipal wastewater through effective community based water resource management, putting all the possibilities and potentialities together into a single platform called eco-community. The Kirtipur Housing Project has now become an inspiration for providing ecologically sustainable design solutions in a broader context (p. 7).
visions for development. One of the first settled residents, for example, explained how the motivation to install a simplified sewerage system in Bansighat emerged out of the desire to demonstrate their cleanliness to passers-by:

We did not have any toilets in the past, but later on a road was constructed by the government. After the completion of the road many people from the city started using it, and passing by our community. This gave rise to our thinking that now we must be concentrate on our cleanliness, because other people would be passing in front of our area all the time. So for that reason we proposed to construct toilets and a sewage line (B3M).

Similarly, the programme coordinator of the city-wide Mahila Ekta Samaj federation outlined that organizing to get official waste collection was also a part of a strategy to challenge negative perceptions at the governmental level:

There is a government line that says that ‘squatters’ are polluting the rivers, however, in reality this is more to do with the lack of adequate drainage, as well as the fact that garbage collection used to be very expensive for many of these residents. But these wrong perceptions were a problem for us, so as a result seven communities have started to collect their own garbage, and negotiated for a municipal truck to come here now. So, you can see how they are challenging these negative attitudes.

She also articulated clearly the ways in which informal settlement residents have contributed positively to the development of their neighbourhoods (and by extension—the city) by making improvements on housing and services through careful management:

Informal settlements are places that are often portrayed as dangerous by the rest of the city. But I grew up there, and my dad always said that we have transformed these areas. They used to be empty and abandoned and no one would want to walk there in the evenings. But now people have settled there and created communities, and you can see its much safer (Programme Coordinator, NMES).

Similarly, Bansighat residents attributed improved services to the “capacity” of people in the settlement, as well as highlighting their contributions to the city, taking on more symbolic dimensions:
In our community we have constructed houses according to government regulations. So we don’t have any intention of moving from here. We have separated housing an adequate distance from the road. We have divided ourselves into sections, and we have arranged for good services such as water deliveries, a sewage system, and waste collection. This settlement is different from others. We have more capacity (B10F).

In all three examples (the clean-up campaign, Kirtipur housing project, and infrastructural development), the federation has used material practices to symbolically position informal neighbourhoods as making valuable and positive contributions to the city. In doing so, the group has reimagined what (ecological) development looks like from the perspective of the urban poor, thereby challenging perceptions of what it is to belong in the city. Critically, the projection of being ‘clean’ and ‘well ordered’ is a cross-cutting strategy, as inhabitants simultaneously seek to improve the physical conditions of their neighbourhood, as well as challenge the negative stigma they face on a daily basis as residents of informal settlement areas. Thus, linking these environmental practices to the broader symbolic narratives attached to them has demonstrated the ways in which informal residents (through the federation) have sought to challenge perceptions of development—and in the process—belonging. What becomes clear are the important symbolic and aspirational dimensions of these environmental improvements for lower-income residents, which can be contrasted with many of the values of ecological development enshrined in policy, as will be explored later.

5.3.2 Material Practice 2: Strategic Bill Payments on Services and Perceptions of ‘Security’

Beyond its function in reshaping city narratives around informal settlements, services and facilities also play a critical role in facilitating access to other, different, kinds of rights in the city. In particular, this section explores how material practices around bill payment takes on a more strategic and symbolic function in terms of asserting identification and increasing a sense of security. Practices of payment are wielded as a way of building relations with the local authority, and demonstrating a form of legitimacy in the city. This is articulated especially as a form of protection from eviction or as the basis to make claims on land and services in the future. Curiously, what can be seen in Bansighat is the continued payment of water bills even in the absence of actual provision, underscoring the perceived value of these practices. This builds upon the
logic explored in the previous section, as some residents articulated this as a way of enhancing a sense of security, through the fulfilment of citizenship obligations.

For informal settlement residents who do not have any kind of documents proving their residency, relying on bill payments for services was often expressed as an important signpost for how long they have been living in the settlement. For instance, in the vast majority of cases, Bansighat residents responded with ‘just the electricity meter’ in response to the question of whether or not they had any proof of residency:

We don't have any documents of ownership, only the electricity meter and a voting card provided by government. These are a kind of legal proof that we have for living here (B4F).

My only proof that I have been living here is the electricity meter. At least with that I can show how long I have been in this place (B6F).

Residents went on to further articulate a number of ways in which the payment of bills from services (such as water) have been used to facilitate access to other rights. For example, several residents reported that these could be used as leverage to access other legal documents, including a citizenship card. This is especially important given the numerous unwieldy bureaucratic barriers in Nepal to obtaining this card outside of the district of birth. Tanaka (2009) has similarly demonstrated the ways in which residents across multiple settlements of Kathmandu have used ‘official’ documents such as electricity or water bills as a workaround to claim state documentation, with the support of sympathetic officials.

Beyond these individual claims, there are also important collective claims that have been made through bill payment on services. For instance, several Bansighat residents shared a clearly articulated belief that the presence of facilities offered a stronger protection against eviction. Referencing the traumatic eviction in 2011 of the neighbouring Thapathali settlement, these residents expressed that this settlement was at risk because it was not as “well-organized” as Bansighat, linking this to community facilities:

Thapathali wasn’t a very well-organized settlement like Bansighat – so they were more at risk. Here we have developments like a sewer system, so I do not think the same thing will happen so easily (B4F).
They could simply evict Thapathali because in that community there weren’t any legal documents nor electricity. Compared to that place we have all the facilities like telephone lines, electricity, water services and waste collection. In settlements like Balkhu, Thapathali, Bageshwori, and Manohara, they don’t have anything, but in our neighbourhood there many facilities (B16F).

As a result of this association between security and services, residents have a finely tuned understanding of where they stand in relation to other settlements and the ‘facilities’ they contain. Bansighat residents often categorized those that were seen as better than theirs as “V.I.P. settlements”, referencing achievements particularly around services and housing quality:

It is better in Shankamul, Pathivara and Manohara. Especially Shankamul—there they all have electricity and concrete houses and handpumps in their houses. They are really like a V.I.P. settlement! But compared to Balkhu and Thapathali, it is better here. There are many facilities here and good people working. That’s why we think the government cannot evict us easily (B27F).

While to a certain extent evictions are simply physically more difficult in well-established settlements, this increased sense of security is also clearly related to the symbolic act of bill payment. Ninglekhu (2012), for example, references the ways in which records of bills have been successfully used in anti-eviction campaigns by federation leaders at the municipal level, to contest the legality of eviction attempts. Similarly, in Bansighat, the federation has used bill payments on services such as electricity and water as a way to advocate for compensation for particular houses which have been put at risk as a result of the ongoing road widening project. One of the federation leaders of this neighborhood, Maya, credits meticulous bill keeping (of water and other services) (Image 5.4), as aiding this process for several houses which are expected to be demolished:
Eight to nine houses around the bridge side of our settlement are going to get evicted soon. But they are getting compensation because the community committee was able to pursue the municipality with our proof here…. We have been managing our two tanks, and we have every receipt for the water we have refilled, so we can show these receipts and question the authorities. We are keeping systematic record of every expense we make and developmental works that we do. We have minute book of community meetings, voting list, household records, electricity and water bills (B33F).

Image 5.4: Proof of record-keeping of water bills displayed by federation leader Maya. (source: author)

The logic behind this strategy was identified by the programme coordinator of Mahila Ekta Samaj, who explained that “keeping bills means residents are able to say: we are paying taxes—so we are citizens here!”. The ability to translate these records into compensation is particularly remarkable given that the municipality does not have a legal requirement to do so, and in a context in which evictions in the city have rarely been accompanied by any kind of recompense. In these ways, the material practices of bill keeping and bill payment (for those who are able to) are evidently important tools for individuals as well as for the collective neighbourhood. Critically, practices of payment extend beyond the actual function of the service, taking on more symbolic dimensions related to enhancing perceptions of security and the claiming of rights.

Perhaps the most striking example, however, of the ways in which bill payment takes on a broader symbolic role in Bansighat are the debates which surround the four non-
functioning community pipelines which cross the east and west of the settlement. These pipelines have not provided (even semi-regular) access to water for close to ten years, and therefore do not feature within the daily collection routines of residents, as discussed further in chapter seven. Despite this, practices around bill payment for the pipes continue to play a significant role in discussions (and conflicts) across the settlement.

One of the major events related to these pipelines occurred in 1997, when the settlement was presented with charges which had been accruing over several years without anyone’s knowledge. Another federation leader, Sona, described receiving a bill amounting to NPR 92000 (£680) for the use of the four pipes, and the decision which was taken to pay off these charges:

There used to be a tap here in which water was running 24 hrs a day, and we were using it. Later we planned to manage it ourselves, and so we went to the water office to ask about that tap. That’s how we came to know that it had been registered by a private individual in 1975 [not a public tap as thought], and the fees had not been paid since then. At this time, the total bill was RS. 92000. I asked— how can sukumbasi people pay that sum of money, even if we had been using the unmanaged tap? We had a discussion with the government officials of the water ministry. We said we didn’t come here to fight, but to get our rights as promised by the political parties. The first time I was alone, but the next time we went in a greater mass, and then we were able to reduce the cost to 65000 rupees, which we paid in 3 instalments. It was fair that we paid, because we had been using that water all along. I have all the bills and proof of the payment (B7F).

In this way, Bansighat residents first collaborated with government officials on water to pay a negotiated fee, despite not having entered a formal contractual agreement with the municipality. Importantly, for certain federation members who were involved in these negotiations, such as Ana, this payment was conceptualized as a kind of citizenship duty, fulfilling the social contract (if not a legal water contract):

I really feel sad that the government treats us as if we were not citizens of Nepal. We should have facilities for water, electricity and a place to live. I think for water there should be a public tap than runs 2-3 times a week, which is provided by the government. We have shown we are ready to pay as other people are paying, and as we have paid in the past for the pipelines (B1F).
Yet the importance of this practice in enhancing the perception of both security and legitimacy to stay in the settlement is perhaps best illustrated with disputes in the settlement ten years later—post-privatization, as service to the taplines become more and more infrequent. At this time, and on the advice of the local organization, NGO Forum (who supported the procurement of the four community tanks through the LICSU programme, discussed further in the next chapter), leader Sona proposed to apply to KUKL for a ‘temporary blockage’ of the pipes—so that bills would not continue to accrue. She explained:

Many years passed in which the water tap has not provided any water. Now we have a water tank for which we also have to pay money. We are sukumbasi people—we don’t have that much money to pay both the tank and the tap! After several discussions, finally some officials at the water office suggested that I get a letter with around 35 signatures to demand that the tap is closed down temporarily. Why should we pay bills for just air in a pipe? (B7F)

However—and despite the lack of water in the pipes—many residents across the settlement were highly opposed to this, fearful of the symbolic loss of relations with the municipality, and the tap which demonstrated their ‘efforts and existence’ and acted as a ‘legal proof of rights’. Leaders Sona and Maya described this conflict, citing the concerns of many residents that closing the tapline down would put them at a higher risk of eviction:

It’s been a long time now since we’ve paid the bills for the tap, because they stopped working, and instead we got the tanks. But some people wanted to continue paying bills so that if the government plans to evict us we would have some proof of our efforts here and existence in community (B33F).

Some people in the community opposed me. My only point was that we should not pay for a tap that was not running water. It was totally useless in my opinion. But some people didn’t trust me. What people in the community thought is that if there is a public tapline then it can be support for us as some kind of legal proof of our rights, in a time of eviction. This was mainly from people on the west side of the neighbourhood. From that time on, I didn’t care what they did on the other side of the settlement (B7F).

Sona references this more specifically as a key point of contention between the eastern and western sides of the settlement. This dispute highlights the critical symbolic role
that water bills played in increasing the perceptions of security particularly for residents on the western side of the settlement—extending far beyond its material value. As a result, it was ultimately decided to adopt different strategies – with those on the east applying to close down the tap, and those on the west managed separately.

Accordingly, a handful of residents on the west have continued to pay monthly bills for the two remaining taplines—despite the fact that they have not provided water for many years. When queried, these residents explained the decision specifically as a form of claims-making, in terms of protection from eviction, or in the hope of providing some kind of leverage if the Melamchi Dam project goes through (Image 5.5):

It is in law that people who don’t have an ownership title of their house can’t have a water line. So we wanted to keep this tapline because we thought this would provide us with some legitimacy here, though we have struggled a lot to keep paying (B10F).

We pay for the tap because it could be a proof for us that we are using and paying for government services. There are rumours that the Melamchi Drinking water project is going to be completed soon, and if this is true, once it is completed, we can get water. Later on, it is possible this can help us claim for the land and our rights (B3M).

Some families have refused to pay for the tap because does it not give water. But we are still paying the government fee, 200 rupees per house monthly. In a way, it is fair that others do not want to pay for a tap which does not give water. But if anything happens to this settlement and we need to show the government documents, we will be able to show that we have paid bills to them. So, it is better to pay them, even if that means taking the money from other expenses. Maybe it is not so important for the other [east] side, because they already have good relations with the authorities (B24F).
What is also critical to highlight in the last quote and photograph above (B24F), is the fact that Asmita identifies that she feels greater insecurity given her location on the west of the settlement. She speculates that the ‘good relations’ shared between (the eastern-operating) federation and local authorities may make it less critical for those living on that side to prove their existence through regular bill payment. Thus, those families living in the west—and unconnected to the federation—have adopted strategic bill payment as a form of “evidence to show that we have been paying government fees”, though this was voiced as ‘totally useless’ by leader Maya (B7F). In this case, it is possible to see how the association with the women’s federation influences a sense of security and legitimacy in the settlement—and therefore why, for those outside this structure—other mechanisms of safety and security take on a greater importance.

These examples demonstrate the broad role which the practice of bill payment plays—not simply in providing access to critical resources—but also as leverage to make other claims—whether on documentation, land, employment opportunities, compensation or
for future water service. Indeed, the symbolic value of bill payment is so evident that some residents are even willing to pay for “air in pipes” (B7F) for services that do not exist. In this way, it is clear how the perception of security informs different water practices. Moreover, in Bansighat these choices are also reflective also of spatial divisions and claims to the land. Here it is possible to see how the eastern half of the settlement is better positioned to take advantage of their privileged relationship with the municipality, giving hints of the different kinds of legitimacy and security felt across the settlement, which will be further explored in the following chapter. In anticipation of the following section, this also raises the point of how those residents unconnected to services (and therefore regular bill payments) are likely to experience a decreased sense of security, recognition, or even belonging in the settlement and city.

5.3.3 Implications for Social Relations: The Making of the ‘Ecological’ and the Polluting Resident

The previous two sections explored the ways in which material practices around services have been symbolically wielded as a way of projecting an image of informal settlement residents as positively contributing to the development of the city, as ‘protectors not polluters’ of the river, of settlements as well ordered and secure, and of enhancing a sense of legitimacy or security. While the material practices explored above have undoubtedly been successful in leveraging access to a wide set of rights (employment, education, other forms of legal documentation) and enhanced sense of belonging for some, it is also important to acknowledge how this creates new forms of disenfranchisement for others that cannot conform to these norms. In fact, the desire to use services to project an image of being clean, ordered, and legitimate necessarily contains exclusions—in particular, for rental tenants and especially those of a specific ethnic group, who are often portrayed as the opposite—with poor hygiene, unmanaged, and polluting. Critically, this is not just a pattern present in Bansighat, but in fact relates to wider misrecognition and stigma in the city, which prevents certain disenfranchised groups from more effectively using services as an assertion of citizenship. These (mis)perceptions (exacerbated by routine coping strategies of these groups) have been used to draw distinctions between different kinds of residents—delegitimizing their claims to belonging in the city. As such, an analysis of the practices outlined in the
previous sections is deepened here to explore how this both produces and is produced by social differentiation—particularly across tenure and ethnicity.

What was clear within Bansighat are the ways in which renters are imaged as posing a critical threat to the tactics through which the federation (and other residents) have used to establish legitimacy, and challenge negative perceptions through services. To this aim, federation leadership (both at the neighbourhood and city level) has expressed a clear vision for the future of Bansighat which seeks to minimize the numbers of newcomers—and particularly rental tenants—linked with concerns around cleanliness and order.

In Bansighat, for instance, leader Maya expressed the growth of the rental population in pejorative terms:

> It’s not just in our settlement, but in other communities that renters are increasing—because when people will have no opportunities, medical service or education in villages, they will migrate in Kathmandu…. But renters will make things even worse here. We are trying to make some rules that people can’t rent just one room for a whole family, or that people living cannot simply rent their house and then move outside of the settlement…

> …in the past there wasn’t a very high population, so the environment was clean and the waste from households was much less, but nowadays as the population has increased drastically I think the things are degrading (B33F).

Similarly, Ninglekhu (2017) examines this sentiment, exploring how federation leaders across the city made the point that recognizing the claims of new migrants is untenable, as this makes it harder to ‘manage’ issues for informal settlement residents. This unwillingness to include new renters into community advocacy was likewise expressed by the current programme coordinator of Mahila Ekta Samaj, who oversees the work of the federation across Kathmandu:

> We know that renters coming into our areas is happening more than ever before, but this is not very good for us. We have worked hard to make our places nice to live. Now people are just dividing their houses, and it makes it hard to keep things nice as they are. It is a problem for the future. We cannot get proof [of residency] for those of us that have been living and struggling. How can we help the rest?
Critically, in the case of Bansighat, when leader Maya was queried on how the federation was planning to respond to the inevitable increase of renters, she explained:

The community committee is also planning to collect data on the renters, so that we can have a record of them. This could be useful in some police cases, because maybe in some houses criminals might to come to live, or other bad guys who will commit crimes and run away (B33F).

In the above, even while Maya explains that the federation will shortly be undertaking their own enumeration of renters, the reasons behind this are expressed as a desire to maintain safety and order, rather than as a way of better distributing resources. As such, returning to the reflections around practices and perceptions in the previous sections, this aversion to the increase of more migrants—and especially renters—can be linked with broader concerns of stigma and shame faced by residents of informal settlements—which positions these neighbourhoods as dirty, polluting, or criminal. In this sense, it easy to understand the intentions behind the desire to limit newcomers to the settlement, which would otherwise increase conditions of overcrowding and pressures on services, and risks undermining some of perceptions federation leaders have sought to challenge. Beyond the sense of exclusion this generates in federation managed settlements across the city, this tactic has a significant impact upon a sense of participation within the neighbourhood, as will be explored in the following chapter.

However, perhaps even more critical to make visible are the ways in which this social differentiation is linked with another marker of identity: those from the Madhesi ethnic group. As suggested in the contextual chapter, the Madhesi ethnic group, originating from the lower-lying Terai regions bordering India, have faced historical discrimination within Nepal as a whole—often imaged as Indian owing to the frequent intermarriages, fluidity of the borderlands, and linguistic similarities. What was clear was the way in which this wider discrimination played out within Bansighat to disenfranchise specifically Madhesi migrants from land and services.

To this, a few residents speculated informally that the opposition to involving “renters” in community activities was in reality a veiled attempt to prevent Madhesi renters specifically from participating. This discursive shift was evident within the language of
residents when queried about renters in their neighbourhood, who either explicitly or implicitly used the term ‘renters’ to refer to Madhesis:

I have extra space in my house, but I don’t want to rent it out. It’s the people from the Terai region (the Madhesi) who would be renting the house, because people in other places will not lease their house to them. But they are not clean. They will create a mess (B24).

We’ve had problems with renters before. Most of them work as a garbage collectors. Some of them were involved in robbery, theft and many other criminal activities. They were creating a negative impression of our community. One time a couple of years ago our community got together and removed them (B3M).

Like renters more generally, Madhesi residents also identify being excluded from community planning or similar activities, connecting this explicitly with a sense of disenfranchisement as both tenants and Madhesi:

Besides water, we are not included in any of the development activities like club or committee meetings. This is because we are renters—but also because we are Madhesi. When some things happen always they blame the Madhesi. But in reality we are also Nepali. I do have a Nepali citizenship card (B17M).

Sometimes I attend local meetings. But I am not invited. I listen from outside the room. They don’t invite me because of where I am from and because I don’t have a permanent place here. If they’d invite me, I would surely go (B30M).

In Bansighat, Madhesi residents live primarily on the most marginal land on the western side of the settlement in areas closest to the river. Of the six families interviewed, all were renters, corresponding with a wider pattern across Bansighat confirmed in interviews. Nor is this a coincidence: on three different occasions, Madhesi families indicated that though there was land available when they first migrated to the area, existing residents did not allow them to construct a house:

10 years ago I first occupied some land here. But the people from the hills region forced us to leave, telling us that we were from Terai and so couldn’t stay, and we left because we didn’t want any trouble. I started to rent a room after that across the river, and then finally I came back here to rent this place (B31F).
I was here a very long time ago, even when the settlement was just beginning to emerge. There were just 1-2 houses here. During that time, people used to discriminate us and whenever we built a shelter here they would destroy it. They would beat us, and so we left then” (B28M).

Research focused on other informal settlements in Kathmandu suggests that this pattern is not unique to Bansighat, with other settlements similarly demonstrating the pattern in which Madhesi residents occupy rental rooms on more marginal land, giving hints of the broader struggle for legitimacy faced by those of this ethnic group (Khanal, 2015). Moreover, these negative perceptions are not limited to informal settlements, but are represented within Nepal more generally, reinforced through media accounts as well as legal discriminations, which have largely positioned members of the Madhesi ethnic group as “not Nepali” (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Thus, if the first sections were focused on the ways in which residents might strategically use services to reclaim the process of development away from more exclusionary city priorities, and build a sense of legitimacy and security, it is also important to understand that not everyone has equal capacities to do so, highlighting the importance of remaining attuned to social and power relations at the micro-scale. In particular, in many instances discriminatory comments aimed at the Madhesi were linked with certain material practices related to water and sanitation or hygiene. In doing so, these residents are positioned as a direct challenge to the narratives of being ‘clean’ and ‘ordered’ that the federation has pursued as a way of ‘looking’ legitimate. The concern with poor hygiene, for example, is readily captured in a more informal conversation held between two residents listening to the interview process, who joked in response:

A: What do we feel about the Madhesi? They are filthy, thieves and drunkards.
B: They also marry with five different women.
A: The ones who come here they do not have any shame. They pee and shit on the roads, they steal, they are drunkards and very dirty. It is not possible for only us to clean. They come here and make a mess.
B: And their voices are very loud. They are very dirty. That is why we discriminate them.” (from interview B24F)

This conversation is all the more striking given the numerous challenges that all informal settlement residents face related to negative perceptions around hygiene and
sanitation. What can be seen is the symbolic separation of some settlers from others, in which the speakers position Madhesi residents as the *real* polluters. This attitude was likewise reflected in numerous interviews:

I think people on the west are less concerned with sanitation – they can even use the riverside for toilet purposes. It is because in the middle and eastern parts of community, people are from the hilly region, and in west most of them are from the Terai. The Madhesi they eat anywhere, create lot of waste. Most live in west because hilly people living on the east side don’t really get along with Madhesi people, and won’t rent a room to them (B19F).

We use the canal water for washing clothes only, but those people on the west use it to drink also! They do not care about hygiene (B1F).

In contrast with these narratives, it is critical to acknowledge that the inadequacy of water and toilet facilities for many Madhesi families means they are often forced to adopt many of highly problematic coping strategies identified in the quotes above—including eating outside (as there isn’t space in the single rented rooms), drinking from the canal as a last resort (due to financial constraints), or using the riverside as a toilet (as facilities may be shared by multiple families, or even completely absent). These practices, in turn, are taken as evidence of poor hygiene.

The multiple impacts of this stigma can be evidenced in the story of Binsa and her young family, who occupy a converted room in an open-air temple of Bansighat. While she lives in this space freely, in exchange for undertaking domestic work around the space, it is without a toilet. Binsa explained the difficulty this generates especially for her and her young daughter, aged three:

Other tenants in this area have their own toilets inside their rooms. However, I have not been able to use them because they are afraid that I will make it dirty, especially with my daughter, and because we do not always have enough water to clean the toilet afterwards. For my husband it is not a problem, because he can use the river. But I have my daughter, so we cannot do that. The only option I have is to use a pot and toss this into the river, or sometimes I try to use my neighbour’s toilet, though she does not like to let me. When I do this I just have to bear her scolding, and this does not make me feel emotionally well. I know about 4-5 other families in this settlement that live in the same way (B26F).
Binsa describes the different ways she and her husband use the riverside—not out of poor hygiene, but out of a lack of any other option. In Binsa’s case, these multiple deprivations related to water and sanitation is compounded by the wider stigma of being seen as ‘unclean’. This example also demonstrates how, on the one hand, her lack of facilities is used to portray her as unclean, while at the same time this negative perception is invoked by others to avoid sharing their facilities, creating a cyclical trap. 

Binsa’s story is illustrative of how her daily routines related to water and sanitation (and as a result emotional and physical wellbeing) are limited by perceptions related to her social position in the neighbourhood, environmental conditions, as well as the wider discourses of the ‘polluting squatter’ expressed at the city scale. As a result, these material practices around sanitation both reflect and reinforce Binsa’s subordinate position.

Similarly, beyond these narratives around hygiene, the association of Madhesi renters with begging or waste picking has also been portrayed as giving the settlement “a bad reputation”:

I don’t rent out rooms. But the ones who do have allowed the waste pickers to rent. The waste pickers are often accused of stealing stuff from homes. That’s why the police come here time and again and tell the house owners not to keep them...due to these waste pickers, we are getting a bad reputation (B27F).

We’ve had problems with renters before. Most of them work as a garbage collectors. Some of them were involved in robbery, theft and many other criminal activities. They were creating a negative impression of our community. One time a couple of years ago our community got together and removed them (B3M).

Nowhere is this more evident than for the small group of Madhesi residents with physical disabilities, who were often imaged as ‘coming from India’ to beg on the streets of Kathmandu. Curiously, in several instances they were imaged in contradictory ways—seen both as poor, unclean beggars, or wealthy accumulators of assets—linking with the wider rumours around the ‘fake squatters’:

There are a few Madhesi who beg during the whole day, and during the night they will buy very good food like mutton or chicken. Their kids are also getting icecream daily, while our kids only see this very few times in a
year. I have to go to their houses around evening time due to my community works. Around then I can see a variety of delicious food being cooked, but the environment that they live in is very dirty. They don’t like to clean their rooms, or have an awareness that they should do it. Maybe it’s because of these reasons that Nepali people dominate them (B33F).

As before, however, this attitude can be held in stark contrast with a series of conversations held with Alam, a young Madhesi renter, who spoke candidly about the discrimination faced by himself and his young family, and the way this has been used to deny a sense of belonging in both the settlement and city:

In this community, most of the Madhesi are from Rautahat, my native village. Many of them are physically disabled and they beg in Sundhara to earn a little money. Just right before the massive earthquake, people here were planning to remove all those disabled Madhesi people from this community, but as there was a disaster people’s attention shifted to other matters. So many Madhesi people have to bear scolding, and threats that we will be thrown from our houses.

I am working from 6 am to 6 pm collecting garbage. Sometimes I get home very late like 7 or 9 pm. When I am free I watch dance programmes on television. Most of time when I leave for the office my child is sleeping, and when I arrive home at night he is already be asleep. I think sometimes that he might wonder where his father has gone for so many days. In my house no one has a good job. My mother has to collect garbage with a big bag, and because of that she gets sick often. I get sick often too, sometimes for a month long. I really don’t want to do this job, but I don’t have any other choices…

…so I think, yes, there still exists discrimination here. For example, though I am Nepali, people call me Madhesi. When I say I have Nepali citizenship card, they say having a Nepali citizenship card does not make you Nepali, and try to bully us. What does it mean then to have this card for which I struggled so hard, and at the end it has no value, and I cannot be called Nepali?” (B17M)

From Alam, what can be seen is how wider city discourses around the unclean, criminal or ‘fake squatter’ have been internally replicated and redirected specifically towards Madhesi renters—disenfranchising residents such as Alam from a sense of security within not only the settlement, but also the city (and even country). In other words, if residents of informal settlements are already sensitive to claims that they make the city less orderly and cleanly, as well as charges that they are ‘faking’ poverty—and renters
specifically have been imaged by federation leadership as a challenge and ongoing advocacy—then Madhesi renters (and especially those that may have disabilities) face the most intensified version of this. In this case, those symbolic narratives relating to looking ‘clean and ordered’ as a form of legitimacy have been used to disenfranchise residents who are portrayed as not conforming this image. Thus, if certain practices can be perceived as a way to challenge stigma and increase legitimacy, these can also be used to delegitimize and disenfranchise certain groups—highlighting the ‘political’ negotiations which underpin different mundane activities.

As a final note on this, it is important to also raise the issue of how this generates particular risks for Madhesi men, and especially women, which is linked with water and sanitation services. A separate story shared by Alam illustrates this—referencing the compounded risks of having their toilet outside their home as a rental tenant, their location next to unfavourable riverside land, and wider social stigma:

We only have one toilet to share, and during the night or morning if we have an emergency and it is occupied we have to go to the riverside. We have no other option. There are many houses who have 2 - 3 toilets even inside their own house, but we don’t even have our own. Usually in the night it is not very safe to go outside to use the toilet, because there are many bad people who drink and are involved in criminal activity. The police are also patrolling at night, and when they see us roaming outside they assume we are up to something bad.

For example, right now there is construction going on for pipelines in our settlement, and government workers started teasing the girls from our community. The girls complained about it to my brother and his friend. There was a bit of fight, and the government workers were injured. At the end of all of this, many of the other people in the neighbourhood supported the workers instead of my brothers and their friends. This is all happening because we are from Terai region (B17M).

Thus, while security in the settlement may be a concern in general, for Madhesi women and men, this is intensified by the lack of adequate facilities and wider misrecognition in the neighbourhood and city. This example demonstrates the way in which the material deprivations faced by Alam and his neighbours are intensified by racialized norms, which have compounded risks for Madhesi women and men (albeit in different ways—for women, increased harassment, and for men, police persecution). Opening up this discussion helps to demonstrate the ways in which material
interventions (around the provision of water or sanitation facilities, for example), will be unlikely to address some of the persistent risks faced by members of this group.

What these accounts demonstrate is that while the symbolic narratives attached to certain material practices can be a route to ‘belonging’ for some residents—especially those that can perform environmental actions or demonstrate responsibility for payment on communal sources—this leaves behind certain groups at the margins. The particular struggles of these residents have remained largely invisible within community-led approaches, with the lack of facilities both reflecting and reinforcing negative perceptions in the wider neighbourhood and city. As a result, residents such as Binsa or Alam have been unable to use services as leverage or to participate in ‘reclaiming’ development processes, as well as being exposed to greater risks. This is reflective of deeply different levels of social power—which has been expressed and reinforced through infrastructure.

5.3.4 Belonging in Urban Development Visions

The previous sections explored practices related to environmental behaviour and the payment on services, and how this is linked with the projection of an image of cleanliness, legitimacy, and order. It examined the ways in which this generates social divides particularly between owners and renters, but most especially for Madhesi renters, who become imaged as unclean and disorganized. These negotiations, however, are better understood by looking at wider urban development priorities at work in the city. In fact, there are a number of key programmatic and policy approaches in which visions for the future of Kathmandu are framed alongside similar values of ‘ecological’ development—particularly focused on the Bagmati riverside. As such, these wider trends are critical to examine for the ways in which they position informal settlement residents (or not) within these narratives, and how this intersects with the approaches and attitudes of residents themselves.

The most prolific of these approaches is the (2009) Bagmati Action Plan (BAP), formed to address the widespread degeneration of the river and loss of heritage sites alongside the Bagmati. Setting out its vision for a “clean, green and healthy river system” (GoN/NTNC, 2009, p. iv), the BAP was first initiated in 2007, when a Memorandum
of Understanding was signed between the United Nation’s Environmental Program (UNEP) and the Nepali National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC). By 2009 the plan was developed, and in 2010 a governmental body was established to oversee the process, called the “High Powered Committee for Integrated Development of the Bagmati Civilization”. Using the language of restoring the Bagmati to a more ‘pristine’ state, the plan lays out the desire to: “conserve the terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity, cultural and heritage sites, and to develop and promote eco-tourism in the Bagmati river” (GoN/NTNC, 2009, p. iv). Drawing on financial support from the ADB, the BAP entails several major objectives to achieve this vision, including the construction of 30km of sewage lines, implementation of five new waste treatment plants, a cleaning and training programme, and the creation of a green belt along the banks. A key pillar of this programme is the weekly ‘community clean-ups’ to remove rubbish from the riverbanks, which Bansighat residents have participated in.

The BAP additionally divides the river into five “zones”, with distinct action points and budgetary allocations for each area. More specifically, in consideration of the “urban zone”, the recommended actions go beyond the restoration of the river, and develop more aspirational propositions around its future use. They are:

- To improve river water quality and quantity through proper management of water and waste water;
- Take measures to protect river side land, aquatic biodiversity and aesthetic value of rivers and their surroundings;
- Control and relocate squatter settlements from the river banks;
- Maintain and renovate heritage sites;
- Promote tourism.

What is evidenced within these proposals are the ways in which the BAP sets out the desire to harness the ecological and heritage value of the Bagmati River, particularly with the aim of promoting tourism. Within this, settlements are explicitly identified as a ‘major issue’ to be addressed by the plan, which identifies the “high encroachment of land by illegal settlements such as squatters” as a threat (GoN/NTNC, 2009, p. 25). Most controversially for informal settlement residents is action point three, which requires a clear space on 20 metres either side of the banks of the river, prohibiting either
commercial or residential activity. As such, it places at least fourteen different
neighbourhoods alongside the Bagmati and its tributaries at risk of eviction (Ninglekhu,
2017).

Critically, the language evidenced within the BAP taps into perceptions referenced
erlier around ‘polluting squatters’ as major contributors to the degradation of the river.
For instance, the document first highlights the major structural drivers of pollution of
the riverbed, including the ‘direct discharge’ of untreated sewage into the river, leachate
as a result of solid waste disposal alongside the river banks by the municipality and
private organizations, and the disposal of chemical waste (p. 25). However, in the same
sentence it also references the “direct discharge of sewage into the river by squatter settlements”
(GoN/NTNC, 2009, p. 25). In this way, the BAP reflects many of the perceptions
expressed by media or government officials, which positions informal settlements’
contribution to pollution at the same level as dumping practices of major industries, or
as a result of chronic underinvestment in infrastructure for the city as a whole.

These developmental values which have prioritized the promotion of heritage or
tourism (at the expense of the urban poor) have likewise been expressed in other key
ways. Rademacher (2011), for instance, cites the eviction in 2000 to build the Bisnumati
Link Road (eventually leading to the Kirtipur Housing Project)—documenting the ways
in which government officials justified the eviction by positioning residents as riparian
invaders who exacerbated the degradation of the river, and as barriers to future
developmental activities. Similarly, several large-scale projects in the name of ‘city
beautification’ have been proposed over the sites of informal settlement areas, leading
to clashes between residents and government authorities. This is prominently
represented, for example, by the 1997 proposal for the ‘United Nations Fiftieth
Anniversary Park’, which sought to turn 156 ropani14 of riverside land into a green
space, a third of which would require large-scale evictions over the site of one of the
oldest settlements in the city. Residents protested over a period of ten years, and
ultimately the project was abandoned (Sengupta and Sharma, 2009). More recently
however, similar signs appeared in Bansighat during the study period, advocating for a

14 A ropani is the unit of measurement typically used for land in Nepal, equivalent to roughly 508 sq meters.
‘redesign’ of the area under the auspice of the preservation of the Bagmati’s cultural heritage (Image 5.6).

Image 5.6: Billboard proposing a new paved walkway alongside the Bagmati river, over the current area of the Bansighat neighbourhood (source: author)

These policy and programmatic approaches represent what Rademacher (2009) refers to as the framing of informal housing as an environmental problem. However, this thesis goes further—positing that this also is indicative of a clash around different aspirations for the future of the city, representing a key battleground through which residents negotiate who ‘belongs’ in processes of city-making.

Critically, this exclusionary framing is also evidenced within some of the policy documents emerging post-2015 after the approval of the new Constitution. The recently promulgated National Urban Development Strategy (2017), for instance, references informal settlements as a part of ‘urban environmental concerns’, listed alongside ‘land use incompatibility, public space encroachment’ and ‘disregard for cultural heritage’ (1.3.1). It later outlines its strategy for these settlements as ‘discouraging encroachment on public land’ through the facilitation of building through the private sector (4.2.4: S43). Critically, nowhere within these documents is the possibility of upgrading or
resettlement mentioned as a policy or programmatic option for settlements. As such, residents continue to be caught between the past and present of the river, cultural heritage and future use. Or as expressed by one resident: “During the rainy season we have to fear flooding, and in winter we have to fear eviction. You can say we are living all the time of year in fear and insecurities because of this river” (B2F).

This section sought to outline the disjunctures between the values and perceptions which are embedded within programmes such as the Bagmati Action Plan—which seeks to restore the ecological integrity and unlock the value of riverside land—and those of residents themselves, who the bear the worst burdens related to riverside pollution. Exploring the assumptions embedded within policy and programmatic approaches is instructive in understanding the material practices explored earlier—linked with presenting residents as well-ordered, and as contributing to the ecological health of the city. Critically, just as the BAP positions settlers as ‘polluting’ invaders, so too do settlers draw symbolic separations amongst themselves—replicating the same language evidenced in the city. This opens up a deeper understanding of the logic underpinning these practices, as well as how the interplay of these policy narratives and existing social differentials can work to exclude certain types of residents—shaping different experiences of belonging across tenure and ethnicity.

5.4 Citizenship Contestations

This chapter has already spoken clearly to the thematic of citizenship—touching upon the ways in which residents conceive of themselves as belonging to the city, and the practices which are understood to be the duties of a good citizen. Unpacking the symbolic narratives which drive practices of bill payment or environmental actions was important not only to better understand the strategic role of water infrastructure—but also as a way to explore why it is that Madhesi renters have been deeply excluded from both adequate services, as well as a more intangible sense of belonging. Critically then, the framework adopted to open up the ‘everyday politics of belonging’ has already helped to elucidate some of the ways and reasons diverse residents can to relate to a broader citizenship project. Departing from this point, the following section discusses three elements of citizenship more particularly which are most present throughout this chapter: self-determination, recognition, and solidarity.
5.4.1 Self-Determination

This chapter highlighted the ways in which residents of informal settlements lay claim to Kathmandu as citizens—not as ‘blockages’ to development, but as protectors and contributors. This is a critical strategy given that flagship projects such as the Bagmati Action Plan have outlined a particular vision for the future of the riverbanks, drawing on imagery from the past, while simultaneously outlining a new future based on tourism, heritage, and riverside developments. Interestingly, and in contrast with other contexts which have linked major development proposals with the desire to achieve ‘world-class city’ aspirations, (e.g. Goldman, 2011; Watson, 2014), many of the values expressed within the BAP and similar programmes are focused on a nostalgic return to a previous state (ex: Nepali Times, ‘Losing the River, and Ourselves’, Maharjan, 2017). This imagery is undoubtedly made more potent because of the powerful symbolic associations of water and purity in Hinduism, which can be traced in the language of restoring the river to a more pristine state (Ninglekhu, 2017).

Yet these imaginaries too often exclude those residents who have made their homes on the riverbanks, making a clear statement on who’s ‘civilization’ is imagined by the ‘Committee for the Integrated Development of the Bagmati Civilization’ which has overseen riverside improvements. In fact, such city-wide developmental plans make little reference to the existing use of these spaces by informal settlement dwellers, or when they do, seek to discursively exclude these residents from visions for the future—positioning them as riparian invaders, or threats to the ecological or cultural value of the river. Critical to the production of legitimacy for these eviction threats are narratives of either the ‘polluting’ or ‘fake squatters’. These discourses have been used to destabilize the claims of residents living in riverside areas, and have been invoked as a way of evading compensation or upgrading strategies, explicitly placing these residents outside of wider developmental visions for the city.

In this way, informal settlement residents do not ‘belong’ within river revitalization plans which look to historical value, rather than present use, corresponding with that Baviskar (2004) refers to as 'bourgeois environmentalism', in which discourses and interventions seek to 'clean' the city (through the removal of the urban poor). A perceived lack of self-determination can be traced in the frustration of residents
describing the ongoing uncertainty of their living conditions as a result—at risk both from actual environmental hazards related to flooding, as well as fears around eviction. A number of residents contested these developments specifically as a violation of their rights ‘as citizens’, as illustrated in the opening quote of this chapter, countering both the values embedded in river restoration projects, and wider (mis)perceptions of informal settlements.

Yet, as explored, in response to these profound uncertainties, informal settlement residents—particularly through the federation of the urban poor—have devised their own visions of development, contributing to high-profile campaigns such as the river clean-up, demonstrating ‘ecological’ precedents such as the Kirtipur housing project, and making infrastructural improvements to the riverside. In these ways, residents have tapped into the state-led discourses of ‘environmentalism’, but have translated them in ways that correspond with their own realities. In doing so, residents have advocated for a new form of belonging—a by extension, a new sense of citizenship in the city (Holston, 2009). In several instances this was conceptualized as a form of self-determination, as residents feel proud to be a part of a settlement with “more capacity” (B10F) than others, while the community management of services becomes equated with “challenging negative perceptions”, (programme coordinator, NMES) and the establishment of infrastructure as ‘undertaking [their] own planning for the area’ (B9M). Here, it is possible to see how meanings and visions for the future are have been redefined and contested in the everyday practices of residents—creating new definitions of belonging, often in opposition to policy processes.

5.4.2 Recognition

A related point this chapter has sought to raise is around how the unequal distribution of water resources is connected with the unequal distribution of other kinds of entitlements. In this way, struggles around services also represents struggles for substantive citizenship rights.

In particular, in light of difficulties in obtaining a citizenship card or tenure status, access to bills (particularly for government-managed services) plays a critical role in opening up different avenues to obtain legal recognition. For instance, the payment of
bills becomes useful as a form of identification—wielded by residents both at an individual level to facilitate access to jobs, as well as collectively as a way of increasing a sense of security from eviction of the neighbourhood as a whole. In this way, while services may very literally be a way of getting recognition (i.e. as way to facilitate access to citizenship documents), when used as a part of a collective strategy it also plays a symbolic role related to belonging, as residents use bills as a proxy to indicate how long they’ve been living, and contributing, in the settlement. For many residents, payments on (even non-functioning) services were articulated as a kind of citizenship duty—fulfilling obligations as a way to later make claims ‘on land and our rights’ (B3M).

However, echoing reflections opened up in chapter six, this highlights the issue of who is being named and recognized in these multiple avenues to security. While those collective advances which have been made are a reflection of the significant work undertaken by the women’s federation, it also raises questions around how this favors organized residents, and what this means for those who are not. More specifically, across the city this can be traced in the range of hierarchies residents referenced between settlements—in which ‘V.I.P.’ settlements (such as Shankamul) with vastly superior infrastructure are understood to be highly secure, and those with a limited federation presence (such as Balkhu) have not progressed in the same way. This troubles the notion of ‘citizenship as participation’, suggesting that those who are less able to participate may therefore be less able to access both resources and recognition which constitute substantive citizenship rights.

Secondly, this link between services (particularly their payment) and citizenship is also worth considering within the context of the marketized approach underpinning the wider water sector, as discussed in the previous two chapters. Within Bansighat, evidence of this logic can also be traced in the ways in which payment on services is wielded as an important marker of legitimacy (as narrated, for instance, by Ana, when she made the point that she is frustrated not to be recognized as a citizen of Nepal—despite the fact that she “is ready to pay as other people are paying” (B1F)). This sentiment has been echoed in other contexts where the payment on services is seen as a basis for claims on the state as positively contributing citizens (e.g. Ranganathan, 2014; Rodina & Harris, 2016). Yet what this means is that legitimacy is (at least partially) sought through compliance with the market. Here, it is helpful to heed the warnings of McFarlane
(2008) speaking of the federation tactics in Mumbai, who posits that civic activity on urban sanitation centred around ‘liberal entrepreneurial politics’ (p. 105) may not radically challenge the status quo. Or in other words, in Bansighat, those who cannot comply with this practice, either a result of financial difficulties, or as a result of social exclusions which have prohibited some from the benefits of wider community organizing, may therefore be unable to take any benefits from this tactic—particularly affecting temporary residents, renters or new migrants. In this way, payment for infrastructure has implications both for land tenure, as well as wider definitions of belonging.

5.4.3 Solidarity

Finally, this chapter outlined a complex set of hierarchies, in which legitimacy is articulated through various types of material practices. However, if certain material routines have increased a sense of self-determination or recognition, it is also important to recognize that this is also predicated upon the exclusions of others. This resonates with reflections emergent from other contexts, in which collective action undertaken by informal settlement residents—even while advocating for radical new forms of citizenship—may also rely upon or produce exclusionary localized hierarchies (Doshi, 2013). This chapter adds to this account by exploring the ways in which social hierarchies are shaped and experienced in dialogue with wider social norms and urban development priorities.

In particular, in Bansighat what can be seen is how ethnic identity, as well as different residential / tenure categories have shaped a differential access to rights and resources. For federation leaders, renters represent the antithesis of the clean and ordered image which the women’s group seeks to project through their multiple strategies—leading to the explicit rejection of these new migrants. This can be alienating for renters who feel they “have nothing else to take from the community” (J14F), or that “there isn't an equality with household owners” (B13F). Thus, while the federation has sought to subvert state-led environmental discourses which erase informal settlements, it has likewise generated differential categories of who 'belongs' in the city.
Critically, these subject categories are reflective both of wider policy and programmatic priorities, as well as localized power relations within the neighbourhood. For instance, the (legal) prejudice faced by the Madhesi in the country as a whole—related to complex factors including wider geopolitics, issues of territorial sovereignty, and the historic association with ‘impure’ occupations—has played out in Bansighat as the denial of improved services and housing for Madhesi renters. This has both reflected and reinforced a degraded position in Bansighat – in that members of this group are often prohibited from the use of improved infrastructure, while inadequate facilities are simultaneously used as evidence for having ‘bad hygiene practices’. These perceptions are in turn amplified by developmental policies of the state, which have sought to restore the ‘Bagmati Civilization’ – contrasting the clean visions of the future against the ‘polluting’ informal settlements. These discourses have intensified with the symbolic separation of the clean ‘hill’ Nepalis from the unhygienic ‘plains’ (Madhesi), undermining the entitlements of groups seen as not conforming to the correct image— the Madhesi particularly, or renters or temporary occupiers more generally. Such narratives undermine solidarity practices across informal settlement dwellers, creating new categories of ‘ecological’ or ‘polluting’ residents. For Madhesi women and men, the experience of this stigma was voiced not just as a kind of disenfranchisement from the neighbourhood, but also as undermining a sense of belonging in the city and country. This was apparent in the words of the young renter Alam, when he asked: “what does it mean to have this citizenship card for which I struggled so hard? At the end it has no value, and it seems I cannot be called Nepali” (B17M).

This disenfranchisement also generates greater burdens for those excluded in particular urban spaces. The stories related by Alam of the threat of violence alongside the riverside, or from Binsa of the shame attached to not having a toilet, demonstrates the ways in which infrastructure, gender, and ethnic identity intersect to create different risks for Madhesi women and men. In both cases, what can be seen are how the challenges of water and sanitation are intensified in a context where shame, stigma, or even violence is directed against women as a whole—as well as more specifically against certain women. In Bansighat, these dangers remain despite improvements in physical infrastructure, suggesting the importance of connecting these vulnerabilities around water and sanitation with the wider social context if Madhesi residents are to move closer to the experience of substantive citizenship.
5.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted how state-led development visions which have sought to restore the ecological integrity and heritage value of the Bagmati and Bisnumati riversides have been experienced in contradictory ways by informal settlement residents, intimately linked with a sense of belonging. While on the one hand, improvements to the riverside through the BAP or similar programmes might alleviate some of the burdens of the worst environmental hazards, on the other it also increases the risk of eviction as riverside land becomes more desirable or well-serviced. The framing of ‘housing as an environmental problem’ (Rademacher, 2009) in policy and programmatic documents has generated competing claims over both land and future visions for the city as a whole.

In response, several material practices linked with demonstrating legitimacy within the settlement have been strategically engaged by the federation—related to payment on services or the demonstration of environmental behaviours. Yet while this remains an effective means for many to enhance a sense of self-determination and obtain a level of recognition from local authorities, these spaces of civic activity are themselves contested. Those who are able to conform to the image of ‘community’ put forth, (particularly by federation leadership) are better able to stake claims to both resources and rights. Meanwhile others have been left behind—remaking social categories along ethnic and tenure lines. As such, the construction of community around these symbolic narratives of being positive contributors to the city has solidified “new identities and struggles… rooted in old and new power relations” (Robins et al., 2008, p. 1073).

A close examination of the values and perceptions embedded in both the everyday practices of residents, as well as wider developmental policies and programmes has highlighted the ways in which infrastructure is intimately linked with wider debates around urban space. In practice, this requires an approach which is cognizant of the different types of tenure categories which are present in Kathmandu’s informal settlements, and how this intersects with different social positions—from recent migrants, to renters, to temporary occupiers. Without additional work — through social educational programmes focused on ethnic identity, encouraging spaces of participation for these groups within neighbourhood initiatives, or addressing unwieldy legal barriers
to citizenship—this means that even as infrastructure and services are improved, the risks and vulnerabilities faced by these groups (and impacted by services) may remain. Simultaneously, attention needs to be paid to the *types* of settlements which are able to attract funding or improved services. The reliance on federation-led strategies has meant that particular neighbourhoods in Kathmandu have managed to upgrade their areas, while neighbourhoods without consolidated leadership have been left behind, creating different kinds risks across settlements in Kathmandu. Altogether, this creates different possibilities—across identities and across neighbourhoods—for relating to a sense of both material and symbolic belonging in the city.
Chapter 6  The Everyday Politics of Participation

In the past I didn’t have any skills nor could I face my fears, but Mahila Ekta Samaj has made me so strong that nowadays I’m involved in many community committees…” (Ana, resident of eastern side of Bansighat).

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This is how it is. Once I went to ask to be involved in the group [Mahila Ekta Samaj] but they told us that we are not allowed because we are living on the west side. Although all of us should be considered residents of this settlement, Mahila Ekta Samaj works in the eastern part only. That means they separate us (Srijana, resident of western side of Bansighat).

6.1  Introduction

If the previous chapter was focused on the city-wide policies and practices which have laid the groundwork for a variegated sense of citizenship (especially across tenure and ethnicity), this chapter focuses particularly on how this has manifested in Bansighat. Accordingly, this chapter takes as its entry point the community scale—focused on two practices related to the management and distribution of community water resources. These practices can be understood as relating to the ability to participate—in water services, as well as in community life. In order to do so, this chapter tells the story of the women’s federation of the urban poor, Mahila Ekta Samaj—a network of informal settlement residents working in settlements throughout Nepal through collective savings, skills trainings, and upgrading or relocation projects. In Bansighat specifically, this organization has explicitly sought to link action around the implementation of water infrastructure with discursive claims around citizenship, generating a number of positive changes in the neighbourhood. This chapter traces this process of community collective action, exploring the innovative partnership that developed between neighbourhood leaders and the privately-operated water company, KUKL, to devolve water services to the local level through a community tank system.

In particular, this chapter focuses on two material practices: the process of infrastructure provision and allocation, and the ‘locking-off’ of infrastructure for the use of certain individuals. It draws particularly from the narratives of the two prominent
‘water leaders’ of Bansighat, as well as several other managers of the communal tanks that are no longer linked with the federation. Examining the discursive framings from these managers around these two material practices helps to reveal how perceptions of ownership were developed at the time of infrastructure provision, as well as how the perception of ‘scarcity’ is used as justification for the exclusion of newcomers from the water tank user groups. In doing so, this chapter reveals critical social faultlines between those inside and outside of the federation, and across the east and west of the settlement—with tanks on the east portrayed as ‘well managed’, while the others are depicted as untrustworthy—and how this impacts participation both around water and wider community planning. This, in turn, is related to wider national and international discourses around participation in the management of communal services—as well as broader theoretical and critical literature which has questioned the discourse of ‘community participation’ as truly fulfilling a broader emancipatory potential (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Dagnino, 2007; Sam Hickey & Mohan, 2005). To this end, this chapter seeks to unfold the definition and benefits of ‘participation’ as conceptualized both by the wider water sector in policy and programmatic documents in Kathmandu, as well by different ‘water managers’ within Bansighat.

Ultimately, this chapter seeks to elucidate the particular vision of participation being pursued by the federation—and the implications for citizenship for a broad range of Bansighat residents both inside and outside of this group. While acknowledging the significant role that these groups have had, less attention in scholarship has been devoted to exploring the intra-communal social relations which structure these groups, and how this may facilitate or close opportunities for different kinds of residents to participate in community activities (with some exceptions: Butcher & Frediani, 2014; McFarlane, 2004; Rigon, 2014; Roy, 2009). This chapter works within this gap—linking material practices to the different perceptions which underpin participation as a way to examine how these water-user associations work (and for whom); how they are linked with the federation (and what it means when they are not); and ultimately, what implications this has for the connection of services and citizenship, especially for those who exist outside of this organization. This generates a reflection of how social difference both shapes and is produced out of these practices—reflecting both localized socio-spatial dynamics (building on the previous chapter) as well as framings of participation articulated at the international and national level. This ‘everyday politics of
participation’, helps to move beyond uncritical narratives of collective action, to explore the extent to which community action on resources can stimulate broader claims around citizenship—and for whom.

6.2 Defining Participation

As in the previous chapter linked with ‘belonging’, this section will first detail the ways in which ‘participation’ has been conceptualized both nationally and internationally in relation to the management of water services—as well as by the women’s federation leadership. In Kathmandu, the shift to the community management of water through user groups was intended to support efficient service delivery, as well as stimulate a sense of community ownership. Simultaneously, the women’s federation—responsible in the initial stages for the management of the communal tanks in Bansighat—also expresses its own version of participation, linked with their vision of solidarity, relations-building, and empowerment. This section thus firstly seeks to unfold the assumptions which underpin the different visions of participation being played out in Bansighat. In doing so, this chapter builds toward an analysis of the everyday politics of participation—exploring how the values of participation are understood and negotiated in Bansighat through material practices by those within and without of the federation, the ways in which this resonates with the values set out by the water sector, and how it plays out within the specific social and environmental context of Bansighat and Kathmandu.

As a starting point, it is important to highlight that discourses of ‘community participation’ have played a significant role in international approaches to water management, particularly for low-income or informal areas. This has been evidenced in the rise of interventions which seek to grant decision-making authority over water and sanitation facilities to ‘water users groups’ (WUGs) formed of members of the community these resources serve. The motivations outlined for such involvement can range—seeking more equitable or efficient service delivery, the sustainable management of resources, through to deepening democratic practice (Cleaver, 1999). For private water companies, devolving service delivery to user groups holds the benefit of extending reach into previously unserved areas with minimal risk. For residents, this is presented as an opportunity to obtain more officialised coverage where none had prior
existed. As discussed throughout the literature review, there is often a strong gender component to these activities—making particular claims around the empowerment of women. Nonetheless, as discussed in chapter two, it is critical to remain cognizant of the ways this discourse has also been used in a depoliticized way, to rely upon women’s (free) labour as a form of ‘efficient’ service delivery (Moser, 1993).

These notions have likewise been articulated within the heavily aid-influenced environment of Nepal—forming an important policy aim as far back as the Irrigation Policy of 1992, which first advocated ‘Drinking Water Users Associations’ to manage resources in rural areas. More recently, propositions for ‘community participation’ through users groups was set out as one the primary functions of the Department for Water Supply and Sewerage (WaterAid, 2005), and has manifested in large-scale initiatives financed by the Asian development bank.\textsuperscript{15} Such shifts have been accompanied by commitments in policy documents, such as the Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Policy (2009), which set out several key priorities to guide water interventions, including the decentralized management of municipal water supply and sanitation services, and enhanced community participation through users groups.

This ethos formed a key pillar of the pro-poor water intervention undertaken in 2007, which established the Low Income Consumer Services Unit (LICSU). Bansighat was one of the settlements included in this programme, with settlement leaders taking part in early discussions on the shape of the programme. Project documents have outlined various motivations related to community management, including fostering a sense of ownership and sustainability, and with a strong emphasis on gender, manifesting in sensitization trainings and workshops (ADB, 2008). It was through this programme that four community tanks in Bansighat (A-D) were brought to the settlement in two phases, and offered water tanker deliveries at a subsidized rate, managed by KUKL. Since this intervention, a fifth tank (E) has also been brought into the westernmost side of the settlement, but has not been able to access this LICSU subsidized rate and delivery, relying instead upon private water tanker vendors for refills.

\textsuperscript{15} In 2003, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a $24 million equivalent loan for the “Community-Based Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project” which financed piped water supply systems, tube wells, and tanks through a subsidy programme in 21 districts of Nepal.
Importantly, the management of these community resources (in Bansighat and elsewhere) was handed over to community groups—initially linked with the women’s federation of the urban poor, Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj. This is a critical point in light of the fact that the federation already had long established and well-articulated discourses around community participation, resonating with the wider organizing principles of groups in Slum/Shack Dwellers International. Drawing on the voices of three active women in the federation for illustration, these values are outlined here in order to build a theory of participation from the perspective of this group. This can be described as a commitment to relations-building with local authorities, solidarity, and self-empowerment.

For example, in reference to relations-building, one of the leaders of Bansighat, Sona, recounted the multiple tactics (some threats, some deceit, some jokes, and some requests), through which relations with local authorities were built:

Our relations with the government and the ward slowly and gradually got better. But at first, when we went to the ward and asked for our rights we would have to fight them. We also used to ask them: "Why is it that you call us illegal, but when elections come then you think our votes for your politicians is legal?" So slowly with some threats, some deceit, some jokes and some requests, our ward office finally registered us as an Informal Settlement Committee of Kathmandu. As we have this, we cannot say that Government has done nothing for us, but at the same time we still need to do more to formally claim our permanent ownership title in this place (B7F).

With reference to the water programme, leader Maya likewise outlined the numerous tactics required at the outset to establish a more meaningful partnership with KUKL, in order to obtain an improvement in services:

In the first year, we faced a lot of problems because water management had just changed from government-owned to being privately run. So many of the staff had changed, and there were a lot of protests for new positions and power. We used to give our location to one driver, but then the next time when we would go to the water office there would be a different person in his position. Whenever these problems happened, Sona [another community leader] and I would attend the meetings of the water company without invitation and give our views—we would hear about these meetings from the water tanker drivers. One time about five years ago in the Himalayan Hotel there was a big meeting we went to, and we told them that we have taplines and tanks but that we don’t have clean or drinkable water.
We even took the impure water in bottles so that they could see the reality. Slowly people realized that we were not talking nonsense, and then our relations with the company got better. Finally, they started to invite us formally in their programs and meetings, and our water services started to improve (B33F).

Importantly, both women identify the desire to obtain 'formal' recognition or invitations from local authorities—seeking the transformation of previously antagonistic relations through strategic partnerships with municipal or utility authorities.

Secondly, the federation draws strongly on the language of community solidarity. As expressed by leader Maya, involvement in the group (through collective savings, trainings, and advocacy work) has made women of the community "stronger and united":

At that time when Mahila Ekta Samaj started most women living here were illiterate, and I had studied up to grade 10. My mother-in-law had to support me to join, because during that time it was very hard for women to get involved in work outside of the household, as it meant leaving their house tasks— but she used to send me to all the meetings, trainings and programs... Now because of the work I have done, many women are doing similar—getting more education, taking trainings, or running their own businesses. I think it is this group that made us stronger, united and empowered us (B33F).

Similarly, one of the active members, Ana, identified the influence of Mahila Ekta Samaj as critical in teaching 'the community... to work together':

In the past I didn’t know anything about the local government or the police. But after becoming involved with Mahila Ekta Samaj, I often have to visit these offices, and feel empowered to do so. Now we have learned that in the community we have to work together. These days when we raise our voices together, the government listens to our request. You can see this, because whenever there is planning or development programmes or trainings the ward office informs and includes us.

These narratives draw on imagery of the ‘community’ which works together across Bansighat, emphasizing a sense of unity.

Finally, on an individual level, these women also highlighted significant personal changes, related to a sense of self-empowerment, as a result of their participation in the group. Both leader Sona and active member Ana spoke of their growing sense of self-
confidence as they took on greater responsibilities in working for their communities, and learned to 'raise [their] voice':

When I first came here I used to get confused or get lost because it is completely different from my village. I used to cry a lot. It was a really panicked phase for me. It was not easy to be here at the start, and we faced a lot of difficulties and struggle, which made our hearts stronger. But little by little my fears decreased, and I thought that if the police are going to come and take action, they will only jail me, but they cannot kill me. We didn’t commit any criminal activity. By this time, we living here felt that in order to achieve some of your rights, you have to fight back. So after a while Mahila Ekta Samaj was formed, and I was given the job to handle the Kathmandu district area, and for 9 years I was president of Mahila Ekta Samaj …. When I came here my first perception was that we cannot stay for a long time in this place. I felt really helpless, and I had negative fears for my life. To live here we had to risk our lives. But things are very different now, because we have learned to raise our voices. I have progressed a lot (B7F).

To be honest, in my family there used to be many problems. I didn’t have any skills nor could I face my fears, but Mahila Ekta Samaj has made me so strong that nowadays I’m involved in many community committees. I have more freedom in the present comparing to my past. I can work and am often busy in many trainings and other programmes, and my husband and children have developed a trust and understanding of me. I also earn and can contribute to my family’s income. My life has changed since then. There are many women like me in this community who have been empowered by Mahila Ekta Samaj and we are really thankful for that. I think if we stay inside the house all the time and think then our minds get dull, but if you explore then you will learn many things. When you stay in the home you have a fear of the outside environment, but when you have skills you don’t have to be afraid (B1F).

What is clear from these accounts are the ways in which these women have identified positive changes within themselves, in their family relations, and in their neighbourhood as a result of the work of Mahila Ekta Samaj. These gains are all the more critical in light of narratives from leader Maya about the great challenges she used to face in her household and from other community members, as she stepped outside of her proscribed role:

There are lots of cases where husbands just want their wives to be under their control. They do not like when their women are engaged in some community works. Even in my case, people often don’t complain to me directly, but they complain to my husband. He also listens to his friends complaining about me working, and he used to scold me. He told me he is
earning, so I should sit in the house and should look after our family. But I used to argue with him, saying my duty should not just be limited to my house, but also to help the community. We sometimes have strong arguments and don’t talk with each other for a week. When this happens, I express my anger by not doing any kitchen work for whole week. He has to cook for himself (B31F).

In sum, the narratives of these three women generate insights into the ways in which active members and the leadership of NMES envision participation to lead to deeper transformation, either at the personal or collective level. Indeed, much has been written in terms of how groups in diverse contexts use this ‘politics of patience’ to generate change at multiple scales (Appadurai, 2002; Mitlin, 2008; Patel, Baptist, & D’Cruz, 2012). This form of participation—predicated on the idea of women’s empowerment through advocacy on issues of the home or neighbourhood—is also clearly echoed in international or NGO approaches which increasingly legitimized women’s participation in this way, as outlined in chapter two.

Nonetheless, the case of Bansighat is also instructive in demonstrating the ways in which this narrative of participation is partial and contested—reflecting both the different priorities of the water sector, as well as localized sets of power relations. In fact, it is possible to identify several different management styles and membership rules of these communally managed water tanks—which holds both practical and symbolic implications for different residents across the neighbourhood. In particular, this chapter will highlight key differences between the community tanks linked with the women’s federation (and managed by Maya and Sona), and the remaining three that now operate outside of it.

In order to start unpacking the implications for citizenship, this chapter focuses on material practices related to the provision and spatial division of infrastructure, and particularly in relation to the ‘community’ tanks. These practices are explored to understand the extent to which they are underpinned by the values of participation as set out by the federation, as well as how they are conceived by water managers outside of the women’s group. Doing so demonstrates fragmentation around how a sense of ‘ownership’ is constructed, and the spatial allocation of infrastructure as related to a perception of scarcity. Critically, these differences are not neutral, but are reflective of a complex set of social divides related to the spatial development of the settlement, wider
ecological changes, and values espoused by the water sector. This generates social differentiation around 'good and bad' managers—where certain practices are imaged as 'good' for conforming to the vision of participation espoused by the federation and legitimated by the LICSU programme, while management practices conducted by residents outside of the women’s federation are criticized for adopting different practices. As such, this chapter unfolds the multiple community-level strategies (looking beyond just the federation) to manage water—as well as to participate in community life more generally—named here as the everyday politics of participation.

6.3 Everyday Politics of Participation

6.3.1 Material Practice 1: Implementation of Infrastructure and Perceptions of ‘Ownership’

A key starting point for understanding the differences which exist between the community tanks across Bansighat are the diverse ‘origin stories’ through which they were brought into the settlement. In fact, the material practices through which the community tanks were implemented has continued to impact upon how diverse individuals are able to participate in the management and use of communal sources. In fact, across the settlement it is evident that there is not a uniformity in how membership rules are specified, nor was there necessarily a transparent process for how leaders—or members—were chosen. The discursive narratives of the federation leaders who managed this process are used to unfold how these practices are linked with different perceptions related to a sense of ‘ownership’—that is, a sense of who is entitled to draw from and manage the different tanks in the settlement. This starts to reveal the ways in which infrastructure provision is linked with different social rules around who can partake in communal sources, and who cannot.

As a starting point, it is important to briefly describe the different origins of the community tanks in Bansighat (Table 6.1). As already alluded to, the first two community tanks of Bansighat (A-B) were brought in 2007 as a part of pro-poor reforms in KUKL. These were placed in the east of the settlement, in a process which was closely instigated and managed by the women’s federation, NMES. They were installed free of charge as a part of the initial phase of the LICSU programme, and
continue to be managed by one woman in particular, Sona, on behalf of NMES. These tanks are run as a monthly collective, meaning a restricted set of members pay a set fee for a fixed amount of water. These tanks do not sell ‘by-the-bucket’ to people outside of this group, but membership of these two tanks is highest, each serving between 20-40 members. They received the subsidized delivery of water as a part of LICSU programme.

In contrast, tanks C & D were brought to the middle and west of the settlement in the second phase of the LICSU programme, about one year later. There are some conflicting reports of how this process was initiated; some residents make the claim that it was the result of further advocacy by NMES, to expand coverage in the neighbourhood. Others insinuate that it was the product of residents well-connected to the Maoist political party, who were able to secure additional tanks through patronage. Despite their unclear origins, these tanks were also able to tap into the LICSU subsidy, with water provided by KUKL operators. Critically however, in this second phase residents were required to contribute to the initial costs of installing the infrastructure, rather than being provided it freely. As a result, only those households who paid for the initial connection fees became a part of these monthly water user groups, significantly limiting the amount of people it serves. Membership of tanks C and D were 9 and 6 families, respectively—though tank C is now currently broken and therefore non-functional. In the case of Tank D, these six families rotate the management, claiming a fixed amount of water for themselves, and selling the remainder by the bucket to a further estimated 15-20 people.

Finally, and different from the rest— tank E was brought only in 2015 after a charitable Christian organization conducted a survey of the neighbourhood, and identified that the western-most part of the settlement was severely under-covered. It is currently being managed on behalf of a group, though practically by a single individual, Ditya, that has opted to take on this role. As will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, membership has been limited to 20 to support the financial sustainability of the model. This tank has not been eligible for the LICSU discount, and is supplied by a private tanker vendor at twice the price of tanks A-D.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source &amp; Location</th>
<th>Built By</th>
<th>Managed By</th>
<th>Pricing</th>
<th>Rules of Use</th>
<th>Eligible for Subsidy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tank A</strong> (East)</td>
<td>NGO Forum; Lumanti; Mahila Ekta Samaj (Women’s Federation)</td>
<td>Mahila Ekta Samaj (Women’s Federation)</td>
<td>150 rupees per month for 24 buckets (3 buckets, 2x a week)</td>
<td>Serves 40 households on a monthly basis (1-2 poorer households might have water for free); no one else served.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tank B</strong> (East)</td>
<td>NGO Forum; Lumanti; Mahila Ekta Samaj (Free of Charge)</td>
<td>Mahila Ekta Samaj (Women’s Federation)</td>
<td>150 rupees per month for 24 buckets (2 buckets 3x a week)</td>
<td>Serves 22 households on a monthly basis; no one else served.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tank C</strong> (Middle)</td>
<td>NGO Forum; Lumanti; Mahila Ekta Samaj (Financed 60% partners, 40% community)</td>
<td>BROKEN (previously served 9 households monthly)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tank D</strong> (West)</td>
<td>NGO Forum; Lumanti; Mahila Ekta Samaj (Financed 60% partners, 40% community)</td>
<td>Six households collectively</td>
<td>6 households receive 10 buckets (200L) freely; 10 rupees per bucket after that for everyone else</td>
<td>Serves 6 households on a monthly basis; also sells by the bucket</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tank E</strong> (West)</td>
<td>Charitable Christian Organization (Free of Charge)</td>
<td>20 households collectively</td>
<td>200 rupees per month for 24 buckets (2 buckets, 3x OR 12 rupees per bucket)</td>
<td>Serves 20 households on a monthly basis; also sells by the bucket</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1: Description of community tanks
What is already suggested through these brief descriptions is the connection between the practices through which tanks were brought into the settlement and their current membership. More specifically, a close examination demonstrates the way that the members of each WUG are internally linked through some kind of material or relational practice: whether through advocacy work, financial input, or by knowing someone who was a part of the original procurement process.

In the case of the federation-managed tanks A & B, for instance, group membership was largely represented by those who were apart of the original ‘strugglers’ to advocate for the tank. This was described by Maya, one of the key leaders in the federation:

When the provision of drinking water changed to private ownership, an organization called LICSU supported a plan where instead of a tapline, if we formed groups of 25 members they would provide a water tank. So, with another leader here we attended a meeting with LICSU with a list of names for two groups of people who were willing to join, with 50 members. They were ready to give us a tank, but we had to really work for it to be refilled. During that first year there used to be lot of delays for refilling a tank. But when this happened, all 50 people used to go to their office to complain, and then they really listened! This is how we got the tanks and made it much better here in terms of water compared to other communities in Kathmandu. Those people who are members now worked hard to receive it (B33F).

Maya later referred to this as an example for how “on the east side, most people have struggled a lot to help form this settlement” (B33F). The material practices of ‘struggle’ played an important symbolic role for federation members and leaders—for Maya translating into a kind of proprietorial attitude for those who “worked hard” for tanks A and B. This language was likewise present in many of the narratives of residents (almost exclusively on the eastern side) about how they ‘struggled a lot’ to develop the settlement in terms of services and infrastructure—often contrasted with the west side, which was depicted as ‘not well-organized’ (B7F). In this case, what is evident are discursive framings through which these older settlers identify themselves as having greater ownership claims over land and resources as a result of their collective practices to bring these services.

In contrast, it is also possible to trace why tanks C & D—even while apart of the LICSU programme—has a much smaller membership base than the federation tanks. Asmita, a member of one of these six families using Tank D, reflected on the reasons for this more limited engagement:
At the beginning, we went through a lot of struggles to bring the tanks into this settlement. We had to go to Lumanti’s office several times. This is why we prefer not to let new people join [the monthly group]. They were not involved at the time, and we can’t be sure that they are always going to be able to pay the money every month. Now we all know each other, and that is different. When you are part of the group, you have a sense of ownership (B24F).

As in the previous quote from Maya, Asmita references the collective solidarity that emerged out of the previous struggles to bring the tank, which, to her, has generated a sense of ‘ownership’ to be a part of the monthly group. Critically however—and unlike the federation tanks—this sense of collective ownership was limited to those six families that were willing to make upfront investments to install the tanks. Thus in this case, the sense of ‘ownership’ was developed not out of the (broader-based) collective action undertaken in the case of Tanks A & B, but as a result of financial contribution, which has limited the use of tanks C & D to a closed set of members. This begins to hint at a critical issue related to the different conditions under which infrastructure is brought into settlements. Importantly in Bansighat, it also demonstrates the necessity of distinguishing between the federation-run tanks as a part of the LICSU programme, and tanks C & D, which are a part of the same institutional programme, but which are underpinned by different perceptions regarding the entitlements of use.

Finally, the case of Tank E is somewhat different – requiring neither financial contribution nor a process of collective struggle. However, its arrival in the settlement several years after the establishment of the others means that it mimicked the organizational pattern of having a closed group of members. The process of membership is least clear in the case of the newest Tank E. Members of this tank report that it was simply a matter of ‘expressing interest’ at the time of the tank’s inception, while also indicating that generally members were either neighbours or friends: “mainly it was people who already knew each other well who joined the group” (B29F). In this case then, group membership was formed out of existing networks.

What these examples illustrate are the subtleties of the groups which have formed around each of the tanks. These WUGs demonstrate their own internal logic around who is able to use what source, with the perception of collective ownership or entitlement forged around different material practices—whether linked with financial
contribution, advocacy work, or contributing to existing networks. This coincides with what McFarlane and Desai (2015) refer to as ‘moral economies’—the ‘collectively understood informal regulations’ as well as an ‘individually-held’ sense of expected behaviours (in their case, around the use of sanitation services) (p. 441). As will be unpacked in the following sections, this lays the foundations for boundaries to be drawn across the settlement in relation to water services—reflecting different tenure claims, spatial, or relational divides.

Indeed, the association of ownership with practices of collective struggle or financial contribution is not only limited to the case of the community tanks—but is similarly evidenced in the case of the two ‘public’ wells located on either side of the neighborhood. The well on the eastern side of the settlement, for example, was first introduced by Sona, the manager of tanks A&B, as the “community well—used by the entire population of the neighbourhood”. Nevertheless, despite many narratives (particularly from federation leadership) that this source was available and relied upon by all, subsequent interviews with residents demonstrated that it was in fact highly restricted in practice. This was articulated by Alisha, a long-term resident on the eastern side of the settlement, who was quick to identify that the well was now restricted to only those that contributed financially to its construction: “This well was actually meant to be used by everyone, but nowadays it seems like only those who paid for its construction are allowed to use it, and feel a kind of ownership” (B4F). This sentiment was similarly confirmed in subsequent interviews, with only six residents out of an interviewed seventeen from the east of the settlement identifying this well as a source they drew upon.

It is a similar story with the second well on the western side of the settlement. This well was constructed out of the financial contributions and organization of a small group of residents, unconnected with the women’s federation. However, while many residents on the west likewise make the claim that it was intended to be for ‘community use’, three interviewed residents located in close proximity to this source complained that this has been appropriated by the household directly adjacent, charging users for collection:

Seven to eight households got together to construct the public well, but now it is being privately controlled. This makes me very angry, and I do not want to pay the 5 rupees. This happened because this woman had repaired the well by herself when it was broken. That’s why she is selling the water as
if the well is hers. My view is that she must divide the cost of repairs amongst the neighbours. I am willing to pay the share of the cost but I will not pay for the water. Sometimes when I am really in need of water I threaten that I will break open the padlock if they try to charge me! But so far it has not come to that (B29F).

What can be seen in these cases is the appropriation of common property resources, clearly linked with a sense of ownership as a result of financial investment. As identified by Sabina, a resident that was locked out of the use of the eastern well:

For managing water, there should be more public resources like wells. We do have a few wells in different places, but what has happened is that those houses located near to these resources are using it only for themselves, and they are slowly not letting others use it. This is especially a problem for newer people in this settlement. It is harder for renters because they are not always well integrated into this neighbourhood. This can create some mistrust (B16F).

In both cases—and similar to the tanks—this evidently privileges the original settlers present at the time of the source’s construction, as well as those with the financial means to contribute. This echoes research in rural Nepal, which examined an irrigation supply system seven years after completion, and the process of ‘informal privatization’ which occurred over time. In this case it was found that the system was appropriated by certain individuals, consolidating ownership over the community system in the hands of (largely unaccountable) local landowners of a higher caste (Udas et al., 2014). These cases offer a different perspective to ideas frequently explored in literature on common property management, which is focused on those formalized ‘rules of use’ which can help institutionalize cooperation (i.e. Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom et al., 1993). Instead—and following the lead of scholarship which looks critically at community-based natural resource management (Cleaver & De Koning, 2015; Mosse, 1997)—the case of both the community tanks and wells suggests that the formalization of institutions for water management does not necessarily mean that people are able to access these sources equally or with transparency. In the case of sources which require upfront financial contribution, for instance, this has clear implications for poorer, newer, or more transient residents who may not be able or willing to contribute to the implementation of a community resource. Examining the discursive framings around membership of the different community tanks (or wells) was critical in revealing perceptions around the “rules in use” (Cleaver, 1998)—linked with material practices around financial
investment or collective struggle—which dictate more informally how people are able to participate in the management or use of different sources.

6.3.2 Material Practice 2: Spatial Restrictions and Perceptions of ‘Scarcity’

Beyond the ways in which the perception of ‘use rights’ to infrastructure may develop through different practices, what is also striking is the spatialization of water infrastructure. In fact, residents were found to be highly unlikely to draw from sources (whether tanks or wells) that were not in their immediate vicinity—even when there were problems with their particular sources. This section seeks to outline the ways in which the material practice of spatially dividing resources is justified on the basis of wider perceptions around scarcity. Importantly, this did not emerge out of a neutral process, but was in fact linked with a specific set of decisions undertaken by community leadership, related to wider concerns related to resources and land. As such, this section also positions these localized perceptions within the wider urban and ecological processes at work in Bansighat. Ultimately, this section explores how this practice of spatial differentiation and restriction—particularly as attached to narratives of scarcity—reflects an underlying value of privileging the earlier settlers of Bansighat, at the expense of newer migrants.

In order to understand how the practice of spatial restriction of certain sources has occurred, it is key to first map their current location and configuration. In fact, spatially locating the five community tanks with their monthly membership clearly demonstrates how this service privileges the eastern side of the settlement (Image 6.1).
As discussed, the eastern (federation) tanks A & B serve a higher number of people, with a combined 62 households in their monthly WUGs. Meanwhile, the broken tank C and tank D and E, located in the middle or western half of the neighbourhood, serve just 26 households through the monthly system. It is also important to note here that tank E (20 members) was implemented only in 2015. Prior to this, there would have been an even more dramatic gap in coverage, with sources concentrated entirely on the east or middle of the settlement.

Keeping in mind the historical development of the neighbourhood from east to west—it is in some ways unsurprising to observe that the eastern side of the settlement was first and better able to benefit. It is common for residents to attribute this fact to timing and higher levels of community consolidation on the east. For example, when queried, Ditya the manager of the western Tank E explained:

The LICSU programme is working for drinking water. However, they have not done anything on this [west] side of the settlement. It is because the other side of this community was formed before the Maoist era, and this side formed after the Maoists came to power. This means that the other side has had more time to come together and focus on their own rehabilitation earlier than the west side (B11F).
Here Ditya’s comment suggests a relatively neutral framing of the distribution of water services—a product of timing and the historical development of the neighbourhood. It is also true that there would have been relatively few people living on the western side of the settlement in 2007/08 when tanks A-D were first constructed, explaining the uneven distribution in the present day.

Yet despite this apolitical framing, these distinctions have exclusionary implications in the present day. As identified in the previous section, residents have clearly articulated ‘moral economies’ of water—or a sense of which sources they are entitled to draw from. In fact, this sense was so well developed that several residents indicated that they were more likely to adopt various other coping strategies rather than use one of the other community tanks or wells when there was an issue with ‘their’ designated source—including going outside of the settlement to collect water, purchasing from private vendors, or drawing from more polluted sources:

We use the well here [on the west]. There is another one on the other side, but we don’t use it even if this one is dry. There is no comparison between us and the other side—they have many facilities over there. They do not allow us to collect water from their well (B27F).

I take water from tank E only. If there isn’t any water in the tank, I do not try to use any of the others— I get it from the canal (B31M).

In other words, there is a clear practice of spatial restriction of different resources across the Bansighat neighbourhood. This experience is well illustrated, for example, in the case of Sanju, the manager of the now-broken tank C. Sanju had previously described the prohibitively high price of fixing the tank, meaning that those residents in the catchment area for this tank were suddenly without a source, and unlikely to regain one within any near timeframe. Critically, those users of this tank C had not switched to using one of the others, instead relying upon the (much more expensive) bottled jar water for their drinking needs:

Now, our tank is damaged. We don’t go to other communal tanks for collection because it was decided that 4 tanks would be placed in different parts of the community, and those who were near to the tanks would use their respective tanks. So now if we go to fetch water from the other tanks, we think this will cause some trouble, and we don’t want to cause any problems. So we are buying jarred water instead of going there. We use two
jars per day for drinking and cooking, which costs us 100 rupees per day. This means we’re spending 3000 a month on just water… all because our tank is broken (BM3).

Returning to the image of the water portfolio from the previous chapter, these families were required to change to a less preferable (expensive) option when their primary source was lost, highlighting the relative rigidity of these implicit social rules guarding the division of different water sources. As recalled by Sanju, the boundaries around Tank C had become fixed, highlighting the continued significance of these social rules even where the physical technology they were based upon disappeared. Thus, if the previous section set out those relations of solidarity which developed out of mutual struggle, shared financial contributions or trust, this example reveals the other side—relations of exclusion—marked across space.

Critically, these practices of restriction are intimately linked with discursive narratives around the scarcity of resources. From one perspective, for leaders such as Sona, the delimitation of the different sources linked with location in the settlement was identified as a pragmatic decision—“to make it easier for people not to walk too far” (B7F). Others however, including Sanju, challenged this framing—recounting how the process of drawing boundaries and maintaining restrictions around their use was an explicit decision undertaken by neighbourhood leaders, linked specifically with fears around the growing population:

Many years ago in the community we didn’t have as many problems with water, because we were very few in number, and we could manage with the resources we had. When we first got the tanks, they were not assigned or divided amongst different people, or have any rules that only certain people could use each tank. They were for everyone. But later on our population increased, especially because there were many renters migrating in our community. With the coming of new people, new opinions arose, and later on the tanks were formally divided to serve the different areas of the settlement (B3M).

This memory of Sanju highlights concerns around the changing nature of the neighbourhood—specifically, the material practice of assigning tanks to distinct ‘areas’ of the settlement in response to fears around the growing settlement and lack of sufficient resources. Thus, while the division of the tanks might be discursively represented by some as functional, from another perspective this was
underpinned by the desire to regulate the allocation of what was seen as a rapidly diminishing resource.

Indeed, these perceptions of scarcity (especially in the context of rapid population growth) is understandable given urban development trends and the water sector, which have placed increasing pressures on water resources. This manifested several times in the participatory photography workshops as the sentiment of the need to control or protect limited resources (Image 6.2 & Image 6.3).

Significantly however, this desire to protect limited resources has also manifested in the relative resistance of the tanks to admit new members. While Sanju described the material practice of spatially allocating the tanks as a response to the rise of newcomers, only in rare cases did interviewed renters appear to actually have the opportunity to become involved in any of these monthly groups. When members of various tanks were queried on the possibilities of newcomers joining, they expressed concerns:

The tank water [B] does not usually provide to renters, like the ones in our house, because the tank water is not sufficient for the house owners itself. There are some renters who are getting the tank water, but this is because they have been renting here for very long period of time (B16F).

We have decided that membership for our tank [E] has to be closed. We need to keep the numbers at 20 otherwise we will not be able to afford to
 provide for everyone and still fill the tank. I am also afraid that if we add more members this will increase disputes and the possibilities of people not paying. That means only those who were members in the first place can be members (B26F).

Anecdotal evidence similarly suggested that in the few cases where newcomers joined, they were in some way connected to one of the leaders: “those members who are newer are people whom [the manager] knows very well” (B26F). Across all three managers of the community tanks, these exclusions were couched either in fear around the financial or ecological sustainability of the model, or in a lack of trust of newcomers to the group. These exclusions also take on a broader symbolic role beyond water resources. In fact, as suggested in the previous chapter, those renters interviewed on this expressed a sense of exclusion not only from water services, but also from other community associations. Looking to the city-scale was instructive of the deeper reasons for these exclusions, linked with the wider organizational strategies of the federation. Exploring how this manifests in a day-to-day level in Bansighat serves to demonstrate the link between participation in water services, and participation in community life more generally:

I am not involved in social networks or groups. There are no services for renters. I don’t think we can be included in the water tank groups. I also don’t think we can be part of developments for this community. We can help with a few things, but I don’t expect to feel any benefits from this. In the future if there was some kind of association for renters or other kinds of groups, definitely I would like to join. But there are no such groups at the moment (B18M).

As renters, there isn’t an equality with household owners of this settlement. By this, I mean that when there are some kinds of charity works done by different social organizations we are not involved, or when some kind of government aid is here for the community then we are excluded from getting it. Most groups or programmes are associated with household owners, and not renters (B13F).

Examining the discursive narratives linking the practice of spatial restriction with the perception of scarcity demonstrates the limits of this vision of participation—which does not appear to adapt well to the changing circumstances of the neighbourhood. This demonstrates the role that water interventions can have in either sedimenting old or creating new patterns of ‘winners and losers’ (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003) in a settlement. In this case, changing ecological conditions and population pressures have led to the practice of ‘locking-off’ community tanks, which has prevented newcomers
from joining any of the existing WUGs (except, it seems, in a few discrete cases where newcomers had a pre-existing relationship with one of the water leaders). These closed groups may work extremely well for their existing members, but are also clearly geared towards reinforcing the privilege of the original settlers of Bansighat, and may not adapt well to newcomers. Importantly, this process occurs by rendering the distribution of scarce resources as a technical—and therefore apolitical—problem, delinked from wider social decisions related to the makeup of the settlements. As such, the separation of the tanks in the settlement demonstrates the way in which forms of social control—linked with the hydrological state of the settlement—impacts participation in the use and management of communal water sources.

6.3.3 Implications for Social Relations: The Making of “Good and Bad” Managers

The previous sections have outlined the ways in which perceptions of ownership and scarcity have underpinned different material practices around the community water tanks—offering a particular type of ‘participation’ for certain residents. This section delves deeper into the implications of this in relation to the production of social and power relations throughout the settlement.

In fact, these implicit rules for how sources are allocated and used at the community level play an important symbolic function, drawing on moral language to valorise certain kinds of management, which draws further social distinctions across the settlement. In particular (and reflecting the wider NMES ethos) those tanks (A & B) that are managed by the women’s federation have articulated a sense of responsibility to ‘the community’ that extends beyond service delivery, engaging in a wider community building project. However, even while highly beneficial, this wider remit expressed by the federation has also been used to create discursive distinctions between ‘good and bad’ managers, linked with perceptions of how the tanks should be run. Beyond the social distinctions this generates, the framing of the western tanks as ‘badly managed’ has also undermined the ability of these managers to more effectively work in their areas. As such, this section explores the social roles that tank managers play—and how this is linked to a broader vision of participation, linked with a conception of the ‘common good’. Drawing on the narratives of different managers, it reveals the ways in which this ultimately generates
social distinctions across the settlement – linked with the federation, and reflecting spatial divides.

As identified in the first section of this chapter, a clear organizing principle of NMES (and federations of the urban poor, more generally), is the strategic use of services to facilitate broader claims linked with solidarity and relations-building. And indeed, a point of pride for the manager of the NMES tanks, Sona, are the different ways in which tanks A&B were used to work ‘for the benefit of the whole community’ (B7F). For instance, in the first year of service, when water was being delivered free of cost to these tanks, Sona described her decision to charge a small fee to the monthly members. These funds were collected and then reinvested into the construction of a large community centre in the middle of settlement, which hosts after school clubs and activities attended by many children throughout the neighbourhood:

For the first year LICSU provided water to our tank for free, but still we collected money monthly from the community. With that money, we have been able to save around Rs. 18000 (£125), and in 2007 I donated this money to re-build our community club building which had been destroyed (B7F).

Similarly, rather than taking a profit herself for the task of running the tank, Sona describes putting any extra funds earned into a pot which can be used to provide water freely for residents who might be struggling. She emphasised that this was income for the community, which she could have rather taken ‘for her own personal profit’:

I have been fulfilling my promise, and even exceeding it. Instead of serving 50 households from two tanks, now nearly 70 households are getting the tank water, out of which 13 households are getting water for free. These 13 households are marginalized people who are unable to pay tank water because of their condition—some are old women, some are widows, some are very poor, and some are single parents. This costs around an extra 1300 Rs. (£9) monthly. That money I could easily use for my own personal profit. The water office and drivers have often suggested to me that I have done enough for the community, and I could make some profit for myself. But I always tell them that I don’t need the money from those that are poor and vulnerable. I just want to do something good for them. I don’t need it and I don’t want it (B7F).

In the above quote, Sona expressed a clear sense of responsibility for those that are ‘poor and vulnerable’ in the settlement, which meant she continued to ‘exceed her promise’ in
managing the tanks in a voluntary role. These tanks have also been publically recognized for the work that they do, expressed in leaflets and reports produced by the federation (Image 6.4). Similarly, the leader Maya also referenced the work of Sona in managing resources as a positive example in the city: “nowadays whenever LISCSU has meetings or programs related to water they call us as an example of a good success story” (B33F). In these ways, Sona and Maya highlight the ways in which the water tanks are valuable not just as a resource, or as a good to exchange on the market, but rather understood as a tool for relations building and the betterment of the neighbourhood more generally.

In contrast, the managers of Tank D and E do not claim to serve the communal functions in quite the same way as those managed by NMES. Indeed, unlike Tank A & B, members of tank D expect to make a small profit out of their work. (Tank E does not report any possibilities for profit given the higher price they pay for water deliveries from private vendors). Nonetheless, the membership and management of these tanks do hold some symbolic social functions—albeit in a more limited way. In the case of tank D for example, one of the managers, Asmita, describes how the shared management of the tank has knit together those six families in a way that allows them to address other collective problems:
Economically it is not a big difference if you are a member or non-member. But it feels good. If there are any other problems, we gather together and work to solve them. For example, when the sewage is blocked, the women gather together for this also and discuss how to solve it. We get along quite well (B24F).

Similarly, Asmita identified the sense of personal autonomy that tank management afforded her—allowing her to ‘set her own rules’ for the way in which water was managed:

[Running this tank] is good for us because we manage everything ourselves, so we get to set the rules for our own water. By this I mean we have more rights and control over the water than the non-members (B24F).

Likewise, in the case of tank E, there was an explicit decision to have it managed by a collective to avoid it being run for ‘personal’ gain:

An organization came here and brought a tank. It was decided that the tank would be run by a group of people who contribute some amount each week. This is because if only one person runs the tank, it becomes a kind of personal source. We asked that they print the organization name on the tank to avoid someone making it private, so it could be for the good of many (B29F).

And mirroring the acts of reciprocity undertaken by Sona in the case of tanks A & B, there were some reports from customers of tank E on the ways in which the primary manager, Ditya, is flexible on the rules when they can’t afford to pay:

Before this tank [E] we were not allowed to buy water, until [the manager, Ditya] came and said—if there is a problem, they can have my water…. with her we pay at the end of the month based on the number of buckets collected, whereas other people have to pay instantly. This helps us (B28M).

Thus, the managers of tank D and E articulate a sense of autonomy and solidarity through the management of their water resources, without explicitly pronouncing this as a ‘responsibility to the community’ as in the case of Sona.

Critically, however, this strong rhetoric expressed by federation leaders around community responsibility has also become linked with value judgements around good and bad management. In particular, the characteristics of tanks D and E (smaller membership, limited engagement beyond service delivery, tank location) has been
discursively used to frame these tank leaders as bad managers. For example, as expressed by Maya:

There are certainly differences between the east and west side of the community. On the east side, most people have struggled a lot to help form this settlement. Many of them contributed a lot to the developments that are seen today. Whereas most of the people from west side settled here through their association with some political party, mostly with the Maoists and with their power. We just kept quiet at this time, because we thought that they were also the same poor people like us who were facing similar problems.

…There are also some differences between the east and west in the access to resources. But people's behaviour and thinking also affects this. For example: on our side we have tanks, but we have kept both tanks at a location where everyone has an equal access. Being leaders, we could have kept both the tanks in front of our house, but we didn’t do like that. But on the other side, we can see the tanks are just next to the house of leaders (B33F).

Here Maya makes a distinction between residents of the east, who ‘worked hard’ to develop Bansighat, and those on the west, who relied on patronage through the Maoist party. She links this explicitly to services in the settlement, making the point that a more progressive vision of managers on the east can be seen in the ‘more equal’ placement of the NMES tanks. This statement also reveals a consciousness of spatial divisions in the settlement – those ‘on the east’ versus those ‘on the west’ – in which the community tanks are both a visual representation and reinforcing factor for distinctions between the two. This sentiment was similarly echoed by leader Sona when queried on why she only managed tanks A&B—revealing additional value judgements linked with ethnicity:

About the other side of the settlement… what they are doing, or what they should be doing I don’t care. Nor have they asked for help from us. For example, Tank D is being used only by 6 families, even though it is actually supposed to be for many households. On that west side of the settlement there are more Janajati [indigenous non-Hindu ethnicities] and Madhesi people, and they don’t have unity among themselves. That’s why it is hard for us to manage their issues (B7F).

Thus, the federation leaders Sona and Maya make reference to the contentious moment when Bansighat rapidly expanded following the election of the Maoists to power, bringing a host of new people of diverse identities to the settlement. For these leaders in NMES, their struggle to work legitimately for water services through community works
sets them apart from the ‘disorganized’ (ethnically indigenous or Madhesi) residents on
the west side of the settlement, who (according to rumour) gained their tanks through a
process of political patronage. As justification, Sona contrasts the broader set of
members served by tanks A and B with the more limited membership of especially tank
D (and now defunct tank C) as evidence of the federation’s better commitment to
serving ‘the community’. Thus, if the previous sections demonstrated a limited vision of
participation for newcomers, this also highlights how the different membership rules
across the east and west of the settlement (which in turn, is related to federation
membership, as well as ethnic and tenure divides) is discursively framed as the
difference between good and bad management.

Moreover, while the role that the federation plays in the provision of services and in
generating further benefits is significant, these narratives expressed by federation
leadership underplays the constraints that tank managers on the west faced at the outset.
The requirement for an initial financial contribution, for example, has limited a broader
participation in tanks C and D. And the high cost burden for the manager of tank E
prohibits any savings to be reinvested in a more meaningful way in other community
facilities. Meanwhile, this discursive framing of the ‘good’ federation managers and the
‘disorganized’ western managers has impacted the leaders of tanks C-E in very practical
ways. For Asmita managing tank D, for example, their lack of link with wider
community structures has left them less able to hold their LICSU water tank vendors to
account:

> There are many challenges here. The tanker deliveries often do not come in
time. Sometimes we do not have water to cook meals, and we need to buy
jarred water to cook. They can delay sometimes up to 8-9 days. On the
other side the water tankers come in time—they care less about us. Maybe
it’s because [leader] Sona is well-respected. She is smart and is active in
social activities. She is closer to LICSU. She is also able to bring any
programs (like scholarships) to her side of the settlement first (B24F).

Here Asmita links the difficulties that she faces in contacting her water vendors with a
wider sense of disenfranchisement from programmes and opportunities, which she
perceives to be primarily channelled through the east of the settlement. In this case,
being linked with NMES is not merely a case of being able to better access water
resources, but also facilitates access to multiple forms of support – which in turn helps the federation do further work in the neighbourhood.

Similarly, in the case of tank E, the lack of communication or trust between leaders of the different tanks has undermined the ability of the leader Ditya to more effectively manage her tank. Most notably, the LICSU programme was granted only a three-year mandate. While the original tanks in Bansighat are still receiving deliveries of subsidized water, this initiative has not been expanded to reach other settlements not originally included in the programme, nor to cope with future growth even within beneficiary settlements. Despite repeatedly querying NMES water leaders on the process of obtaining subsidized delivery, Ditya, the manager of Tank E, reports only being told that it was no longer possible. As such, she is completely disconnected from any of the benefits that were gained through the process of advocacy in 2008. Likewise, she is the least connected manager with the local municipality, and has reported never being represented in forums or meetings with KUKI, in contrast with the leaders of tanks A & B.

As suggested in the previous section, these struggles around the water tanks are also representative of wider social distinctions—in this case, representing differences between federation members and non-members. This sense of division of the federation across the east and west of the settlement is highlighted by the opening quotes of this chapter. In particular, Srijana raises the point that “she is not allowed because she is living at the west side” to join and take in the benefits of the federation—whether related to water, or community works more generally. This was likewise expressed by several other residents interviewed on the western side: “those leaders on the east do not involve us in trainings, or in the mothers’ group. They don’t even ask us if we are interested in going to those trainings” (B26F). Embedded within these comments, as well as in the narratives of the water managers, are hints of social fragmentation, which impacts how services, programmes, and benefits—including and beyond water—are distributed across the settlement, affecting a sense of participation in community life.

What can be seen through these different narratives are the ways in which value judgements are inscribed onto the different community tanks. This in turn, is used to draw discursive distinctions between the federation and non-federation tanks—which are themselves linked with spatial divisions across the settlement. This disconnect from
the federation means that leaders of the western tanks are impeded from better performing their basic functions of water provision—let alone being able to make a profit and reinvest more generally in the community. This, in turn, reinforces those negative perceptions within the settlement—demonstrating the symbolic and practical ways the management of water tanks divides the settlement. This has critical implications for the extent to which especially western tank managers are able to contribute to a broader citizenship project, both reflecting and reinforcing social divides from east to west, and from those inside and outside of the federation.

6.3.4 Community Participation in Water Policy

The previous sections outlined different material practices around the provision and allocation of infrastructure, and how this became linked with different perceptions around ownership and scarcity, and values around ‘good and bad’ management across the settlement. This, in turn, has shaped social and spatial divides in the settlement, creating social differentiation between federation members and non-members, and across the east and west. This section seeks to hold these everyday realities against the values of community participation as espoused by the water sector and within urban processes of Kathmandu, as a way to understand how these discursive framings play out through the policy and planning sphere.

In fact, the LICSU programme sits squarely within this interest in community participation. As mentioned, it emerged as a part of pro-poor reforms within KUKL in 2007, linked with the shift to privatization and associated interest in seeing the distribution and management of water services for informal settlements handed over to registered water user groups (WUGs). These groups entered into a signed contract with the Kathmandu Valley Water Services Management Board, setting out the duties and responsibilities of the group. An accompanying ‘community participation strategy’ envisioned the continued advisory support of LICSU for local service providers, as a part of a longer-term pro-poor service delivery and operational strategy. Regulations contained specifications against discrimination on the basis of economic conditions, caste, gender, or political affiliation, and outlined that both house owners and tenants should be able to partake in the WUGs—with a specific reference that this should include those who moved to the area after the implementation of the tanks (Ranjitkar,
A strong gender component was encouraged through an initial series of gender trainings and sensitization workshops. As a part of the longer-term vision, the project defined three objectives (ADB, 2006):

- Short term (1-2 years): provide interim services for the poor through rehabilitated or new tapstands;
- Medium term (within ten years): carry out network densification and add new connections;
- Long term (post ten years): extension and rehabilitation of the piped water network.

Of key importance for this thesis are the ways in which the notion of ‘ownership’ has been linked with community participation within policy documents. This term often appears in international discussions around water—prolific in programmes aimed at enhancing community participation in the implementation and management of natural resource infrastructure (Manikutty, 1997; Whittington et al., 2009). In Nepal, it was likewise enshrined as a key tenet of the Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Policy (2009) which was formed following the 2007 water reforms, which stipulates that: “user involvement will be promoted through an enhanced role in decision making at all levels to inculcate community ownership” (GoN, 2009, p. 7). A sense of ownership, particularly as discussed in section 6.3.1, likewise appears within the discourses of the managers of the LICSU tanks.

However, as identified by Choguill (1999), this much sought-after goal is often conceptualized as the inevitable outcome of contributions in either labour or finance. This specific framing has likewise been present in ADB operations in Nepal, which outlines that “ownership is enhanced when [people] provide in-kind and voluntary labour support and co-share the cost” (ADB, 2012, p. 2). In relation to the LICSU project, this definition is also embedded within the assumption of a “willingness to provide a counterpart contribution of tapstand water services” (ADB, 2006, p. 6). More recently, it has been included within the National Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (2016-2030) Sector Development Plan, which outlines ‘community ownership of assets’ as a key pillar of ‘empowering communities for full participation’ (GoN, 2016, 2.1 p. 28).
In Bansighat, the requirement that residents provide a monetary contribution towards the implementation of the tanks was effected only in the second phase of the programme, impacting tanks C & D. Here, it is possible to identify the challenge this generated, in which the first two (free) tanks were able to serve a broader-based membership, while the second two WUGs became closed to only these financial contributors. It is therefore possible to see how this framing of ‘ownership as financial contribution’ led to exclusions for those who were unwilling or unable to contribute at the outset. Such observations lead to deeper (if rarely asked) questions around this concept of ‘ownership’. In particular: what does it mean if only those with the financial ability can contribute to the implementation of communal resources? And how might this framing undermine other ways of imagining the benefits of communal ownership and participation—such as solidarity?

Meanwhile, the changing ecological conditions and population pressures of the city have intensified demands on water services. Taking a wider perspective, this is echoed in city narratives, in which population growth in the Valley is frequently positioned as one of the major drivers of water scarcity, driving investment in large-scale projects such as the Melamchi Dam (ADB, 2000; NGO Forum, 2005). With reference to the changing ecological conditions, a WaterAid (2012) study across 142 districts of Nepal demonstrated how the pervasive trend of water sources drying up was the major factor in escalating conflicts around water—particularly as those in close proximity to a source suddenly felt threatened by increasing scarcity. In Bansighat, it is possible to trace how these wider narratives related to scarcity and increased demand have pushed residents towards the formation of closed groups, which was explicitly expressed as the need to protect and regulate limited resources, as well as to maintain the financial sustainability of the model. Thus, the ‘moral economies’ which inform a sense of ownership became fixed, and unable to accommodate newcomers—despite the clear specification in LICSU project documents that this should not occur.

This trend has been exacerbated by the inability to review or expand the LICSU pilot, despite the fact that this programme was intended to link into a longer-term project. In fact, parts 2 and 3 of this programme which sought to rehabilitate and extend the piped network to informal settlements never manifested across Kathmandu. The office of LICSU no longer exists, though KUKL continues to supply subsidized water, raising
questions as to the extent to which relations were sustainably built between local authorities and residents of informal settlements. Nor are there clear guidelines for the future of water provision for the urban poor. When queried on options should the Melamchi Dam project go ahead, the president of the Kathmandu Valley Water Service Board outlined the institution’s vision for ‘different modalities’ to be provided in informal settlements—whether through an increase in communal pipelines, or a revival of the tank system (Personal Communication, April 2017). Likewise, federation leadership across multiple settlements have indicated a willingness to support the financing of “up to 25%” of the costs of capital investment to bring additional pipelines into Bansighat (Appendix 4). However, the lessons of tank C and D in Bansighat (which required upfront investment) is suggestive of the ways in which this might further marginalize individuals that are unable to participate in this way in the communal financing and management of services.

This chapter explored how these wider city trends—combined with the particular historical and geographical conditions of the settlement, and a lack of ongoing institutional support from LICSU—has pushed residents towards material practices geared towards protecting and regulating limited water resources. Different values underpinning community participation, particularly related to ownership, have been offered in LICSU programmatic documents and policy, which don’t necessarily draw upon the broader language of relations-building, solidarity, or empowerment which are espoused by the federation. Meanwhile, in Bansighat, these more expansive values of NMES have in turn been compromised by wider ecological trends and population pressures, which has fostered an increased sense of competition at the local level. This holds critical implications for how a more transformative vision of citizenship is able to be achieved through ‘participation’, and across the different tank groups.

6.4 Citizenship Contestations

The exploration of the ‘everyday politics of participation’ within this chapter speaks to three of the different citizenship values engaged in this thesis. It firstly makes the case that the partial redistribution of water resources from the municipal level through the LICSU tanks has been further fragmented as a result of the social rules which underpin the use of different sources. It secondly speaks to the aims of self-determination—
particularly in reference to the sense of autonomy and self-esteem referenced by diverse residents as one of the positive aspects of collective management. Finally, it speaks to solidarity (and its opposite—exclusion) in the discussion of who is included not only in the management of services, but within a sense of community life.

6.4.1 Redistribution

In relation to redistribution, this chapter demonstrated the ways in which claims over particular infrastructures are articulated: through territory, financial investment, collective struggle, or trust in existing networks. This is clearly evidenced in Bansighat, in which membership rules generated predominantly during the inception of the tanks (and often built around a notion of ‘ownership’) have remained relatively rigid, to the detriment of those living on the west, and renters or more recent migrants especially.

What this highlights is that the way in which infrastructure is brought into the settlement matters. The case of the broken tank C demonstrates how the rigidity of these social rules can undermine a broader commitment to reaching the population equally. Similarly, the inability for tank E to tap into the subsidy programme demonstrates the limits of collective action over time and space. The lack of a ‘water network’ connecting the communally-managed sources across the neighbourhood limits the possibilities for the positive lessons, knowledge sharing, or collective advocacy evidenced within the example of the NMES-run tanks to spread further.

What this indicates is that the benefits imagined through the LICSU programme were not well-equipped to respond to the future growth or change over time of informal areas. This is particularly evident given that the LICSU department has disappeared from KUKL, leaving residents without a clear institution to address concerns or seek support. While the federation struck a moment of ‘periodic consensus’ (Levy, 2008) which allowed them to creatively harness debates around privatization to advocate for better services for the urban poor, these discussions did not see the transition from a pilot programme to a long-term institution, which might have been better able to respond to some of these emerging challenges. In fact, a lack of institutional support on issues of water delivery, quantity or quality was cited as a key challenge in a final workshop by representatives across Kathmandu's settlements (whether beneficiaries of
the LICSU programme or not). A deeper form of participation might have seen the continued existence of an institution through which community groups could collaborate with municipal actors over time, and respond to urban change.

These gaps are critical not only for the current shape of water services in Bansighat, but also in terms of future provision should the Melamchi project be completed. As explored above, the proposal from city-wide federation leadership was to maintain the community tank system for renters, while homeowners applied for taplines, through upfront investment in the capital costs. The examples traced throughout this chapter illustrate well how this response risks new hierarchies being set up across owners and renters—with infrastructure being the physical manifestation of difference.

6.4.2 Self Determination

Echoing the literature focused on the work of federations of the urban poor, it is clear that participation in the management of the water tanks was hugely beneficial to a particular set of women in the settlement. For leaders such as Maya and Sona, as well as active participants such as Ana, their involvement in the federation has had a significant contribution to their emotional well-being, knowledge, and self-worth. Beyond this, individual women outside of the federation who continue to manage their tanks, such as Asmita, have also identified a sense of autonomy gained from being in charge of their own resources. This starts to go beyond more traditional assessments of participation carried out in relation to gendered water management, which typically focus on the quality of participation in public arenas, without examining the links between this and household dynamics (Cleaver, 2000; Mosse, 1994). The experiences shared by these women also echoes literature which identifies that advocacy around community needs, such as water, can act as a critical arena for the practice of citizenship for people that might struggle in the realm of ‘formalized’ politics (Lister, 2003; Dagnino, 2007). The story of Ana, quoted at the opening of this chapter, highlighted in particular the way in which her role within the federation has supported the transformation of relations in her household—giving her a greater feeling of respect from her husband and children, while simultaneously granting her a greater knowledge of her rights. In these ways, and for these women, the federation has been able to knit together some of the ‘practical’
needs around water, with more ‘strategic’ aims (Moser, 1989) around a growing sense of empowerment, knowledge, or agency.

However, a nuanced gendered analysis is necessary to reveal the differences through which participation is secured through the federation or the water user groups. A simple focus on “women” alone does not support a reading of the ways different women and men are able to approach these groups, or the different ways residents have benefited (or not) from collective action. Speaking of the SPARC alliance in India, Doshi (2013) raised this point in reference to the ‘feminization of participation’ (p. 857)—referring to the ways in which women who have the time and space to participate (even where it requires sacrifice in their personal life) are able to take the benefits of community collective action—leaving behind those who may not have this same capacity. In Bansighat, it is clear that the federation operates strictly on the eastern side of the settlement, whether in relation to water or to other community works. As such—and while acknowledging the significant and positive work undertaken by this group—those narratives of female empowerment highlighted at the opening of this chapter must also be held in tension with the lack of autonomy for certain women and men. In particular, this refers to those living on the west, or renters, who are excluded from the use or management of communal resources, or from a sense of community participation more generally. This is seen, for example, in the inability of members of the broken tank C to become involved in any of the other WUGs. Or in the frustration of the managers of tank D and E, unconnected to the federation, who find it harder to communicate and hold service providers to account. Or in the voice of the renter, who felt “there wasn’t equality with household owners of this settlement”. These exclusions are rooted in the specific ideas around ownership or entitlement that were generated through the LICSU project, as well as in relation to wider concerns around population pressures and scarcity.

Moreover, the link between the federation and the eastern tanks matters not only because water services are undoubtedly poorer on the west, but also because it reflects exclusions from beneficial programmes and planning more generally—which was articulated by several residents on the western side as a lack of agency or ability to participate. This highlights the localized processes which shape or constrain people’s ability to ‘participate’ to enhance their sense of political agency (Cleaver, 2007). In other words, “community participation” is clearly not a vehicle for collective self-
determination, without an interrogation of how it may simultaneously reinforce or reify new inequalities for others.

6.4.3 Solidarity

Finally, much scholarship has focused on the ways in which the federations of the urban poor have used advocacy on the lack of basic necessities around shelter, water, or other services to shape new spaces of urban citizenship (Appadurai, 2001; Butcher and Frediani, 2012; Doshi, 2013). However, this chapter also highlighted that the three different WUGs in Bansighat have very different visions of participation, and relationships to the federation, leading to different possibilities for relating water services to citizenship. This raises a fundamental question in terms of how the boundaries of membership (of the federation, and water groups) are actually defined. In other words, who is able to be a part of these different citizenship spaces, and what does it mean for those that are excluded?

Looking at this question in the case of Bansighat demonstrates the ways in which institutions of collective management of services are not equal, even within the same settlement—with some speaking more clearly to the aims of citizenship. For instance, it is clear that the federation managers of tanks A & B have embraced a broader responsibility in the neighbourhood. In this way, being embedded within the structure of NMES allows the manager of A & B to link some to the distributional gains of the tanks (around better service provision), with a broader set of community-based practices centred around (but not limited to) the water tanks. Such impacts were similarly identified in other contexts, such as in Kisumu in Kenya, in which linking the managers of the Delegated Management Model water kiosk with the broader Neighbourhood Planning Association supported the group in strategic advocacy around services and legitimacy simultaneously (Butcher, 2015).

Yet this group also benefitted in key ways from the process through which the tanks were brought. In particular, the fact that residents were not required to contribute any up-front costs from the outset helped create the conditions for more broad-based membership, generating a different kind of ‘ownership’ from that secured by financial contribution. Simultaneously, tanks C & D have been hindered by the rumour of the
Maoist intervention, which has been discursively wielded by federation leadership to delegitimize the ways in which the tanks on the west are managed. Meanwhile, tank E—outside of the LICSU pilot—has the worst service and is least connected to local authorities, and therefore operates predominately as an autonomous self-help unit.

Thus, these three models of WUGs offer very different potentials for relating to a citizenship project, linked with solidarity. As identified at the opening of this chapter, for tank A & B, a sense of citizenship is built through strategic partnerships, a sense of ‘community’ responsibility and investment (even if the boundaries of that community are limited), and capacity building for its leaders. For tank D, this is even more inward facing—with limited connections with KUKL and the local authority. Nonetheless, members still identify a sense of autonomy and dignity from not being reliant on anyone else to ‘set the rules’ for water. Meanwhile, the broken tank C shows how people can just as easily fall out of spaces of participation, losing the benefits of membership. And tank E continues to be the most disadvantaged—operating outside the contract between state and citizen, relying on the highly unregulated and exploitative private vendors. In these three cases, ‘participation’ looks different, and therefore supports different possibilities for the experience of citizenship.

6.5 Conclusion

Looking at the everyday politics of participation at the community scale deepens and makes specific many of the reflections emergent from the previous chapter, around how wider policy discourses and social categories are played out through infrastructure in a certain spatial site. In particular, this chapter highlighted how material practices around the provision and spatial divisions of the tanks are linked with different perceptions of ownership and scarcity, conditioning the vision of ‘participation’ on offer. Critically, this produced new sets of social relations, as closed groups formed around physical infrastructure—drawing boundaries between federation members, the east and the west, and householders and new migrants or renters. The way in which is these groupings, in turn, became linked with value judgements around ‘good’ and ‘bad’ management highlights how the material practices around the tanks both reflected and reinforced localized power dynamics. This requires a rethink of the expectations of decentralized service delivery, acknowledging the way in which these structures reproduce their own
power dynamics which may not necessarily move toward inclusive or democratic representation, or a deeper form of citizenship (Robins et al., 2008).

However, it is also possible to trace how the particularities of the settlement development and process of infrastructure provision have intensified some of these exclusions. In fact, residents did not frame their concerns around the sufficiency of existing sources in the language of exclusion necessarily, but rather as issues of sustainability, trust, or protection. What this suggests is that if some of these narratives around resource scarcity were changed—or if, for instance, there was still an organization such as LICSU which could adapt as the neighbourhood grew in size and diversity—such competition might not be experienced so acutely, better allowing for the incorporation of newcomers into the settlement. At a municipal level, the LICSU department had disappeared by the time of this research, meaning that residents were unable to draw on some form of institutional support where they ran into issues, or where the settlement demographic changed. This suggests that infrastructural interventions might require a nuanced and alternate notion of ‘scaling’ – one which takes into account the scale-out of programmes across time, as well as across space. Thinking through the ‘when’ of infrastructure, and how that leads to different forms of participation is an important point not only in terms of the current functioning of the community’s water system, but also in relation to any future taplines that may be brought to the settlement as a part of the Melamchi project.

These reflections have implications in a range of contexts where ‘water user groups’ are becoming the norm for service delivery, and especially where there are broader claims that community management can contribute to a deepened democratic process. In fact, a close focus on the everyday politics of participation demonstrated the inherent contradictions of community managed systems, which may be simultaneously emancipatory and repressive, for different groups of people. Understanding these divisions—as well as the internal particularities and wider trends which have shaped social differentiation—is critical in moving from apolitical definitions of ‘community participation’, to a deeper understanding of the ways in which participation actually occurs, and its ability to enhance a deeper sense of citizenship.
Chapter 7  The Everyday Politics of Water Access

We don’t have many options for water. There isn’t water around. So, what should I answer? We manage with whatever water we have. We harvest rainwater; we buy water for 10 rupees per jar. If there is a shortage even after that then we search for water. We stay in queues at nights. We go across the bridge- there is a small tap there... It takes around 15-20 minutes. There is also a spring near to here. We go to those places at night to get the water because in the day it will be dry. We reuse the water after washing clothes; after rinsing the clothes, we use the water to rewash the clothes. We use water very carefully. That’s how we manage (Aisha, resident of Bansighat).

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter of analysis is focused on the micro-scale, exploring the ways in which infrastructure burdens are unevenly and intimately distributed across different bodies. In order to do so, it is focused on two practices which take place within the household, and which demonstrate the ways in which ‘water access’ is negotiated by diverse individuals in Bansighat. What is clear in the quote above is that practices adopted by residents in order to obtain water are highly complex. Strategies change in the winter and in the summer, based on financial or physical ability, reflecting differences in location in the settlement, identities, relationships, or age. Different sources are used for particular types of domestic tasks, with fluid understandings of what is safe to drink, what can be used for cooking, and which sources are only suitable for washing. During times of shortage, residents have different ideas of what is worth sacrificing to meet water needs. Out of this dizzying complexity is the realization that residents have very different possibilities for assembling their ‘water portfolios’—or the assortment of resources used to meet their water needs. Critically, this chapter demonstrates that the practices undertaken are not solely a technical negotiation of water infrastructure, but is intimately structured by sets of social relations, the local geographical conditions, and wider assumptions within the water sector which have prioritized certain types of interventions. This chapter makes the case that these “everyday politics of water access” are, in turn, related to citizenship—particularly in the sense of how well water resources are redistributed, as well as how residents experience a sense of self-determination in their daily lives.
In order to illustrate this, this chapter takes as its entry point two material practices that residents adopt as a way to mitigate risk and supplement their water portfolio beyond the communal tanks—the purchase of (jarred) water, and the reliance on public resources. It draws on examples from residents across the east and the west of the settlement (with different access to water sources), and from those with different levels of income, before focusing specifically on the narratives of those residents who have particularly low access to water of good quality or quantity, in order to reveal the diversity that underpins these two practices. This reflection deepens the analysis presented in the previous sections, revealing the intimate connections between infrastructure and citizenship, and particularly revealing faultlines between federation members and non-members, across the east and the west, and for renters and the Madhesi. Across these social and geographical differences, looking at the choice to purchase jarred water reveals different perceptions around the ‘willingness and ability’ to pay for water access. Meanwhile, the multiple practices around supplementation with public resources reveals different perceptions around what constitutes ‘managing’. In both cases, the implications of these perceptions are demonstrated through embodied experiences of risk or shame, which are absorbed differently by diverse household water managers. What this analysis demonstrates is that even where different residents are able to achieve similar levels of water access, this can come at different ‘costs’—whether financial, physical, or emotional.

Critically, the opportunities to act on different water options are neither random nor neutral, but reflect a nuanced set of political negotiations linked with space, gender, and other markers of identity. Thus, this chapter examines the ways in which these practices are both elicited by, and can generate, socio-spatial inequalities—with a particular emphasis on income, location in the settlement, and ethnicity. In doing so, this chapter makes the case that these different practices of water access are intimately related with the negotiation of social relations. Nor is this simply a localized process, as framings of water scarcity at the city level have generated particular investments and approaches to addressing shortages, which reinforces or encourages particular practices. Together, this is presented here as the everyday politics of access, in which examining material practices around water access reveals different possibilities (reflecting these localized socio-spatial inequalities, as well as the wider socio-cultural and urban development environment) for residents to meet their household needs with dignity.
7.2 Expanding Definitions of Access

Before exploring what water access looks like in Bansighat, this section will briefly explore how this notion has been conceptualized at different scales. In fact, discussions of water scarcity in urban settlements often make reference to the aims of increasing “water access”, usually through the implementation of improved drinking water sources.

At the international scale, perhaps the most prolific definition is provided by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme, which refers to this goal as increasing as the “proportion of population using an improved drinking-water source” (WHO/UNICEF, 2012). However, this definition of what constitutes adequate access to water is in of itself contested. One the one hand, this definition has been critiqued for not measuring far enough—including the fact that access to a water point is not the same as use (Kayaga, Fisher, & Franceys, 2009), that this understates the importance of quality and quantity (Satterthwaite, 2003), or elides the value of alternate (often lower quality) sources for cooking, washing, or hygiene purposes (Joshi, Fawcett, & Mannan, 2011). In contrast, broader discussions of ‘deep access’ (Obeng-Odoom, 2012) in urban areas can be attributed to a complex confluence of features, including regularity, sufficiency, affordability, quality, or accessibility (Allen et al., 2006; Brown, 2010; Nganyanyuka, Martinez, Wesselink, Lungo, & Georgiadou, 2014). Thus, as a first point, this chapter engages from this expanded definition, broadening access beyond the existence of water technologies, to an assessment of their quality, location and function. It also draws from literature which has identified the range of strategies residents might engage in—from ‘policy driven’ approaches in collaboration with the local utility or municipality—through to ‘needs driven’ approaches undertaken by residents themselves, often with little external support (Allen, Dávila, & Hofmann, 2006).

Secondly, this thesis makes the point that the experience of differential water access cannot be disconnected from the priorities of the wider water sector, which drive different kinds of investment and interventions. In the UK, for instance, Bakker (2000) has demonstrated the way in which the 1995 drought in Yorkshire was framed within a discourse of ecological scarcity, while meanwhile a simultaneous process of deregulation and privatization crippled the ability of the water industry to more effectively respond to changing environmental conditions. From another context, Butcher (2015) looked at the specific manifestations of water interventions in informal settlements in Kisumu, Kenya,
and how the wider policy emphasis on privatization, decentralization, and community participation ultimately worked to disenfranchise the most vulnerable residents, even while increasing coverage in the neighbourhood as a whole. These works highlight the ways in which policy or programmatic choices might continue to ‘produce’ scarcity for different people, even as it seeks to address water challenges.

As explored in the contextual chapter, obtaining water of adequate quality and quantity is a struggle for residents throughout Kathmandu—not simply for those in informal settlements. For the urban poor however, the experience of scarcity has been exacerbated by reforms in the water sector in 2007—which ushered in an era of privatization and commoditization which shifted water from a social good (provided freely to informal communities) to an economic good—accessible via the market (albeit at a subsidized rate). While there have been discussions around the large-scale Melamchi Dam project to bring piped water into the city, water interventions aimed at the urban poor are focused primarily on the provision of 5000 litre ‘community’ tanks which can be filled by either the water utility, KUKL, or from private tanker trucks. Yet, as will be explored, this vision of increasing access does not always resonate with the everyday ways that Bansighat residents are collecting water.

Finally, beyond this expanded definition of water access, there are also questions of how the benefits of water distribution systems—as well as the risks of water scarcity—are experienced unequally. Focusing on the micro-scale, several authors have explored the ways in which historical sets of power relations (often along class, caste, or gender lines) have impacted the ability of certain individuals to use water technologies (Crow & Sultana, 2002; Joshi, 2011; Joy, Kulkarni, Roth, & Zwarteveen, 2014; Udas, Roth, & Zwarteveen, 2014). Looking at India, for example, Joshi (2011) explored how drinking water interventions—from community managed schemes up to national institutions—have largely ignored the representation of Dalit men and women, thereby maintaining the experience of scarcity for these groups at the local level, even while higher caste neighbours reported increased water security. Critically, such accounts often seek an integration of both the practical and emotional dimensions of water collection, in which unequal power relations can also manifest in feelings of stigma, shame, or vulnerability, which can reproduce difference (Nightingale, 2011b; Sultana, 2011). These cases
unsettle the idea that water access is necessarily experienced equitably and with dignity, after the installation of the nuts and bolts of ‘improved’ sources.

This chapter knits together these critiques as a way of understanding access at the household scale for diverse Bansighat residents—looking at two material practices which are undertaken to supplement daily water—the purchase of jarred water, and the collection from public resources. Exploring the values and perceptions which underpin these different practices opens up the multiple strategies residents have for assembling their water portfolios, and for whom and how different options are successful. In doing so, this chapter moves beyond a simplified understanding of ‘access’—exploring the ability to exercise choice over different water options, with dignity, and to the preservation of emotional and bodily health. What becomes clear is that this ‘everyday politics of access’ is deeply gendered, spatialized, and marked by disjunctures between values and perceptions held by residents, and priorities set within Kathmandu water policy.

7.3 Diverse Gendered Collection Practices

Before undertaking an analysis of the two specific material practices of water collection, it is critical to first outline the range of sources available in the settlement, as well as to acknowledge the gendered nature of collection. Bansighat residents rely upon multiple resources with different functions to fulfil their water needs. As indicated in chapter five, while there are four municipally-supplied pipelines located throughout the settlement, residents report that these have not worked for a period of at least three years. This is not especially remarkable given the context of Kathmandu as a whole, where the privately operated (but municipally regulated) water service provider, KUKL, is erratic and partial for all households. While non-functional, these tapeines do play an important symbolic and leveraging role for some residents, as indicated in chapter five. However, they do not feature in the daily collection routines of residents, and therefore will not be discussed in great detail in this chapter.

In the absence of traditional piped services, the majority of residents collect water from one of the multiple large storage tanks discussed in the previous chapter, for either drinking and/or cooking needs. As already indicated, and mirroring a system found
within the rest of Kathmandu, these storage tanks are refilled by water tanker suppliers—operated either by the water company KUKL, or independent vendors—who extract resources from rivers, springs, or reservoirs outside the Valley. There are four functioning ‘community’ tanks of 5000L within Bansighat and a fifth which is currently broken (C). The term “community tanks” (A-E) is used to refer to those which are run on behalf of a collective, with a monthly fee, collection rules, and a restricted membership. These tanks are managed by ‘water user groups’ (WUGs) formed of residents, who opt either to provide a fixed amount of water weekly to its members, or to sell additional buckets of water by volume to ‘non-members’.

In addition to these community tanks, there are several smaller “private” tanks, also served by private tanker truck vendors, which have been purchased and established by entrepreneurial individuals to run as businesses. These tanks sell by volume, between 10-12 rupees per 20L to individuals in the settlement who are not members of the community tanks. Of the 33 residents interviewed in Bansighat, only four people did not use either a community or private tank, making these the primary (and in the case of the community tanks—‘official’) source of water provision.

Besides tank water, residents might also depend upon the (far costlier) “jarred water” for drinking, which comes bottled and sold at 50 rupees for a 19L bottle. While this comes at significantly more expense, residents often opt to use this source especially for drinking because of its supposed superior quality.

Finally, Bansighat residents also draw upon a range of lower quality natural resources to fulfil purposes such as cooking, washing, and cleaning. There are two protected ‘public’ wells located on either side of the settlement, which have been constructed and financed by groups of organized residents. While these are in theory available for use by residents across the settlement, in practice these sources are often highly restricted to those residents who paid for its construction, as highlighted in chapter six. A few individuals in the settlement (particularly located on the higher lying eastern half) have likewise been able to dig their own private wells within their house compounds, which they may sometimes let friends or neighbours use.
For those residents that are unable to access a dug well, the remaining option is to use the riverside canal, which can be accessed by anyone. However, this source is of the lowest quality, impacted by the extremely high levels of pollution from the river. Indeed, in the case of both wells and canals, these sources are highly variable, subject both to drought during the dry winter season, and contamination from flooding during the rainy summer—though those on the lower lying western side are at higher risk. Despite their variability, these sources play a fundamental role for nearly all residents in supplementing the higher quality water of the bottled jars and tanks. In general, residents living on the eastern half of the settlement tend to be better served—with greater numbers relying upon the community tanks A&B, a higher proportion of private wells, and a well-used communal well (Image 7.1).

![Image 7.1: Bansighat water sources (clockwise from top: community tank; jarred water; canal on the west; public well on the east. Source: author)](image)

Critically for the purposes of this chapter, in nearly all households interviewed, women and girls were the primary collectors and decision-makers around the use of water. This echoes a wider global association, which sees women and girls largely responsible for
reproductive activities (Ahlers & Zwartveen, 2009; Moser, 1989; O’Reilly, 2006). As such, the choice to use particular sources (or to substitute one for another) was largely undertaken by the responsible female in the house, putting them at the centre of daily negotiations around water. For many women, this was largely normalized, and attributed to ‘Nepali culture’:

Maybe it is affected by our culture, but it is normal that men go outside the community to find jobs, but women are expected to do all the household work like cleaning the house, cooking food, washing clothes and other various household chores (B19F).

In terms of water and sanitation, women have to face more problems compared to men, as they take responsibility for these things. I think it is natural. More than a challenge, we take this as our job (B13F).

Nonetheless, several other women also highlighted how the responsibility to care for the water needs of the household created an extra burden on women especially:

There are lot of problem with water and sanitation. Because of water problems we don’t get to bathe or wash clothes in time. When this happens, it is women who suffer the most because they cannot bathe and wash as they need (B14F).

Women face challenges for water and sanitation because women are responsible for household matters (cleaning, managing water), and men are only concerned with earning. Here in our settlement we don’t have water, so definitely this creates extra problems we have to face around water (B15F).

A young participatory photography participant similarly expressed aggravation with having these responsibilities without help, suggesting that this acceptance may also accompanied by frustration (Image 7.2).
Indeed, across Kathmandu, the nature of water access (tanks only open at certain times, sources subject to variability across seasons, uncertain quality and quantity), generates a range of knock-on effects particularly for women—related to the physical and time burdens of collection, health concerns and hygienic needs, or safety (Image 7.3 & Image 7.4). These predictable seasonal shortages or disruptions in service were often compensated for by women’s labour, who described limited coping strategies such as simply paying more for jarred water, walking further distances, waiting in longer queues, and carrying greater amounts in single journeys.
While many women interviewed identified positive changes in gender norms over time (particularly around caste, purity, and marriage practices)—and especially as they moved from rural to urban areas—this has not always impacted the association of women and their household duties. This is evident, for example, even as women move into productive spheres. For instance, in two interviews, Manisha, a young receptionist referred to her ‘two jobs’, while Bina, a tailor, describes her balancing act:

By nature, we women are more responsible for the kitchen work. Most women who are engaged in employment also have to do household work. In my house, I do all the work. I wake up early in the morning at 4 and prepare my lunch and get ready for my office at around 8...Now I am habituated to working two jobs (B13F).

Mostly women are the ones who are in house, as men are busy in their work. Therefore, we have to deal with every challenge that comes up around water. Sometimes this means we have to go to collect from very early in morning and sometimes we have to go very late in evening too. But

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16 For instance, several interviewed women referenced the restrictive norms they would have expected to face back in their home villages—in which inter-caste marriages were discouraged, menstruating women are restricted from touching water sources or sometimes entering the household, or members of different castes prohibited from sharing water infrastructure.
we always have to make sure we complete our housework before we go to our work for the day (B16F).

Those challenges were also noted by girls of a younger generation, particularly watching their families and neighbours in these double roles (Image 7.5). Thus, while these women identify changing cultural values around the productive roles that women may take in Nepali society, this has not necessarily shaken normative ideas around the conventional (gendered) division of labour, and the role of wives and daughters in taking care of the household.

As a final note on water collection, underpinning the challenge of exploring how well different households are accessing water, is the fact that there isn’t a consensus on which sources are used for which domestic task. While the municipal or privately operated tanks are the most prevalently used source, a large number of respondents continued to purchase the far more expensive jarred water for drinking. Similarly, some residents report using the tanks for cooking water, while others took from wells and canals for these purposes. Washing uses were also mixed, as in some cases residents
used the paid tanks, while others drew from the free public resources. In other words, residents share different perceptions on which sources to use dependent on the tasks they are intending to perform.

Moreover, while residents tend to have a well-defined personal sense of which sources to use for different tasks—water shortages, contamination or other crisis moments can sometimes disrupt this, creating new challenges for the women and girls that must quickly adapt. As one resident explained:

“We don’t have any problems while there is water in our [community] tank, but when the trucks don’t come to refill it in time we have to buy extra water jars for drinking which cost 50 rupees per jar, and I can’t always afford this extra expense. At the same time, during the dry winter months if there isn’t water in the well, we have to use the drinking water from the tank even for our washing purposes. We are constantly adapting (B2F).”

Thus, trying to understand how well residents feel they are accessing water is intimately linked with the kinds of water being tapped, the tasks it is used for, and how sources are impacted by wider issues such as seasonality, deliveries, financial and physical ability.

Unpacking these variances in residents’ portfolios (and their ability to adapt when under water stress) is key in explaining the multiple ways residents experience water access in the household. Critically, this brief exploration also highlights the importance of looking beyond the ‘state provided’ community tanks discussed in the previous chapter, as these represent just one element of the everyday assemblage practices of residents. As such, while referring to the tanks, the following two sections take as their entry point two alternate practices—paying for jarred water, and collection from (free) public resources, as a way of unfolding how different residents are able to assemble their water portfolio. Through examining the perceptions and values underpinning the use of these sources, conclusions can be drawn about the nature of water access and its relationship to citizenship.


7.4 Everyday Politics of Access

7.4.1 Material Practice 1: Purchase of Jarred Water and Perceptions of ‘Willingness to Pay’

This section explores the practice of paying for jarred water, and the perceptions which drive this choice for diverse residents across the settlement. In order to do so, it presents the narratives of three residents located in the east and the west of the settlement, who represent very different economic abilities, but all engage in the purchase of jarred water. This reveals that while residents of even very limited economic means engage in this practice, this can come at varying levels of personal and bodily sacrifice. In other words, those who wish to access the highest quality water are required to absorb particular financial or physical costs. This impacts the poorest women, as well as those located in the under-resourced western side of the settlement, the most—highlighting class and spatial distinctions across the settlement. Focusing on these differential embodied experiences highlights the necessity of unpacking the seeming ‘willingness’ to pay for water, differentiating what this means for different kinds of residents.

Mirroring practices undertaken by residents throughout Kathmandu, over half of interviewed residents (18 of 33) indicated that they preferred to use jarred water for drinking, saving the water they obtain from the community tanks for other tasks. Residents opting to purchase jarred water for drinking cut across location in the settlement, outlining a few different motivations for doing so. This choice, for example, was made by Manisha, a renter living on the eastern side of the settlement. She uses the more expensive jar water for drinking, and buys buckets from private vendors for cooking and washing, as she works a full-time position and cannot spare the time to collect in any other way. She explains:

In my family, we tend to buy jarred water for drinking, cooking, and sometimes other purposes. This is because I usually don’t have the time to collect from places like the tank or well, as I work full-time. This is especially the case during the dry season, because then it really takes much longer to collect from the public places, especially the well for washing. But the main problem is that I have to pay a huge amount of money monthly,
around Rs 1000 (£7.70), as I have to buy water for drinking, washing and cooking (B13F).

While Manisha laments the added expense during these times, both she and her husband are higher earners in more professionalized careers in the settlement, as she works as a receptionist at a news station, and he as a veterinarian. As such she adopts the material practice of purchasing jarred water for drinking and cooking rather than relying on the tank, citing the fact that the tanks have limited hours of operation, which does not suit her schedule. Their more stable economic condition allows them to manage with the added expense, alleviating her of the time burdens of collection, while allowing her to balance her productive and reproductive roles. In this way, Manisha models both a willingness and ability to pay for higher quality water resources.

Though in Manisha’s case the motivation to purchase jarred water was around time burdens, in fact the predominate reason given was around quality. In Bansighat, water deliveries to four of the community tanks (A-D) are made by the water company, KUKL, as a part of the pro-poor water reform previously discussed. As such, these operators are (in theory) held to a higher quality regulatory oversight than the rogue private water tanker trucks that supply tank E and the private tanks, who frequently operate without licenses. However, the quality from even these government-regulated deliveries was often met with suspicion from residents. This was in part attributed to doubt as to whether the water was properly treated, but also to the possibilities of contamination during both the transport and storage process. As identified by two users of ‘tank B’ who opted to purchase jarred water:

- The water itself is safe to drink, but the tank [B] itself cannot be cleaned, so that is why I prefer to use jarred water for drinking (B23F).

- We don’t use the tank water for drinking, because I think the tank container is dirty as Sona [the manager] cannot clean the tank herself. However, the water is clean as it is mixed with a water purifier (B1F).

These apprehensions are intensified in the case of the newest 'Tank E', as well as for the private tank operators—who both work with private suppliers rather than through KUKL. In these cases, even the limited guarantees of treatment at the source provided by KUKL are missing, suggesting that residents who draw upon these sources are at an
even higher risk. Reports from the manager of Tank E demonstrate the multiple challenges of working within this highly unregulated system of private water vendors:

We had been purchasing water for our tank from one private tanker vendor, but we recently realized that they have been cheating us in terms of quantity. So then we decided to contract a new supplier, but now we are receiving a very poor quality of water instead. It is not fit to consume, and the water turns black when it is boiled. We are really in a hard place now (B11F).

This starts to reveal spatial differences across the settlement, as residents in the west that rely on tank E are faced with even more unstable water quality. Significantly, there aren’t many options to ascertain water quality, with most interviewees relying on visual cues or taste as a proxy. Health concerns related to water-borne diseases are high throughout the city, and were frequently mentioned by Bansighat residents, particularly in relation to the impacts on children. Compounding this challenge of poor quality sources is the unwillingness of residents to disclose where they live as a result of the wider stigma faced by residents of informal settlements. This can be a barrier to effective medical treatment, as well as adding layers of emotional strain:

The water situation affects our health, and many diseases are spread because of it. For instance, my daughter has suffered from typhoid 5 times. When we took her to the hospital the doctors suggested that maybe we had been drinking dirty water. However, they don’t know that we have been living in a Sukumbasi area, as we don’t want to disclose this fact. It made it harder to get the right treatment (B1F).

As such, residents undertake their own calculations around the perception of water quality or their tank source, balancing this both with the financial implications, and emotional decision-making around health burdens.

And indeed, the financial impacts are significant: for those residents who opt for jarred water for drinking, the cost of a 19L jar is 50 rupees (£0.40) – close to three times the equivalent amount from the water tanks. Interestingly, despite its significantly higher price, several residents within the lower-income bracket of the settlement (i.e. renters, living in poor conditions, or self-reporting as struggling as comparing to neighbours) were also found to make the choice to purchase jarred water. Here however, and in contrast with women (like Manisha, in the first example) who might be able to absorb
the financial burdens, this comes with a different set of embodied risks. This is evidenced, for example, in the case of Kalavita, a single mother renting on the western side of the settlement. Kalavita obtains a very low and variable source of income, usually around 200-300 rupees ( £1.50 - £2.20) a day from begging on the streets with her daughter. She lives in small and windowless single room of wood, for 3000 rupees a month ( £23) — paying amongst the highest rental prices for a room of the lowest quality of the settlement. However, with her limited source of income, she has opted to use jarred water for her drinking. She explains:

I make very little money a day. But most of my expenses in the past have gone to paying my daughter’s health bills when she is sick, which has happened many times. The doctor has suggested that it is better to drink jar water for the health of my daughter, so now I buy this. Of course, sometimes I may not even have money for food, and I often sleep hungry. And if I don’t have any money, then I don’t get water (B32F).

In Kalavita’s case, concerns around the health of her daughter manifested in the commitment to spend her extremely limited resources on higher quality water rather than other activities, with great sacrifice in other aspects of her life (“I sleep hungry.”) In fact, while many families do spend significant amounts of money on water— with some opting to pay higher amounts for better quality—it is critical to highlight the risks or sacrifices this requires for some. While many users of jarred water— such as Manisha— expressed difficulties over its high expense, for women such as Kalavita it can be debilitating. In other words— while on the surface, Kalavita and Manisha might appear to have the same portfolio of drinking sources, their contrasting income levels means that this affects them in profoundly different ways.

Similarly, residents reported other precarious coping strategies related to the high price of quality drinking water, such as severely suppressing consumption. This was articulated by Asha, for example, a very recent migrant who was sharing her accommodation with friends— two families renting a single windowless room in the settlement:

Comparing to how it was in the village, water is much harder to get here. This is because here we have to buy it for everything: for drinking, cooking, and washing, whereas in the village we could get it freely from the tubewells in our houses. We could fetch as much as we want. I believe that this water
should be available freely for everyone. If we cannot afford it, we don't have any options. If in the village we drink two jars of water, here we drink only one" (B32F).

Like Kalavita, Asha lives on the western-most side of the settlement, and would therefore draw from the unregulated Tank E, or one of the private vendors located on this side. As such, she also opts to purchase all of her water supplies, using jar water because of quality concerns from the tank. However, in order to accommodate this practice, she describes drinking far less in Bansighat than she would if she was able to draw from the free sources in the village she had just migrated from.

Kalavita and Asha’s stories are important as they confound concepts such as ‘willingness and ability’ to pay—often expressed as the idea that because the poor typically already pay more for water than those living in ‘formal’ neighbourhoods, they can be expected to be able to shoulder any regularized tariffs for potable water (Najlis & Edwards, 1991). This is an important point in a context where access to the highest quality water has not been addressed within existing pro-poor reforms in the water sector, and thus can only be obtained through the individualized engagement with the jarred water market. As will be explored in section 7.4.4, these issues around drinking water quality are compounded by the largely unregulated ‘water mafias’ which delivery water from outside the Valley, and with very little regulatory oversight. Without any reforms in the wider water sector, for the majority of residents, obtaining high quality water will only be possible by making sacrifices in other areas. In the words of Ditya the manager of tank E: “You always have to prioritize good quality water first… for example, if you like to eat meat, but one week you don’t have the money, you have to eat less” (B11F).

Thus, the first point when looking at this material practice is that ‘access’ to high quality water is not simply a matter of how residents are obtaining water, but also must account for the ‘costs’ to obtain it, with a higher level of risk absorbed by poorer bodies. The focus on embodied experiences therefore helped link the purchase of jarred water with different perceptions around the ‘willingness’ to pay for water—revealing very different outcomes for residents undertaking the same kinds of practices. It is on this level—as will be discussed in section 7.5—where the ‘everyday politics of access’ begins to intersect with broader understandings of citizenship, particularly in understanding how well water
resources are redistributed, or how much self-determination residents have around making different water choices.

7.4.2 Material Practice 2: Substitution with Public Resources and Perceptions of ‘Managing’

The second material practice that residents engage in, almost without exception, is the supplementation of paid (higher-quality) resources with water drawn freely from one of the public resources in the settlement. While this is related to financial considerations, it also arises in response to severe challenges with obtaining water of sufficient quantity from the water tanks. Thus, this section makes the case for an increased attention on the use of multiple (free) public resources, in understanding how residents assemble their water portfolio. Drawing from the narratives of several residents living on opposite sides of the settlement, this section highlights the vital function of public resources in shaping the perceptions of diverse residents around how well they are ‘managing’ in the settlement. Critically, exploring different embodied experiences of risk, stigma or shame demonstrates how the perception of ‘managing’ is not simply linked with what infrastructure exists— but also what purposes it serves, and where it is placed. Such discussions are critical for unpacking the multiple ways residents are experiencing water scarcity and access across the settlement, as well as in light of wider discussions in the water sector which have not always acknowledged the vital role of public resources.

On the whole, many residents were initially ambiguous when outlining whether their water needs were being met—replying in variations of: “as we are managing I think its sufficient”; or “we cannot think of getting water as a problem, as it’s just the reality”. Nevertheless, these sentiments hide the vast plurality of ways in which residents describe their strategies for ‘managing’. In fact, of 33 residents interviewed, only 6 reported not drawing upon some kind of public resource—whether a public or private well, or the riverside canal. As will be demonstrated—the variable abilities to draw on these resources was a critical factor in determining how well different residents were able to assemble their water portfolio.

For example, Bishal lives on the eastern side of the settlement with his four other family members. He is a member of the monthly tank group run by the women’s group *Mabila*...
Ekta Samaj, and for his 150 rupees (£1.20) monthly fee is therefore eligible to receive 2 buckets of water (around 20L each), 3 times a week, which his family uses only for drinking. In addition to this tank water, he draws from the free river canal on the eastern side of settlement for cooking and washing purposes. As a monthly tank member, as well as a resident on the east with the higher quality canal available, Bishal’s portfolio of resources is relatively good. He also benefits from the financial savings of monthly membership, saving about 100 rupees (£0.76) a month this way, as compared to fees charged by private tank operators. When queried about how his family is managing, he gave the following answer: “Sometimes the water that we get from the tanks—only 2 buckets at a time—is not enough, but as long as we have the canal it is good for us. It is not a big problem for us.”

What this means is that for drinking water, Bishal’s family of five is subsisting on the 120L a week provided by the community tank B. As a point of reference, this can be contrasted with standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO), which identifies ‘sufficient’ drinking water to be a minimum of 10L per person, per day (WHO, 2000). In the case of Bishal’s family, this would mean a requirement of 350L a week—or about three times what the community tank is providing. Yet for Bishal, as long as he is able to draw on the canal on the east of the settlement, he considers himself to be ‘managing’ well, as he can prioritize their (limited) tank water for drinking, while drawing on other supplementary sources. This example is used as a demonstration of the significance that public resources hold even for relatively ‘water privileged’ residents of Bansighat.

Similarly, Ana is a resident from the ‘hill’ region of Nepal living on the east side. She is an active member of Mahila Ekta Samaj, and is also a part of the monthly tank group B which she uses for cooking purposes only, relying upon the protected community well on the east for washing. Like Bishal, in the context of Bansighat Ana is relatively better off: she is well-connected and lives in higher-quality housing constructed out of brick and wood over two floors, and is able to draw from the communal facilities of the tank

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17 While universal standards may not always be the best indicator across diverse circumstances, this disparity does highlights that even where the tanks are working well for their monthly members, it may only meet a small portion of a family’s drinking needs as stipulated by international standards.
and well. However, her account also highlights the difficulties of collection that are hidden in Bishal’s account (perhaps more evident as she is the key water collector in her household, unlike Bishal):

The tank water is filled two times per week, and we also buy jar water, so drinking and cooking we can manage. But for washing it is hard for us. First of all, our water sources are a little far, so it is time consuming. During the rainy season the roads are full of ditches, and it is slippery so we have to be careful otherwise we will fall. When we get there, there are often long queues at the community well. Meanwhile, during the dry season, the water is very low. During these times of water shortages, we control our use of water by restricting the washing of our clothes, preventing the waste of water, and prioritizing our water from the tank for other tasks if we need it (B1F).

Ana’s story is typical of a common refrain heard in the settlement from more well-off residents: ‘for drinking water we can manage, but washing is difficult’. Critically, while Bishal referred to the use of free public resources as allowing his family to ‘manage’, Ana’s narrative makes visible the physical labour (walking slippery ditches, waiting in long queues) required for these practices—undertaken largely by women. These gendered physical burdens are particularly important to highlight given that public resources are increasingly subject to variable and degrading quality, further impacting residents’ ability to meet their water needs. The dry season brings shortages in wells and canals as a result of drought. Meanwhile, during the rainy months of June-August, many residents report the bursting of the ‘small pipes’ of household toilets, or flooding from the highly polluted Bagmati, making these sources unusable:

Now in the summer the well dries up, but in the rainy season the sewage and river water leaks into these places and make them dirty. When it rains continuously for two or three days the water overflows from the river, and the sewage lines become full and cannot flow, so it spills outwards (B11F).

This generates additional challenges for women household managers. For instance, in the dry season, this requires waking at very early hours, and is marked by significant struggle for those who are less physically able:

If we want to avoid waiting in long queues at the canal during the dry season, we do have to go very early in the morning to avoid people. I go at
four in the morning. In the daytime, sometimes the water is already too dry, and nothing is left (B12F).

If I don’t have money then no one will give me water. So I go to collect from the canal, because it is free. But I have physical difficulties collecting water. My body hurts because I am weak. People who are strong can collect water every day, but it is hard for me to carry (B31F).

Meanwhile, in the rainy season, cross-contamination from flooding generates additional health burdens for those responsible for collecting and using often polluted canal or well water:

I think women face more challenges related to water. For example, in my house we men go out to work for whole day, and my wife has to stay home and take care of the house. We have children, and they often make their clothes dirty, and then she has to wash their clothes. But because of the water we use, she or the children get sick, and then it is her who has to take care of them. My wife gets problems with her stomach very often, especially when it is rainy (B17M).

Thus, while even relatively water privileged residents speak of ‘managing’ through the practice of supplementation with free resources, it is critical to unpack the hidden work which underpins this perception. Examining these embodied risks highlights how the ongoing degradation of these sources generates additional burdens, which must be compensated for through women’s labour if residents are to be able to ‘manage’ their water portfolio.

Secondly, beyond these shared challenges, there are also some other patterns of note, particularly in looking at access practices across different sides of the settlement. Breaking down the use of different sources in the east versus the west, what can be seen is that in the east all fifteen interviewed residents exclusively used free resources (whether public or private wells or canals) for their washing purposes, saving the tanks for drinking and cooking (Figure 7.1). Further disaggregating, it can also be observed those who opt to use the more expensive jar water for drinking, tend to be the same families that then use the paid tanks for cooking—demonstrating a general trend of paying more for higher quality resources. The reverse is also true: those who predominantly use the tanks for drinking, are also those that report using the free wells for canals for cooking. Put simply: in the east, tanks are generally drawn upon to serve only one domestic purpose—whether drinking or cooking—but only rarely (B2F) to
serve both. Moreover, the free public resources are used for consumption activities such as cooking, indicative of the higher quality of the land and wells on this side. However, this pattern looks very different for residents who were interviewed on the western side of the settlement. Here, only two residents reported using the public wells for cooking, relying exclusively on the paid tanks (Figure 7.2). Similarly, unlike in the east, nearly half on residents (7) also relied upon paid tank water for their washing. In other words, a significant proportion of families from the west are reliant on the water tanks to supply multiple domestic needs, rather than the singular function (whether drinking or cooking) they serve in the east. This reflects the fact that there is a limited access to high quality wells on the west, and that the lower-lying canal is much more polluted on this side of the settlement, making these sources unpopular for anything other than washing, for all but the most economically marginalized residents.

Figure 7.1: East side water use

Figure 7.2: West side water use
Thus, in general, residents in the west can be considered to be at a greater disadvantage to those living on the east, as a result of the geographical conditions of the settlement. Though tanks provide the same volume of water across the east and west, it is evident that those living in the west need to draw more from this paid source, as they are less able to rely upon public resources for any consumption purposes (or if they continue to do so—this is at greater personal risk). This holds implications not only in terms of understanding different practices around the use of public resources, but also for evaluating if the paid tanks (either municipally provided or private) are able to provide ‘sufficient’ water for Bansighat residents\(^\text{18}\).

As will be explored in the following section, this most clearly impacts those residents living in the west who simply cannot afford to purchase additional water. For women collectors on the west who cannot meet this expense, this exacerbates many of the gendered burdens highlighted—requiring residents to traverse further distances, or rely upon even more polluted water. As identified by two women living in the west:

> I think the water situation is harder for people like me. I need to pay even to wash the clothes. During water shortages in my tank, I need to travel far away to collect water, or to wash my clothes in a better area farther away (B26F).

> There is no comparison between our side and the other. They have so many more water facilities as compared to us. They don’t allow us to collect water from their public well either (B27F).

Ultimately, exploring these different embodied experiences of physical burden or risk moves questions of ‘access’ beyond a discussion of whether there is or is not enough water— to exploring how sources are differently used, and different strategies which underpin the perception of ‘managing’. It draws attention to the particular geographical conditions of the settlement which play a role in generating water inequities, and starts to hint at some of the wider ecological trends which have depleted public resources, which will be picked up in greater detail in section 7.4.4 Without interventions which focus on the protection or rehabilitation of these vital public resources, it is likely that

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\(^{18}\) Though in reality, no review has been undertaken by the Kathmandu Valley Water Service Board on the LICSU programme from its inception in 2007 until the present day (Programme Officer of NGO Forum, Personal Communication, March 2016).
Bansighat residents will continue to experience challenges with water access—impacting those on the west more than the east, and creating additional gendered or emotional burdens. Opening up a discussion on the different collection practices from public sources thus creates a more nuanced picture of the different challenges faced by residents across space and over time, with critical implications related to citizenship.

### 7.4.3 Implications for Social Relations: The Making of Socio-Spatial Inequalities

The previous sections outlined how different practices which make up water access are linked with different embodied experiences of risk which might otherwise be invisible within diverse people’s perceptions around household water access. This section seeks to draw from these reflections to explore the ways in which these emotional or bodily burdens are intimately related with the making of social relations in the settlement. In order to do so, this section draws on narratives from Bansighat residents who reported the greatest challenges with water collection, exploring how this is linked not only with physical hardship in accessing water, but also with a sense of emotional wellbeing.

Following the lead of the previous sections—while women in general can be expected to bear a greater proportion of this burden as ‘household managers’—this also falls most heavily on women (and men) who are less well connected, lacking in financial resources, located on the underserved western areas of the neighbourhood, or (as will be explored) representing a particular ethnic identity. Critically, the emotional burdens related with water access are understood here not as individualized experiences, but rather as a relationality produced (Davidson & Milligan, 2004)—a product of people’s socio-spatial economic location, as well as impacted by wider patterns such as the unregulated jarred water market, and ecological conditions of the settlement. A closer examination of these experiences helps illuminate the different choices residents make around water collection, and reveals how social stratification is evidenced within practices of water access. This ultimately challenges the idea that residents make choices based solely on economically ‘rational’ calculations—opening up a range of alternate rationalities based on socially embedded decision-making.
An important theme which emerged in the two sections above was around the different embodied experiences of risk which underpinned the different material practices residents take to access water. Residents are constantly rearranging strategies when their water tanks are not filled, if they run short of money, or when drought or rain affect their public resources. Yet these sections also highlighted the fact that not all residents have equal capacities to engage in different water practices, raising in particular issues around financial capacity and location in the settlement. Critically however, across the 33 interviews held, it is striking that those residents who seem to experience the greatest challenges in assembling their water portfolios were located on the western half of the settlement, renters, and often those representing members of the Madhesi ethnic group. Importantly, this intersection of identity and material collection practices is linked with different levels of emotional vulnerability, opening up the ways in which emotions are “relationally produced between peoples and places” (Sultana, 2011, p. 164).

This is demonstrated, for instance, by Alam—a young Madhesi resident who works as a waste-picker for limited income. He rents a single windowless wooden room out of a block of eight for 3000 rupees (£23) monthly on the west of the settlement, which he shares with his wife, two children, and mother. He buys water for drinking and cooking from a private vendor, and supplements this by drawing water from the riverside. The lower quality of the canal as well as the lower lying land of the west, means that his main public resource is doubly affected during the rainy season. He describes:

> During the time of rains and flooding, the dirty river gets into the canal. For a week or more we have to wait for it to be clean, so that it can be used again. Those times, we have no choice but to buy more water from private tanks. At this time, we might spend around 100 to 150 Rs per day for water, and that is money that we could be spending on food (B17).

As a wastepicker Alam earns around 10000 rupees (£76) a month, and is the only breadwinner supporting his young family and mother. As such, he is far less able to adapt his water portfolio than other residents when his free water is compromised. He explains how the necessity of spending more (the ‘non-substitutability’ of water) often leaves him with no other choice than reducing the amount he is able to spend on food, when he cannot access the free water for washing.
Critically however, for Alam the choice to spend more money on water, rather than food, is also underpinned by important emotional considerations. Several residents in Bansighat had previous explained that when washing resources were compromised, they postponed bathing and cleaning activities. However, when queried on this, Alam expressed keenly the ways in which he felt discriminated against in the settlement because of his ethnicity and his profession, which is often linked with being ‘unclean’19. As such, and unlike reports from other residents, he explained that he was less willing to compromise on activities such as bathing: “even if there isn’t water, we have to find some for bathing ourselves. It is important that I am looking neat” (B17F). As such, Alam’s story demonstrates how poorer residents fair differently in response to water stresses, which is related both to his location in the settlement, as well as a wider perceived stigma related to his profession and ethnicity.

Similar challenges were reported by Hitu and Imay, a young family also renting on the western side of the settlement. Imay is the only earner in the family, bringing home small amounts from begging. When they have money, they purchase individual buckets of water from tank E, or otherwise draw from the riverside. Importantly, Imay described only being able to buy these buckets because of the goodwill of the manager:

There are people who would not let us buy water from them. If I tell you about them, it will be difficult for us later. But [the manager] is very good, she said, if no one will let you buy water, I will give you some myself (B28M).

In this conversation, Imay reports having been prohibited from joining the monthly water tank group when he first arrived, which he attributed to a wider disenfranchisement his family experiences as Madhesi renters in the community. This was likewise expressed by Alam, who relies upon private tanks: “even if we are willing to pay for one of the community tankers we cannot get water, because they discriminate against us, which is not fair” (B17M). Thus, if chapter five opened up a more generalized set of reasons for the discrimination of the Madhesi ethnic group, this chapter demonstrates how this plays out across the bodies and emotions of these residents, and the critical role that social

19 As explored in chapter five, this concern with the presentation of ‘cleanliness’ is a reoccurring theme, linked with the wider stigma faced by informal settlement residents as a whole within the city, especially around the pollution of the riverside.
relations play in governing which resources are able to be used by different people in the settlement. In this case, Imay and Hitu have a narrowed sense of ‘choices’ which they can use to fill their water portfolio, which has been somewhat alleviated only with the care undertaken by the manager of their tank.

Meanwhile, as demonstrated in the previous sections, though the free public resources are critical even for more ‘well-off’ families for their washing—for Imay and Hitu it forms an even more important lifeline, who reported relying on the river canal even for drinking when they cannot afford to purchase water:

> Sometimes we have to use the canal even for drinking, when there isn’t any water in our tank [E], or when we cannot afford to buy buckets. We can’t even really afford a purifier, so we just use cotton cloth as a filter… I know it is not good for us, but sometimes we don’t have any other way. We just have to drink it even though it may make us sick (B28M).

Moreover, the need to rely on public resources because of financial considerations also comes with other challenges: while Hitu is blind, Imay is in a wheelchair, and so collection falls to Hitu despite the challenges it poses to walk down to the riverside canal along a rocky and often muddy path. For Hitu however, the physical challenges of collection are compounded by the lack of support she receives from her neighbours, who she recalls will laugh at her if she falls or walks in the wrong direction:

> It is difficult for me to fetch water, but what can we do? We need water to survive. Hence, we tend to use the water very carefully. Sometimes, people talk about my disability when I go to collect water. People scold, but I cannot be angry. I need to tolerate such things (B29F).

Thus, like Amal, the young Madhesi renter, Imay and Hitu express a narrowed sense of choices which inform their material collection practices. While this is a product of financial and physical ability—it is also compounded by social relations in the settlement, which generates another layer of emotional vulnerability.

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20 A discussion of caste has not featured heavily in this analysis, as interviewed residents (of a range of castes) were quick to identify without exception that that older restrictions on the sharing of sources between castes were not observed in the settlement, i.e.: “we do not have enough sources here to be separating according to caste!” (B13F).
Likewise, the story of Binsa, also renting on the western side of the settlement, highlights the ways in which the private control of certain water sources takes an emotional toll. This is linked with the fact that sources such as tanks and wells have implicit social rules around who is entitled to draw from them, as explored in the previous chapter. Feelings of emotional vulnerability were especially referenced by women (poorer, usually on the west) who do not have access to their own private wells in their house compounds, or a community well they feel they can draw from. This is the case for Binsa, who rents a room on the west of the settlement with her husband and small daughter. She obtains the majority of her water for all purposes from the nearby tank E. When tank resources run low, she describes how she might ask to borrow some from her neighbour’s well, but also discusses the ‘scolding’ she will have to bear, thereby making this an unpleasant option:

Those with their own wells are obviously better off. For example, my husband’s elder sister has a well in her house, but she padlocks it. She is a bit stingy in water. I think she is better off, because she does not need to face scolding from others. When we collect 1-2 buckets of water, she may complain about us taking more water. So I need to pay even to wash the clothes (B26F).

The desire to avoid this experience of stigma or shame alters Binsa’s choices—in which she describes opting to pay extra to wash her clothes, rather than asking to borrow water from her relatives. Critically, Binsa identifies her sister in law as ‘better off’ not simply because she has access to her own private well, but because she does not have to face any ‘scolding’—explicitly linking her understanding of water access with a sense of emotional well-being.

Together, these examples demonstrate the ways in which emotions play a role in dictating the material practices of collection. These emotions are intimately linked with social context, and therefore change or influence the practices and understandings of water access. Critically—greater emotional, physical, or financial burdens are absorbed by particular bodies—particularly those on the west, poorer residents, or those of Madhesi ethnic group. Linking with the previous chapters then, this exploration lays the groundwork for understanding some of the more intimate sets of power relations in the settlement—around space, ethnicity, and class. As such, this chapter indicates that negotiations over ‘access’ are a result of residents’ ‘socio-spatial location’—in Bansighat,
an overlapping set of factors including location in the settlement and geographical conditions, as well as social categories related to class, tenure, and ethnicity.

7.4.4 Expanding Access: Urban Development Priorities

The previous sections highlighted the ways in which different material practices aimed at assembling a household water portfolio may vary according to different emotional or embodied calculations related to class, location in the settlement, or ethnicity. Important to this narrative is the use of multiple sources for different water needs, as well as the gendered nature of collection, which means that the burdens of sub-standard choices typically falls heavier upon (poorer/western dwelling/ Madhesi) women’s bodies. This defies perceptions of willingness or ability to pay, or of how well residents are ‘managing’, which often underpin discussions around access. In this way, this chapter demonstrated how water practices are intimately linked with the politics of social difference.

Departing from this analysis, the following section seeks to expand on the interventions and approaches in the water sector, as well as processes of ecological change impacting the city as a whole—as a way of demonstrating how this wider contextual environment also shapes these everyday negotiations. As discussed, the inability of the government to meet daily demands of Kathmandu through its piped network has meant that the majority of the city’s population has turned to (largely privately-run) businesses which extract water from rivers and lakes outside of the city to deliver to customers in the Valley. In informal settlements, major investment in water infrastructure was made only once in 2007, during a pilot project as a part of pro-poor water reforms—installing a series of community tanks, with deliveries made by the water company, KUKL. As discussed in greater detail in chapter six, this intervention was primarily aimed at increasing access to drinking water in the absence of piped infrastructure. Yet what emerges from the exploration of residents’ daily collection practices are the impacts of (partial) redistribution of resources, which can be evidenced in two important ways. Firstly, while water supplied from outside the Valley through delivery trucks (either from private or KUKL vendors) fills an important gap, water quality is also widely acknowledged to be extremely variable—attributed to rapid-paced urbanization, which has seen severe pollution as a result of heavy discharge from industry, domestic waste,
and the ejection of untreated sewage directly into the city’s rivers and lakes. This is further exacerbated by a lack of sufficient treatment plants as well as adequate regulation, which has meant that individual operators are responsible for treating water upon extraction at the source, whether obtained from deep boring wells, aquifers, or rivers and streams located outside of the Valley (Shrestha & Shukla, 2010).

This has had demonstrable impacts on the quality of water provision. A 2010 study monitoring Kathmandu’s drinking water quality undertaken by the Environment and Public Health Organization (ENPHO) indicated that 53% of samples taken at different points of the water supply chain (source, reservoir, public and private taps), did not meet the Drinking Water Quality Standards (ENPHO, 2016). As those operators who serve the community tanks A-D in Bansighat work under the umbrella of KUKL, they are in theory, held to higher regulatory oversight by the Kathmandu Valley Water Supply Board than the rogue private water tanker trucks. Nonetheless, the quality of even these government-regulated deliveries was often met with suspicion from residents—evidenced in the choice of many residents to rely on jarred water. As discussed, for Bansighat residents, these concerns centred in part as to whether the water was properly treated, but also on the possibilities of contamination during both the transport and storage process. These concerns are intensified for the users of tank (E) in the west, which has been unable to use the KUKL vendors, relying instead upon the private operators. Similarly, those residents who are not included in the monthly tank groups, and buy water from the handful of unregulated private tank vendors, report significant challenges with quality: “Often we have dirty water in the private tanks. For example, sometimes in the water we can find lots of dirt, and sometimes there are lots of chemicals in it” (B17M). Nor are these concerns around quality limited to Bansighat, but are present throughout informal settlements in Kathmandu. In a final research workshop, residents across multiple settlements expressed exasperation at the inability to test the quality of water of their public sources (often resorting to rudimentary filters)—or to hold service providers to account when water was substandard:

One problem we face is that the water refilled in the LICSU tanks are not drinkable at all. We have raised this issue to the management. They say that during the monsoon only the water is not clean. But the problem is not just during monsoons. We have asked them so many times to bring clean and clear water, but nothing has changed (Tau, federation leader in Shankamul).
While it is recognized that there is an urgent need for regulation, the ongoing promise of the Melamchi project, as well as the power of private tanker operators, has inhibited potential reforms. As explained by Prakash Amatya, a prominent water activist in Kathmandu:

Why haven’t we seen more reforms in the city around quality? It’s because the whole system is being controlled by the mafias. For example, one of the reasons why the water is not of good quality is because the tankers are very old. The government has recently promulgated a new law that ban public vehicles more than 20 years old, which would apply to most of these operators. But these people refuse to comply. They are saying that after the Melamchi water supply is functional, their businesses will go down. That’s why they don’t want to buy new tankers; neither do they want to implement a color-coding system for the ones that are in operation. But if the government does not regulate them, it might affect the population’s health. These people have too much control.

As Prakash explains, a belief in the imminence of the Melamchi project means that private businesses are unwilling to comply with reforms which would address quality issues in the immediate-term. For the majority of Kathmandu’s residents, this means the continued widespread reliance on bottled jarred water for drinking. For Bansighat residents however, water delivered by tankers is still the major source of drinking water about half of the time. Therefore, without better regulatory or accountability mechanisms, the only option available for residents who wish to access the highest quality drinking water is to purchase water in jars, at prices that can be extremely prohibitive. As a result, poorer residents (often women) have few options than to simply ‘absorb’ the risks—whether health burdens of bad water, or the suppression of eating and drinking.

Secondly, and related to this, it is impossible to ignore the overwhelming emphasis that water reform discussions have given to the Melamchi project over the last thirty years. Major investment has therefore centred on rehabilitating or extended the piped water network through the construction of a 26km tunnel. On the one hand, as discussed, the institutional focus on this process has distracted from even short-term interventions which might address quality concerns in the present for low-income residents. Meanwhile, little work has been done to unravel how residents within the city are differently impacted by scarcity—or might differentially benefit from redistributive measures envisioned by this project (Domènech, March, & Saurí, 2013). In fact, without
specific provisions for the urban poor (increasing at twice the rate of the city as a whole), the Dam project is likely to increase inequalities as the price of tariffs increase, thereby not significantly affecting experienced scarcity.

Moreover, the prioritization of the Dam has also meant that there have been few overtures to preserve existing natural resources—such as the canals and wells in Bansighat, or historic ‘stone spouts’ elsewhere in the city—which have played a critical role for lower-income Kathmandu residents. In Bansighat, residents were quick to link the degradation of public resources to urban development patterns such as intensive construction and the placement of a new dumpsite—which have put these sources at increasing risk:

The water levels in the wells here have been getting worse over the recent years, as the constant construction to build new concrete houses and roads around here has made the water go down. It also contaminates the water, and immediately dirties your clothing. Four or five years ago it was not like this—we had lots of water in the canal, and we could go any time of day. We could wash non-stop. Now there are long queues in the canal and we have to struggle a lot to collect from it (B12F).

The water situation has been getting worse here lately because the government has made a temporary dump site in this area. There was strike led by residents who lived near to the area where a new site was original proposed, so when that happened they just moved all the trash to the Bansighat area about five years ago. This pollution affects us in the wells and canals (B9M).

In fact, the degradation of public resources in Bansighat is a part of a wider pattern occurring at the city level, in which the insufficient recharge of the water table has been attributed to unregulated building construction, rapid infrastructure growth, and unregulated groundwater extraction (Pandey, Chapagain, & Kazama, 2009). This has been picked up by water activists in the country, which have critiqued interventions such as the Melamchi project for not focusing on other underused forms of water, including the recharging of groundwater, rainwater harvests, the construction of shallow wells or rehabilitation of the traditional stone spouts (Domènech, March, & Sauri, 2013).
These charges have been acknowledged by Kathmandu municipality to a certain extent, which has undertaken some large-scale projects in recent years to address some of these concerns, and particularly in response to the pollution of the river. The ongoing Bagmati Area Physical Infrastructure Project, for example, aims to better manage the ecology of the Bagmati river and its tributaries, while large-scale infrastructure investments facilitated by ADB seeks to address the lack of adequate sewerage drainage—both of which are threats to the public resources of Bansighat. Nonetheless, other urban planning priorities contain contradictions for residents of informal settlements. For instance, major infrastructural investment, particularly through the ongoing Road Expansion Project (since 2011) has increasingly impacted informal neighbourhoods, and in at least two settlements residents reported that construction has actually covered over public wells, putting further stressors on already limited water resources:

> Previously, we had dug a well collectively but it has been covered by the road. So 16 families collected money and made a borehole instead, which is providing them with water. Only these 16 houses use this though. This creates challenges for the rest of the neighbourhood now, especially the upper part of the settlement where water does not flow.” (Rai, Shankamul)

As in Bansighat, the challenges stemming from the loss of public resources was also a repeated theme in each of the participatory photography workshops—referring to a broad range of settlements throughout Kathmandu—also often attributed by residents to either population growth or intensive urban development practices (Image 7.6 & Image 7.7).
As such, it is also critical to highlight how the depletion of public resources in Kathmandu is not a natural effect of changes over time, but is in fact driven by particular patterns of unregulated urban development in the city. These development priorities have led to the degradation of public resources and depletion of the water table, while simultaneously major construction has increasingly covered or destroyed existing resources. Without the recognition of the significant role of these alternate public resources, residents of informal settlements are unlikely to be able to fulfil their water needs even if the large-scale dam project is successfully completed.

These two points, related to the jarred water market and issues of quality, as well as the neglect of valuable public resources, is indicative of the “distributional and allocational assumptions” (Joy et al., 2014, p. 955) at the policy-level about the kinds of water needed—without recognition of the multiple ways in which scarcity and access is experienced. Holding the material practices of Bansighat residents against these policy and programmatic priorities helps demonstrate the ways in which the wider ecological and urban environment shapes the choices and opportunities for diverse Bansighat residents to assemble their water portfolios, contributing to the shaping of socio-spatial inequalities.
In this way, the ‘everyday politics of access’, can be understood as related to the particular geographical conditions of Bansighat, different social relations related to gender, class, or ethnic identity, as well as priorities and interventions of the water sector. Applying this framework helped draw out the different embodied experiences of risk, which linked two key material practices of household water access with different perceptions—revealing great socio-spatial diversity across the settlement in the ways these risks are absorbed. Understanding how these wider priorities as well as localized social relations come to bear upon different bodies helped to move beyond an analysis of ‘practices’—to understand how water access is shaped by a politics of difference.

7.5 Citizenship Contestations

One of the critical implications of the analysis above is the ways in which water access is experienced—which goes far beyond allocational questions of pricing, quality or quantity. The following section departs from this point, seeking to explore what these differences in access mean for the experience of citizenship. In particular, these everyday negotiations are understood to speak more specifically to two out of the four key citizenship values explored in this thesis: the redistribution of resources, and the ability to affect a measure of self-determination over water choices.

7.5.1 Redistribution

One of the key things explored in this chapter are the multiple and changing patterns of household access, which are conditioned by multiple factors—including social relations related to identity (income, location in the settlement, ethnicity)—but also how this intersects with the presence of physical infrastructure, the hydrological and spatial conditions of the settlement, and urban investment priorities. Thus, even the same types of infrastructure might be used differently across the settlement, and residents have different (natural or built) sources available to them dependent on who they are or where they live.

What this reveals is that the redistribution of water resources through the installation of ‘improved’ sources has been partial. On the one hand, the community tanks still represent the most significant source of water in the settlement. And identified in the previous chapter, their communal nature holds the potential for collective strategizing
around water, linking services with broader claims around citizenship beyond the redistributive benefits. However, this chapter was focused particularly on the practices outside of these tanks, which also represent a vital part of access, and which might otherwise go overlooked.

Firstly, for all residents, water of the highest quality can only be obtained by purchasing jarred water from private vendors. These strategies are individualized and economic, meaning that the right to (quality) water can only be accessed through the market—sometimes at the sacrifice of other necessities. Meanwhile, the burdens of not being able to access high quality water fall predominantly to women in the settlement (especially poorer ones), who must additionally care for sick family members, or identify other household areas to cut back from, as in the example of Kalavita who might forgo food to secure safe water for her daughter. In other words, a lack of action on the provision of good quality water is in effect subsidized by the bodies of women, who bear this burden through various compensation strategies. This echoes work within feminist political economy, which has looked at the ways in which women’s reproductive labour has been critical in maintaining global capitalist expansion (Nagar et al., 2002). While the regulation and monitoring of water tanker trucks has been proposed within the municipality, discussions have never focused on the jarred water companies. This is with one notable recent exception—when during the post-earthquake crisis residents report that jarred water was distributed throughout the settlement. Yet for residents such as Kalavita, it is important to highlight that the daily demands of water collection might be similarly understood as a crisis, but have not been recognized as such in policy discussions around water scarcity.

Secondly, the existing system of water supply hasn’t satisfactorily answered questions of sufficiency. An exploration of the everyday politics around access demonstrated that addressing this requires a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, it requires increasing the regularity of service delivery to the community tanks, which currently stands at once a week (during the best of times). In the final workshop with residents from multiple settlements, this was identified as a key potential point of advocacy, which would allow the community tanks to distribute greater amounts to their members. For relatively well-off residents of Bansighat—particularly those living on the
east side and who are community tank members—this would profoundly support supply issues, and potentially reduce pressures on the public resources. Yet it is also important to remember that in Bansighat there are more household demands being made on the western tanks than those on the east, as a result of the poorer quality public resources. As such, simply increasing regularity may not address these spatial inequalities. This is a particularly important point given the reflections of the previous chapter, which indicated that these spatial divisions and differences are not arbitrary, but rather reflect deeper social principles which have been used to organize the settlement and its resources. What it means in this case is that even the seemingly same infrastructures (in this case: community tanks), can be used in different ways as a result of intersecting material and spatial realities—constraining some in less visible ways.

Furthermore, it can also be concluded that increasing the regularity of deliveries would be unlikely to impact upon those residents that are most poor, excluded from the community tank groups, or who simply cannot afford even the subsidized rates for paid water. This highlights the second strategy which might better support the redistribution of resources—around the fundamental importance of dealing seriously with the need to rehabilitate public resources, so that they may continue to be used safely—especially by the most vulnerable residents who rely upon them heavily. Treating these sources as secondary is only likely to further disenfranchise these residents, who may not have the capacity to undertake their own improvements or shuffle their portfolios in any other way. This is a critical point in the context of wider development patterns which have continued to degrade or make these sources less viable. Similarly, the necessity of nuancing of ‘water access’ to include public resources for washing is a particularly important counterpoint to the Constitutional narrative which foregrounds ‘drinking water’ rights. This policy-driven priority is not isolated to the Nepal context, but is also replicated at the international scale, which tends to focus on “improved sources” for drinking, often eliding water needs related to washing and cleaning purposes (Joshi et al., 2011)\textsuperscript{21}. Short of increasing water quantity and quality significantly (at an affordable

\textsuperscript{21} This is evidenced, for example, in the case of water and sanitation narratives in both the Millennium Development Goals as well as newly introduced Sustainable Development Goals. MDG goal seven was much cited as a successful statistic—aimed at halving the proportion of people without adequate access to drinking water by 2015. While significant progress to this aim was made, this did not include water for bathing, washing, or cleaning, an oversight that impacts
price), there is an urgent need for national discourses to reprioritize and recognize these often-invisible uses of water.

### 7.5.2 Self-Determination

The above points are largely focused on improving the technical nuts and bolts of water delivery for residents, thereby better allowing them to enjoy their citizenship status around the right to water. In other words, the previous explorations might be helpful in understanding how the right to water is better realized through urban water policy and programmes. However, focusing on the everyday politics of household water access also reveals a second space where citizenship can be seen to be negotiated, raising deeper questions about the ability of different residents to actually engage with the physical technologies of water. This is related to the way in which self-determination (for some) is constrained through the process of water collection. Exploring this is to take seriously the feminist assertion that ‘non-material goods’ such as autonomy or self-respect are also critical to the experience of citizenship (Lister, 2003; Young, 1989). In Bansighat this is seen in the ways in which certain people are differently affected by the same kinds of scarcity, particularly where looking at embodied experiences around shame or stigma. This chapter raised the point that while all residents undertake a series of choices about which sources to use and why—in some cases these options are limited not by technological concerns, but by social norms. Importantly, this may be less of a practical concern and more a symbolic one, as evidenced in Alam’s words:

> Even if we are willing to pay for the community tank we cannot get water because they discriminate against us, which is not fair…. But actually, we are happy with these private tankers. They have water regularly so it is not a problem for us (B17M).

In other words, for Alam the concern around water access was articulated not so much as related to the insufficiency of water, but rather in relation to his sense of exclusion from the collectively-managed sources. Related to this, there are real implications for how water collection affects residents’ daily emotions, particularly those that are locked upon women significantly. While the SDGs have attempted to acknowledge water for alternate uses through a newfound emphasis on hygiene (with a bias towards ‘handwashing’), it still remains to be seen the extent to which this refers to water for bathing or washing clothes or flushing toilets.
out of higher quality resources as a result of income, location, or ethnicity. In the case of Hitu and Imay—the young family that might resort to drinking from the (highly polluted) canal—they make the point of ‘not having any option’ other than risking sickness, demonstrating the ways in which the inability to access safe water is linked with a wider sense of disenfranchisement, or a narrowing of their own choices. In this way, water access is linked also with unequal bodily experiences, as (some) resident draw from more polluted sources or walk further distances with heavier loads. The impacts of this narrowing of choices is echoed also in the reference to ‘scolding’ and ‘shame’ which residents without their own private wells spoke openly of when borrowing from neighbours. Or in the unwillingness of Alam, the young Madhesi renter, to ‘postpone washing’ like many residents reported doing during times of scarcity, as he identified his profession and his ethnicity as already marking him as ‘unhygienic’ to many of his neighbours. In all three cases, the inability to access water is expressed not only in the lack of resources, but is also directly related with a sense of emotional security or the desire to avoid further discrimination in the settlement. Bodily risks, physical hardship, or emotional shame are experienced unevenly in the process of water access, impacted by residents’ different social positions (Sultana, 2007; Truelove, 2011). In this way, inequities in water distribution continue to reinforce or generate new inequalities which may be harder to capture or measure, but which nonetheless impact how citizenship is experienced.

7.6 Conclusion

The analysis above demonstrates the plurality of water sources in Bansighat, highlighting the challenge of understanding how residents are actually accessing water, and in their diversity. What can be seen is a constant and shifting attempt to maximize and optimize resources through different material practices— influenced by a range of factors including the ecological conditions of the settlement, localized power relations, infrastructural technologies, and urban investment priorities. Looking at this everyday politics of access demonstrates that not all residents have the same options available to them to combine different sources and meet their daily needs with dignity.

This has a profound impact upon citizenship in different ways, highlighting the gap between the formal right to water and how this has been experienced substantively.
These disjunctures and policy gaps in the current dominant discourses around water access speak to what Ahlers and Zwarteveen (2009) identify as the de-politicization of water. At the city scale, this means attributing water scarcity to issues such as the rising population, rather than the identification of unsustainable drilling practices and urban development practices which have impacted public resources, as well as institutional narratives around privatization which have compromised residents’ ability to access high quality water. Similarly, while there are many shared challenges amongst residents, strategies to obtain water may vary significantly between different sets of people (Nganyanya, et al., 2014). This de-politicization is made more explicit when it is linked with citizenship—demonstrating how the partial energy to redistribute resources (while significant), has still left behind the most vulnerable residents in important ways, impacting also upon their ability to exercise control over their own lives. As such, 'access' as experienced at the household level is not simply a product of having water or not, or how much residents are willing or able to pay for it, but is intimately linked with these everyday politics around the diverse collection practices, spatial and geographical features, as well as residents’ different identities.
Chapter 8 Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This thesis proposed a mechanism for understanding the ‘everyday politics of water’—outlining a conceptual framework to help open up the dynamic interactions between the daily material practices of residents, the nuts and bolts of infrastructure, intangible dynamics related to values and perceptions, and how this impacts on and is impacted by social-power relations. Critically, these political negotiations within Bansighat cannot be extricated from the contextual environment in which they operate—impacted by wider trends underpinning urban development and water policy in Kathmandu, processes of ecological change, or social and gender norms. Within each chapter, this thesis sought to draw together an analysis of theses localized and embedded everyday politics, demonstrating the implications for moving towards a substantive vision of citizenship for diverse sets of residents. Taking as its entry point material practices occurring at different scales, this revealed everyday political negotiations around belonging, participation, and access.

This concluding chapter brings together the theoretical and practical contributions of this thesis—outlining its contribution to literature exploring everyday practices, power, and politics, as well as infrastructural services and citizenship. It also seeks to outline implications for organizations or practitioners working in the development sector, particularly around water in urban settlements. In order to do so, this chapter proceeds as follows: it firstly engages with three interlocking findings which build up from the three scales across the analytical chapters. It secondly explores the theoretical contribution to knowledge, and some of the limitations of the study. It finally outlines the implications for practitioners in Kathmandu, or those working more generally with water interventions in a range of urban contexts.
8.2 Three Interlocking Conclusions

8.2.1 Decision-Making on Water Resources is Socially Embedded—Challenging Conceptions of the (Economically) ‘Rational Actor’

A clear theme which emerged throughout the three analytical chapters is the complexity of decision-making which underpins how residents are using water resources. This challenges a conception of ‘economically rational’ decision-making—i.e. making the most cost-efficient choices—opening up a range of different motivations which structure daily practices. Chapter seven in particular highlighted the range of ways in which residents assemble their ‘water portfolio’—drawing upon different sources to fulfil varied water needs, from drinking to cooking, to washing. This challenged simple conceptions of ‘access’, building the case for a deeper examination of the reasons why residents choose different sources over others—which is often based on embodied, emotional, or social reasons. In particular, focusing on the household (and body) demonstrated the ways in which personal feelings of shame or care dictated different choices, as well as the embodied and invisible ‘costs’ that are absorbed especially by poorer residents. This was demonstrated in the willingness of even very poor residents to purchase higher-quality water at great personal burden—sacrificing food or water consumption—or in the case of the resident who worked as a wastepicker, continuing to pay for washing resources in order to challenge the ‘unclean’ stigma of his profession.

Furthermore, applying the framework of the everyday politics of water was critical in demonstrating how ‘access’ is deeply conditioned by the water policy environment, in which the highest quality water is still obtained only with an economic and individualized ability to engage with the (unregulated) jarred water market, and in which residents continue to draw heavily from rapidly-depleting ‘sub-standard’ resources, such as the free wells and canals. Adopting the framework was therefore useful in unpacking how these drivers impacted diverse residents unequally, and revealed a range of motivations which underpinned household decision-making on water access, which often moved beyond simple calculations of cost, and was embedded in localized negotiations.
Similar reflections were evident at the community scale, which focused more on the social rules around how different community sources are used. What emerged was a clear set of perceptions around the entitlement to use different sources—often forged around existing networks, collective action, or financial investment. Indeed, these social rules were so strong that they persisted even in the absence of the infrastructure they were founded upon, as in the case of the broken tank C, in which residents were still prohibited to use other sources despite the fact that theirs no longer existed. Critically, this chapter demonstrated that these localized social rules cannot be separated from the wider context of ecological change, degradation of water resources, and rapid population growth, which has placed additional pressures on existing services. Here, examining the discursive framings around the use and management of communal sources was critical in opening up contradictory narratives. In particular, while for some the restriction of the tanks to delimited members was ostensibly for ‘practical’ reasons to better allocate water, for others this was articulated as a way to safeguard limited resources for those considered to be entitled to use these sources. This challenged conceptions of ‘participation’ which are disembodied from the existing sets of social and power relations—highlighting the necessity of understanding how these localized politics, as well as ecological conditions, can shape or impact upon institutional design.

This influence of socially embedded decision-making was likewise explored in chapter five, which explored the ways in which some residents (on the west) opted to continue paying bills for the non-functioning municipal pipeline (what community leader Sona refers to as ‘paying for air in the pipes’). Though residents may not do so for economically rational reasons, these residents articulated a clear set of symbolic reasons for engaging in this practice—related to both present and future security (“later on, it is possible this can help us claim for the land and our rights” (B3M)). Critically, those six families (attached to tank D) who continued to pay expressed that this was necessary given that they did not have the same secure relationship with local authorities as residents on the eastern side, highlighting again how localized power dynamics can shape different material practices and priorities.

What can be seen cross-cutting these three chapters is that decision-making on water cannot be reduced to straightforward understandings of residents as ‘rational’ economic actors, but must instead be seen as embedded in social context (Cleaver, 2000). A focus
on these socially embedded rationalities is important, as many of the ‘design principles’ (Ostrom, 1990)—or the discussions of institutional rules which generate good governance—are underpinned by an assumption that residents will operate for the collective good if given the appropriate institutional set-up. As such, a focus on the everyday politics of water helps make the case for an increased focus on the ways in which different social rules are shaped, and how that corresponds (or not) with particularly ‘communities’ or institutions of water management. Together, these chapters open up a fruitful discussion on the roles that these socially embedded rules play in shaping the experience of substantive citizenship.

8.2.2 Distributional Issues are Connected with Wider Socio-Spatial Injustices

The second major proposition which cuts across this thesis is the correlation between space, infrastructure and social relations. While the relationship between water infrastructure and social power has been previously explored, this is most often traced at a larger scale, examining the ways in which power impacts the distribution and management of infrastructure across the city (e.g. Gandy, 2008; Swyngedouw, 1995). Thus, this thesis contributes to explorations of the ways in which these dynamics occur even within a single neighbourhood—demonstrating how the spatial distribution of infrastructure can replicate or consolidate power at the micro-scale.

Throughout this thesis, what has been demonstrated are the ways in which infrastructure follows (and consolidates) power across spatial lines. At the city scale, chapter five revealed that residents living on the west (and especially western Madhesi tenants) are on the whole less represented, less knowledgeable about community works, and least likely to have a stake in neighbourhood planning. Moreover, this trend is likewise mirrored across the city, which is reflective of the wider social stigma faced by members of this ethnic group. In Bansighat, (as well as other settlements) it is not an accident that the Madhesi occupy the most marginal land, and only exist as renters in the settlement—as indicated by several residents who reported prohibitions on constructing their own houses in the settlement in prior years when space was still available. This sense of social discrimination has undoubtedly been compounded by legal citizenship exclusions which have made it harder for members of this groups to
gain documentation, as well as recent political contestations in the Terai border region, which has intensified social unrest.

Critically, chapter six deepened this reflection, by demonstrating that these discrepancies in infrastructure distribution specific to Bansighat were not simply the product of a neutral or coincidental process. Examining the discursive framings around infrastructure entitlements, this chapter firstly presented an apolitical interpretation—that the better access to services on the eastern half of the settlement was the result of the fact that it was first to develop on the highest lying and better quality land, the first to consolidate around community collective action, and therefore (naturally) able to obtain better infrastructure. However, unpacking alternate discursive framings across the settlement revealed how the stratification of infrastructure is intimately linked with the inner workings of power. For instance, it is significant that the women’s federation only works on the eastern half of the settlement – and never expanded its membership base to the newer population on the western side. While the work that this group has achieved for Bansighat is significant—there has been little evidence of this structure representing both halves of the settlement, with particular ramifications for the newer, and especially rental, population. Meanwhile, the more broad-based role that the federation plays has been recognized by organizations working in the city as a model of ‘good participation’—leading further support to be channelled through these leaders, and additionally consolidating their authority. Taking this into account, it no longer appears neutral or accidental that the eastern half of the settlement is better served, as resources and programmes continue to be channelled through this structure—which explicitly does not seek to represent diverse residents across the settlement as a whole. Returning to the points made in chapter five, applying the framework at the community scale was thus critical in revealing the ways in which the additional emotional or physical impacts experienced by predominantly western, poorer, residents is, in fact, inherently political.

Finally, chapter seven outlined the invisible emotional and physical burdens which some residents absorbed as a part of assembling their water portfolio. In particular, this chapter highlighted how differing perceptions of ‘managing’ were influenced by localized spatial dynamics—with clear differences expressed between the east and west of the settlement. That is, the higher quality land and clustering of sources on the east of
the settlement meant that (especially poorer) women on the west were likely to suffer more (either physically, financially, or emotionally) from inadequate access to water, as a result of a ‘narrowing of choices’ from which they might draw.

What links these three chapters are the ways in which infrastructure becomes the physical manifestation of difference—both reflecting and reinforcing sets of social and power relations in Bansighat. This suggests that the way in which infrastructure is implemented, the sets of residents that manage it, where they are placed, and who is allowed to use these sources are fundamental in understanding how well infrastructure is able to meet some of the broader aims of substantive citizenship. In this case, remaining cognizant of the broader exclusions faced by certain groups in Nepali society, as well as taking a temporal perspective on the running of the communal water tanks, is key to unpacking some of these dynamics.

8.2.3 Residents are Engaged in the Construction of Legitimacy Through Services, Generating Social Subjectivities

Finally, the last message identified by this thesis are the ways in which material practices around infrastructure can play a role in consolidating social subjectivities. This first emerged in chapter five, which explored the demonstration of ‘environmental behaviour’ adopted at the city-wide level by the federation, as a way of countering the wider urban development narratives which positioned informal settlement residents as polluters of the riverside. Likewise, the payment on services was conceived of as an important demonstration not only of length of time in the settlement, but also as a way of fulfilling more symbolic aims around citizenship (or in the words of the programme manager of Mahila Ekta Samaj: “we are paying taxes—so we are citizens here!”). From one perspective, these practices aimed at demonstrating legitimacy, and a positive contribution through acts as ‘good citizens’, are key in demonstrating how active residents can organize to challenge urban approaches (such as the Bagmati Action Plan), which have actively excluded the urban poor. In particular, practices aimed at demonstrating environmental and orderly behaviour were deployed by members of the federation as a counter-narrative to language of the ‘polluting squatter’—which have proliferated in accounts in the media or from policy-makers. In doing so, these material practices played a critical symbolic role, reshaping narratives of informal settlement residents across the city.
Yet while effective in many ways, this has also generated new exclusionary subject categories—generating distinctions between those residents that are able to conform to this framing, while leaving behind others that are imaged as unclean or unordered. In relation to renters, for instance, the exclusion from communal water sources was justified on the basis that renters are a drain on already stretched services—“nowadays as the rental population has increased drastically, so I think the things are degrading” (B33F). In other words, renters were portrayed as a threat to the ongoing advocacy work being undertaken by federation leadership across the city, and were therefore not incorporated into many of the projects being undertaken in Bansighat. Such framings are particularly important in the context in which limited space, increasing land values, and high rates of urbanization mean that the rental population within Kathmandu’s informal settlements is likely to continually increase.

This reflection likewise emerged in chapter six, which sought to outline the discursive distinctions drawn between the different management structures of the water tanks. Here, the federation-run tanks A and B, which undertook activities such as the reinvestment of water profits into community activities, was framed by eastern leaders as meaning their tanks were “a good success story” (B32F). This became a specific point of contrast to the “badly managed” (B7F) tanks on the western side, in which rumours of political patronage were used to discredit the workings of these water managers and residents on the west. Adopting the everyday politics framework helped to explore how material practices were imbued with broader meaning, and how these generated social distinctions across the different sides of the settlement.

However, perhaps most critically were the issues this thesis raised around the exclusions of the Madhesi ethnic group, and the way in which this generated different emotional or bodily outcomes. Chapter seven demonstrated how the reliance on symbolic narratives of cleanliness and order as a marker of a ‘good citizen’ was simultaneously used to delegitimize members of this ethnic group. This was justified on the basis of the fact that Madhesi residents most often engage in ‘unclean’ occupations such as waste picking or begging. Chapter five went on to explore how certain water practices—such as using the riverside as a toilet, or drinking from polluted sources—as evidence of the ‘unclean’ nature of Madhesi residents. Ultimately what this means is that these residents are caught in a negative feedback loop—in which substandard practices are used to
discriminate against them (“they pee and shit on the roads, they steal, they are drunkards and very dirty…they come here and make a mess” (B24F)), while this discrimination acts as a barrier to accessing services (“even if we are willing to pay for 150 RS [for tank A & B] we cannot get water because they discriminate against us” (B17M). This opens up a reflection on the embodied experiences of stigma and shame which will be intensified for members of this group as rental residents on the west, and which both reflects and reinforces their subordinate position. These wider social injustices thus manifest and are exacerbated through water inequalities—highlighting the ways in which (water) vulnerabilities are linked with social context. Understanding these different embodied experiences, discursive framings and symbolic narratives was therefore critical in linking material practices around infrastructure to the perceptions and construction of different subject categories, and how this opens up (or closes) different possibilities for relating to a citizenship project.

8.3 Research Implications

8.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

This section outlines the contributions to theory made by this work, as well as offering clear indications for future research agendas.

8.3.1.1 Infrastructure, Power, and Urban Politics

The first set of debates which this thesis contributes to are those which have sought to explore the everyday experiences of men and women around infrastructure, outlining the lived, heterogeneous, and socially embedded nature of services. This echoes authors which have sought to redefine what infrastructure is—outlining its socio-political dimensions at the point of use (Bjorkman, 2014; Lawhon et. al, 2018; Graham and McFarlane, 2015). In doing so, this has demonstrated the ways in which the technical material of infrastructure is linked with social processes, and how this either opens up or constrains the possibilities for different residents not only to make use of infrastructure, but also to contribute to a broader emancipatory urban politics.

As such, a key theoretical contribution of this thesis is in moving the discussion of infrastructure beyond conceptions of location, price, quality, or quantity, to the (everyday) relationships of power which dictate how infrastructure is unraveled, experienced, and improvised, with differential outcomes. In the case of Bansighat, the
ability of infrastructure to contribute to a new kind of ‘urban sociability’ (Amin, 2014) was most clearly outlined in the discussion of the water tanker system. Here, the ‘tank managers’ demonstrated a variable ability to translate their work into a form of legitimacy within the city, with the ‘good’ (federation) managers of tank A&B able to capitalize on their previous financial advantages to further extend their influence in the neighbourhood and city. Furthermore, those women who have taken on leadership or active roles in the federation have had the opportunity to consolidate their knowledge and capacity around water and activism more generally—linked with an increased sense of self-determination. The organizational power of the women’s federation, and sophisticated way they have linked services with broader claims to rights in the city, offers valuable lessons for how informal settlement residents have transformed infrastructure into a broader political project.

At the same time, the performance of these water practices (payment of bills on services, installation of green infrastructure, management of communal services) is also founded upon the exclusion of those that do not conform to this ‘legitimate’ image—particularly affecting newcomers (renters generally, and the Madhesi more specifically). Meanwhile, for ‘water users’ the ability to appropriate different infrastructures is intimately linked with social hierarchies founded upon membership in the federation, tenure status, and ethnicity, as well as geological conditions of the settlement. These examples give life to the claim of Swyngedouw & Heynen (2003) that infrastructure is capable of generating new patterns of ‘winners and losers’, requiring an examination of community collective which demonstrates the ways power is consolidated through infrastructure, as well as its exclusionary faces. As such, this thesis builds upon literature which has looked at the ways in which ‘participation’ in community collective action can be both emancipatory and repressive—helping to disaggregate the impact amongst diverse identities (Meth, 2010; Miraftab & Wills, 2005). While works have examined how different identities become excluded from urban programmes or infrastructure, this thesis also explores the ways in which subjectivities are produced and delegitimized through infrastructure.

Where this thesis particularly contributes, however, is the insistence upon a scalar analysis to open up this discussion of urban politics, power, and infrastructure. Thus, each empirical chapter sought to outline how wider urban changes, policy and
programmatic priorities or infrastructural investments are played out, negotiated, replicated, or contested in everyday life across the themes of belonging, participation, and access. In doing so, this thesis highlighted, for instance, critical tensions between rights (to shelter or water) as enshrined by the Constitution, and ongoing investment through the Bagmati Action Plan which has undermined these rights, and informed the tactics of the federation to demonstrate ‘clean’ and ‘orderly’ behaviour. It has examined the framings of ‘water scarcity’ in policy discourses, and how this has driven investments in pipes and tanks, while missing the rehabilitation of public resources which are vital for negotiating water access for the most vulnerable residents. And it has demonstrated how wider social stigma around informal settlement residents as polluters, rumours of ‘fake squatters’, or claims that the Madhesi are ‘not Nepali’ play out in localized spaces, and the ways in which this concretely impacts infrastructural entitlements, and increases vulnerability for diverse residents in daily life.

Thus, this thesis makes a key contribution in theorizing the role of infrastructure in consolidating power—and the sometimes-contradictory ways this can both open up spaces for alternative democratic imaginings, while also further entrenching processes of marginalization for the most vulnerable residents. Critical to these reflections was a scalar perspective: examining how policy and programmatic priorities are imbued with their own material, discursive, and symbolic implications in everyday life, and how this shapes the possibilities of infrastructure to either open up new forms of urban sociability, or further processes of stigmatization. As such, a key agenda for future research lies in examining the different modalities, rationalities, or governance structures of infrastructure, as well as the wider hydro-political environment they operate within, and how this gives shape to particular forms of urban infrastructural politics.

8.3.1.2 Infra-Structural Relations: Gender and Citizenship

The second theoretical contribution of this thesis is in linking the debates around urban infrastructural and citizenship. This draws upon reflections from both ‘insurgent’ (Holston, 2009) and ‘ordinary’ (Staeheli et al., 2012) formulations of citizenship, which have made the case that ‘materialities’ matter’ for the production of broader notions of legitimacy, belonging, or entitlement. This lays out a vision of citizenship which moves beyond the conception of rights or a status, but exploring the ways in which relations...
between citizens and the state is negotiated through (often mundane) activities of daily life.

In doing so, this thesis contributes to a small but emerging set of debates that have explicitly set out to link infrastructure and citizenship. This includes works that have focused more on the agency of objects in disciplining or ordering citizen-subjects (Loftus, 2006; von Schnizler, 2008), as well discussions of how residents appropriate technologies to propose their own conceptions of what it is to be a good citizen (Meehan, 2014; Ranganathan, 2014). This also echoes authors which have outlined infrastructure as a key space through which the urban poor interact with the state (Anjaria, 2011; Das, 2011), exploring how access to housing or infrastructure is structured by, and structures, citizen-subjectivities and practices (Oldfield and Greyling, 2015; Truelove, 2011). Whether formulated as ‘hydraulic’ (Anand, 2011; 2017) or ‘infrastructural’ (Lemanski, 2018), this thesis demonstrated the ways in which infrastructure and citizenship are intimately linked with property, social belonging, and the material conditions of infrastructure and the settlement.

However, the particular contribution of this thesis lies in bringing feminist debates on citizenship to this discussion of infrastructure as social embedded. That is, if Simone’s (2004) concept ‘people as infrastructure’ tells of the critical role played by men and women in extending the technical provisioning of the city through the circulation of bodies and objects—a gendered lens allows us to see the uneven distribution of bodily disadvantages—whether through experiences of shame, fear or physical burdens. Merging this focus on lived or everyday experiences of infrastructure with feminist debates on citizenship indicates the critical need to collapse the distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ spaces, understanding how private or bodily experiences sustain infrastructural negotiations in the public sphere. This lays the groundwork for exploring how infrastructure (and by extension—citizenship) is intersected by patriarchal, classist or racialized power relations operating at multiple scales.

This was demonstrated most clearly, for instance, where examining the ‘negative feedback loop’ experienced by Madhesi tenants, where their lack of infrastructure on the one hand fed into a wider stigma around being unhygienic, while on the other hand, this stigma (and fears of sharing with the ‘unclean’) was used to justify the exclusion of these
residents from the use of improved water or sanitation facilities. As a result, these residents engaged in a range of adaptive strategies, including paying more for washing water to maintain the image of looking neat, bearing scolding when borrowing neighbours’ toilets, or foregoing food or drinking from substandard sources as they have been prohibited from the use of the higher quality tanks. Cutting across these reflections are the ways in which these choices were ‘paid for’ in embodied or emotional ways, such as the internalization of shame, scolding, or other bodily payments (such as not eating) for the most disadvantaged residents in the settlement, with greater burdens experienced variously by poorer women, and especially those of the Madhesi group. These examples indicated how negotiations across public and private spaces are intertwined—with choices in ‘public’ sustained by compromises in ‘private’, or private bodily practices (around sanitation or hygiene, for example), spilling out into the public arena—whether materially, through the use of the riverside out of a lack of other options, or in public discourse which is used to shame or stigmatize certain residents, reflecting (an often compounded) discrimination across gender, class, or ethnicity.

As such, this thesis contributes the concept of the ‘water portfolio’, drawing attention to these different adaptive strategies as intersected with geographical conditions of the settlement (location of tanks, seasonality), and social relationships of friendship and conflict, how water choices are shot through with different embodied consequences, and the symbolic ways infrastructural choices are linked with a sense of belonging and ‘feeling like’ a citizen. While the intersection of gender and class in generating unequal body burdens around water has been acknowledged (e.g. Sultana, Mohanty, and Miraglia, 2016), this thesis also highlights other dimensions of identity—including tenure and ethnicity—as well as the role played by social organizations of the poor as gatekeepers, and the particular historical and spatial conditions of the settlement. Similarly, though work from feminist political ecology has opened up the ways subjectivities are formed through mundane practices (Sultana, 2009; Truelove, 2011), when linked with a citizenship framework this allows for a discussion of how residents relate differently to each other and the state through infrastructure. Focusing on the mundane infrastructural practices—and how this is linked with different emotional or bodily impacts, demonstrated how notions of belonging in the city are constructed across private and public spaces. As such, this outlines a clear space for future research, examining the home and body as a vital space for the production of the public citizen,
and understanding how infrastructure unrolls in intimate and public ways to shape a sense of legitimacy, belonging, or entitlement for diverse residents.

8.3.1.3 Microcomparability: Time and Space

Finally, this thesis offers a more methodological offering on the idea of urban comparability. That is, this thesis sought to unfold the varied everyday experiences of water and citizenship, and the factors which have contributed to differential outcomes across diverse identities. While this entailed a rich description of everyday experiences, it also sought to identify the urban and social processes which have contributed to these socio-spatial inequalities. As such, a clear theoretical contribution of this thesis is in the proposal of a lens of analysis to understand the ‘everyday politics of water’—which can help to unpack the dynamics between material practices, infrastructure, values and perceptions, and the negotiation of social relations. In doing so, this thesis has presented a methodology which has sought to outline not only how infrastructure is experienced across different cities, but also how this is linked with diverse potentials for urban politics.

This a lens which can be explored in other contexts—applied in future settlements throughout Kathmandu to generate a rich picture of water services across the city, or in other cities as a way of unpacking the ways diverse residents relate to infrastructure (and each other). This thesis therefore also contributes to discussions around comparative urbanism—echoing the work of McFarlane, Silver, and Truelove (2016) in calling for ‘intra-urban’ comparison to explore how different political configurations are assembled through infrastructure across diverse cities. It also draws on discussions comparing neighbourhoods within cities, examining how the specificities of location and history between and within settlements can have a profound effect on how resources are experienced by diverse individuals (McFarlane and Desai, 2015). Notably, however, this thesis builds from these calls to open up a new terrain for exploring how these diverse infrastructural processes occur even within a single settlement. In this case, ‘comparability’ has been relevant in exploring Bansighat from east to west, newer and older settlements, federation members and non-members.
This reveals the need to engage with the rich specificities of Bansighat in history, geography, and sociability—reflecting the uniqueness of this settlement and the micro-politics held within it. At the same time, an intra-settlement ‘comparative’ lens also makes clear that even if Bansighat is unique, the particular mode of urbanisation is not. In particular, comparison across the settlement revealed the critical role of examining the temporality of infrastructure as linked with urban change. That is, examining how women and men fall in and out of risk as a result of changes in the city: whether the result of cyclical rhythms of seasonality (in the water scarce dry season, or polluted rainy season), changing population dynamics and pressures in the settlement, which challenged the original potential of the LICSU programme, or the steady degradation of water resources, through the depletion of the water table and disappearance of public resources. With reference to citizenship, this echoes the claims of Anand (2017) that ‘hydradraulic’ citizenship is incremental and reversible. In Bansighat, for example, this was most clearly demonstrated in the case of the families drawing on the now-broken tank C, and how their exclusion from the use of any of the other ‘legitimate’ tank sources means they’re now disconnected from infrastructure, but also from a key interface with the state.

Thus, this case brings to light many questions with clear resonance in other contexts and for future research: around how settlements grow and adapt with the influx of new migrant populations or in response to intensive urban growth and construction, how modes of collective action respond to urban change, or how wider infrastructural investments or priorities intersects with social norms in daily life for informal settlement residents across the settlement. Exploring these city rhythms, and how they differently impact residents across public and private spaces, with implications for infrastructure and citizenship offers a key and new space of inquiry. In doing so, this thesis makes a vital claim around the possibilities for the production of urban theory from the ‘ordinary’ experiences of cities such as Kathmandu, and revealing the diversity that exists within and across even a single informal settlement.

8.3.2 Limitations

As a final caveat before closing with some reflections for practice, there are a few limitations which are worth outlining. Firstly, one of the key strengths of this research is
also its limitation—the reliance on a single case study site. On the one hand, this micro-focus was invaluable in demonstrating the deep divisions and specificities that can happen even within a single site. However, what this does not allow is for a broader exploration of how some of the social divisions highlighted (i.e. around renters, new migrants, federation and non-federation members) play out across different settlements. An analysis at this level would have also allowed for an exploration of how these social divisions play out across different geographical conditions, and in relation to the diverse infrastructural arrangements which exist across Kathmandu. While the smaller scale focus adopted here is consistent with the theoretical and methodological mandates of this thesis, taking a broader perspective is also a possibility for scaling future research.

The second limitation of this thesis is related to issues around caste and identity. In fact, an analysis of caste has not played a significant role in this thesis. On the one hand, this is reflective of the fact that interviewed residents themselves were dismissive of this as an important factor impacting water practices in urban areas (while highlighting this would be very different in rural villages.) Nonetheless, it is also important to acknowledge that this may also be reflective of hidden discriminations which residents were not willing to share. What was clearly engaged throughout, however, are the ways in which ethnicity generated differential experiences for residents. This, in fact, is a critical space of examination in the future—as while discussions of caste discrimination are widespread in Kathmandu (in policy, media, and acknowledged by interviewed residents), similar interventions or conversations around ethnicity were not well-evident. As such, while some elements of identity may have been left behind, this thesis offers reflections on another little-discussed facet of social exclusion.

8.3.3 Reflections for Practitioners in Kathmandu and Elsewhere

Beyond the theoretical aims of this thesis, the initial collaboration with the NGO Practical Action set out a clear imperative to explore the ways in which research can contribute to practice. Critically, it was through the application of the four key values of citizenship which helped to illuminate some of the practical implications of this work. While many of these were already explored within the body of this thesis, they are set out in a consolidated fashion here—referring to reflections which might be useful for
practitioners engaging in Kathmandu specifically, as well as with urban water interventions more generally.

Firstly, the complex assemblage of resources—from jarred water, to paid tanks, to the widespread reliance on public resources—suggests the critical importance of interventions in moving beyond a singular understanding of water provision. This requires challenging the tendency in the international community to focus on targets around drinking or handwashing water (Chant, 2013; Joshi et al., 2011) to also encompass a discussion of the multiple uses of water. In Kathmandu specifically, for example, this would mean interventions which focus on the rehabilitation of public resources, as well as a focus on the regulation of the jarred water market. This would also be aided by institutional support with filtration, and the regulation of the quality of different sources at the community or household scale, which at the moment is managed by residents themselves using homemade filters or chemical purifiers. However, this opens up the critical tension of how to value ‘substandard’ sources such as public wells, which play both a critical and problematic role for residents. This thus requires an approach which can recognize such sources as a vital in any trajectory towards water security, even while developing strategies for the urban poor which can prioritize the extension of higher quality sources in the longer-term.

Secondly, this thesis revealed the need to engage with different models of ‘participation’, particularly in light of the shift towards community-based management. What is clear is that decentralized service delivery is not an automatic route to equity, and can in fact reproduce localized power imbalances. This has a range of implications for interventions which seek to engage with or develop water user groups. While there is a clear imperative to work through existing community structures, it also raises questions around representation and accountability within shifts to decentralized governance. This ultimately points to the need to explore the types of institutional arrangements which can better support more broad-based and inclusive structures over time.

On the one hand, linking water groups with an organization that has a broader mandate in the neighbourhood holds the potential to deepen the democratic practice of these groups. In the case of tanks A & B, for instance, this has meant that the managers (and federation leaders) took on a greater role beyond service provision. On the other hand,
without continued institutional support or mechanisms to safeguard accountability or inclusivity, these groups may continue to consolidate and replicate their own internal power dynamics. As such, it is critical to understand who is represented in these spaces, and as linked with the particular social and power relations in the neighbourhood or city. Related to this—one clear lesson which emerged is that the way in which infrastructure is brought into a settlement matters. In particular, there is room for further research on the ways in which the concept of ‘ownership’, as secured through financial investment, may in fact risk locking certain types of residents (poor residents, renters, or new migrants) out of participation in water schemes. Without further examination of the kinds of residents this privileges, there is a risk that this (prevalent) logic will continue to generate social and spatial divisions between informal settlement residents. Secondly, it is also helpful to reflect upon the fact that the community tanks in Bansighat were operating as individualized groups. An emphasis on building a water network across the different community tanks—rather than decentralizing management to different water groups—might better support a coordinated effort across the settlement to obtain access to services, and not simply favour the mobilized groups that were able to take part in the programme in the early days.

Third, the connection between distributional inequalities and wider social, urban or spatial inequities draws attention to the need for alternate and supportive interventions, if the aims of water programmes are to be linked with broader goals such as citizenship. Furthermore, this must also be approached with a sensitive understanding of intersectionality. For example, while a call for the specific inclusion of renters into federation structures might be a clear strategy based on the case of Bansighat, this will not alleviate the most persistent discrimination faced by Madhesi renters. In fact, the wider discrimination faced by this group in Kathmandu, and Nepal as a whole, indicates the need for additional social programmes or legal support (unrelated to water) if the intention is to address social or spatial inequalities.

Finally, this thesis proposes the development of alternate ways of thinking about project scaling. In Bansighat, time was an important focal point of analysis, as the growing neighbourhood was not well incorporated into either the community water system or planning more generally. This is well-evidenced in the fact that the management structures established through the LICSU programme could not grow or adapt to the
changing needs of the population. Taking a wider perspective, it is also clear that this pilot never scaled up to achieve its longer-term aims, nor were all settlements included in this programme. This requires an analysis which does not see projects as static in time—suggesting the need to develop models of evaluation that can explore ongoing changes (in this case: related to ecological conditions and population growth), and what capacity water user groups have to adapt. As such, future research might be geared to understanding the variables which are key to an evaluation across time—related not only to service provision, but also to some of the broader aims related to citizenship.

8.4 Conclusion

This thesis made the case for a broader conception of ‘the political’. In doing so, it sought to highlight the range of ways in which residents are manoeuvring around water, highlighting the complexity of this resource as related to social life. The focus on the ‘everyday politics of water’ helps move beyond a narrower examination of ‘practices’—exploring the values and perceptions which underpin different practices—and how this structures different sets of social-power relations. This thesis thus ends with the appeal to move beyond the technical or apolitical framings of water as a resource, and to raise the visibility of: the socially embedded rationalities which underpin decision making, the relationship of water with wider social inequalities, and the symbolic function of infrastructure in producing subjectivities. There is space for future research agendas to develop this framing of water infrastructure as a question of (gendered) citizenship, exploring how this manifests across and within different households or diverse bodies in informal settlements, and deepening the understanding of the ‘everyday politics’ which shapes the experience of urban life.
Works Cited


Development Initiatives/Water Aid. (2012). *Addressing the shortfall: the urgent need for increased and better targeted aid to the water and sanitation sector*. Kathmandu, Nepal.


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## Appendix 1: Early Practice Theorists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theorist</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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</table>
| Foucault (1978) | Governmentality  | - Outlines the subtleties of social control as unrolled through the routine operation of institutions (i.e. prisons, planning, mental asylums).  
- Technologies of government generate conditions where actors ‘self-discipline’ in line with a hegemonic agenda, manifesting in everyday life, and highlighting the violence of the process through which power is exercised.  
- Structure and agency are constituted through diffuse flows of power.  
- This interpretation of power leaves little space for agentic action, seeing the exercise of power as outside of individuals.  
- Nonetheless, (and at a later date) Foucault also posits the notion of ‘heterotopias’ (1986), moments when agents can break free and transform such conditions. |
| Bourdieu (1977) | Habitus           | - Cultural practices and individual habits generate the *habitus* embodied by different social groupings.  
- Actors make choices, judgements, or adopt logics according to these ‘dispositions’, which develop into long-standing routines.  
- Recognizes the influence of an internalized social ordering as explored by Foucault, but also acknowledges the role of: “the agent’s practice, his or her capacity for invention and improvisation” (Bourdieu, 1990, p13).  
- Strategic improvisations allow agents to pursue particular goals and aspirations, though limited by deeply internalized norms. |
| Giddens (1979) | Structuration     | - Seeks to understand the ‘rules and resources’ which are differentially distributed amongst agents as a product of social relations  
- ‘Duality of structure’, suggests that social order is produced through practices, rather than shaped or constrained by an overarching internalized or disciplinary power  
- Recognizes the mutually constitutive nature of structure and agency, but attributes a greater ability of reflexivity onto agents  
- Adopts an optimistic understanding of the ability of individual action to overcome and transform disadvantageous situations. |
- Agents deploy ‘tactics’ to negotiate tensions between structuring social orders (strategies) and individual aspirations and values  
- Everyday repeated ‘corporeal’ acts (such as walking through the city) are a process of appropriation and *territorialisation*, which generates a sense of belonging in a city.  
- Highlights the ‘creative agency’ that is centrally expressed in everyday life, placing greater emphasis on understanding the actions of people rather exercise of power.  
- Sometimes critiqued for de-linking acts of resistance from the broader social structures which condition the ability to respond. |
### Appendix 2: Research Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Phase</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHASE 1</strong></td>
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</table>
| Developing a typology of water practices (Feb – March 2016) | **Pilot Study (Jagriti Nagar)**  
- Observation at water collection points;  
- Semi-structured interviews with individuals ‘responsible’ for water. |  
- 15 short semi-structured household interviews (10 women, 5 men) |  
- Development of ‘Water Table’ outlining main collection practices in Jagriti Nagar |
| **Key Informants** |  
- Semi-structured interviews |  
- 4 interviews with potential local partners / NGOs working in informal settlements |  
- Working agreement with *Mahila Ekta Samaj* and *Guthi* |
| **Photo Workshop (X2)** |  
- ‘Tell a story about water. Document 5 photos showing either water struggles, or how residents overcome challenges.’ |  
- 7 youth workers with *Mahila Ekta Samaj* representing five settlements  
- 5 women from Jagriti Nagar |  
- Thematic analysis of major water challenges; discussion of community innovations; across six different settlements |
| **PHASE 2**    |         |        |         |
| Mapping ‘everyday politics’ in one settlement (Mar – May 2016) | **Main Research Site (Bansighat)**  
- Observation at water collection points;  
- Semi-structured interviews with individuals ‘responsible’ for household water. |  
- 19 semi-structured household interviews)  
- (14 women and 5 men) |  
- Development of ‘Water Table’ outlining main collection practices in Bansighat |
| **Key Informant Interviews** |  
- 8 interviews with local and international organizations; academics; government |  
- 5 youth females from Bansighat |  
- Initial identification of water networks; members of the federation |
| **Photo Workshop** |  
- Document 5 photos involving ‘water’ where women are either powerful, or not powerful |  
- Thematic analysis of gendered risks and opportunities related to water management from youth perspective |  
- Thematic analysis of gendered risks and opportunities related to water management from youth perspective |
### PHASE 3
Mapping ‘everyday politics’ in one settlement (July – Sept 2016)

**Main Research Site (Bansighat)**
- Semi-structured interviews with individuals ‘responsible’ for household water.
- 12 semi-structured household interviews (12 women and 2 men – representing renters; Madhesi residents; those ‘unconnected’ to community water tanks)
- 2 ‘Community leader’ interviews
- Deeper identification of different water networks and different collection routines
- Timeline of major events in Bansighat

**Photography Workshop**
- Document 5 photos related to water in your settlement which are important to share outside of this settlement.
- 5 women (mixed ages) from across Bansighat (invited to participate on the basis of representing different perspectives)
- Individual narratives capturing values and perceptions in relation to water challenges or opportunities

**Key Informants**
- 7 interviews with local and international organizations; academics; government
- Review of key policy and programmatic documents related to water and/or urban development

### PHASE 4
Collective Analysis and Discussion (Sept 2016)

**City-Level Federation Staff Discussion**
- 5 staff workers from Mahila Ekta Samaj

**Photography Exhibition and Group Discussion**
- 30+ guests representing Bansighat and Jagrit Nagar residents; local media; local and national NGOs
- One-paged ‘brief’ outlining key findings; Radio and newspaper reports in local media

**Bansighat Focus Group Discussion**
- 8 women from Bansighat
- Prioritization of water issues and short-term and long-term strategies

### PHASE 5
(Advocacy and Action)

**Key Informants Workshop**
- Hosted by Guthi: 6 representatives from Water Board; relevant NGOs
- Action-plan to host city-wide federation workshop

**City-wide Federation Workshop**
- Hosted by NMES: Twenty-one residents (across 6 communities)
- Production of ‘Water Charter’

**Water Board / Utility Presentation and Demands**
- Hosted by Guthi & NMES NMES
- Agreements to repair existing infrastructure; discussions on long-term review of settlements
### Appendix 3: Table of Key Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Organization</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Organizations/NGOs</strong></td>
<td>Society for the Urban Poor</td>
<td>Founding President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lumanti</td>
<td>Senior Programme Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lumanti</td>
<td>Programme Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahila Ekata Samaj (Women's Federation)</td>
<td>Programme Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ICIMOD</td>
<td>Gender, Water and Adaptation Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guthi</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NGO Forum</td>
<td>Programme Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International NGOs</strong></td>
<td>Practical Action</td>
<td>Head of Policy and Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practical Action</td>
<td>Head of Urban Water, Sanitation, and Waste Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Water Aid</td>
<td>Advocacy and Communications Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Water Aid</td>
<td>Urban Programme Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA)</td>
<td>Gender and Social Inclusion Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UN-Habitat</td>
<td>Chief Technical Advisor-WASH programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Save the Children</td>
<td>Urban Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academics</strong></td>
<td>Nepal Engineering College</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norwegian University of Science and Technology</td>
<td>PhD (land rights and informal settlement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Bodies</strong></td>
<td>Survey Department, GoN</td>
<td>Deputy Director General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Water Management Board</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Water Management Board</td>
<td>Deputy Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KUKL (utility, private operated)</td>
<td>Programme Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Water Charter

Water Charter
A Road Map for Equitable Services

1. Ensure the right to adequate water
Residents in informal areas experience significant difficulties accessing water of sufficient quality and quantity. This affects drinking, cooking, and washing water. To cope, residents usually take from different sources, including jars, tanks, or wells or canals. Because of shortages, residents across all settlements may sometimes drink or cook with polluted water, and are often forced to carefully ration use.

Action Required: Addressing this may require different modalities in different settlements, including the construction of new 5000L tanks in the immediate timeline, or taplines post-Melamchi, as well as supporting local resources such as springs and wells.

2. Uniform application of subsidies across settlements
While some communities have been able to benefit from the innovative LICSU programme, from both tanks and subsidies, this has not been applied to all settlements, such as Manahora. Additionally, even in included settlements, population growth has meant that these sources are no longer enough, and need to be extended.

Action Required: All community tanks located in informal settlements are requested to receive water from KUKL at the discounted price of 900 rupees. Any taplines that are brought into the settlement should consider reduced tariffs for informal areas, especially as tariffs are likely to rise post Melamchi. There should be mechanisms to apply for new resources, such as tanks, as communities grow.

3. Supply increased in regularity and quantity
Currently most LICSU water tanks are receiving KUKL delivery only 1x per week, and this is not enough to meet need. There are many interruptions in delivery, such as during crisis moments such as post-earthquake or during the blockade, or during the rainy season. In other communities, such as Manahora, there may be tanks, but the community is unable to fill them. With the limited supply, communities such as Jagriti Nagar are forced to ration water.

Action Required: Communities request that water delivery is increased to at least 2x per week to help with these shortages. Increasing the amount of water deliveries is especially important for communities such as Samakhusti, where there isn’t space to bring more tanks.

4. Local resources protected and strengthened
Many local resources such as springs and wells are drying up over time, especially with the increase in construction, or are inadequate with the increasing population. In at least two communities (Bansighat and Shankamul), community wells which were critical for residents have recently been lost with the road expansion programme. In other areas, such as Manahora, dug resources have depleted so much that residents are required to take from outside the community.

Action Required: Where there is space and resources, communities request support with digging of deep wells, especially when existing resources are lost due to new urban developments. Additional support is asked to help protect or treat shallow wells, which in some communities, such as Bansighat, may still be used for cooking purposes.
5. Guarantees and monitoring of water quality
There are currently significant challenges in accessing high quality water, either in the water tanks (whether provided by KUKL or private tankers), or for local resources. When there are no other options, residents may be forced to drink water that is polluted or dirty, including even from the river canals in worst cases. This causes severe health problems.

Action Required: Residents request an institution that residents can take samples to at any time in order to test the quality of water from both KUKL sources and local resources. In addition, residents request support with treatment (filters or chlorination). All water that is delivered into the community should have quality monitoring stickers. The community commits to developing a committee that can regulate the supply and quality of water regularly.

6. Inclusion in household connections in Melamchi project
The task of carrying water from outside sources is time consuming and physical challenging, especially for women. People with physical impairments especially suffer. Some communities have taplines already running near to or through their settlement, but they do not know if they will receive water through these.

Action Required: Residents request working towards the long-term goal of achieving individual household connections. Residents commit to being able to pay a small percentage of the connection fee for individual resources. However, for those who cannot afford these costs, community taplines or tanks are suggested to be provided freely—with one tapline or tank able to serve 20 households. Residents commit to include new people, including renters, in the access and management of any community resources.

7. Re-establish LICSU to support communities
The community management of water has been positive in that it unites neighbourhoods and strengthens women’s groups. However, is will be unsustainable without more support. There are many unseen expenditures attached to managed, such as paying a fee for the drivers, or telephone costs. When there are challenges such as breakages, irregular supply, or management issues, there isn’t an institution residents can seek support from.

Action Required: Re-establish a department within KUKL that resident groups can directly contact for management support, help with maintenance, or to apply for more resources. The LICSU programme has proved to be a highly successful and innovative model that can be showcased, revived and expanded— setting Kathmandu apart as a leader in the provision of services for the urban poor.