'I serve therefore I am'

Youth and Generative Politics in India

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Abstract

This paper uses qualitative research in Uttarakhand, India, to highlight the vitality of civil society and the involvement of young people in everyday ‘civic’ politics. Much recent academic literature emphasizes the ubiquity of narrowly self-interested patronage politics in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as captured in the saying sometimes attributed to politicians in Cameroon: ‘I graze therefore I am’. But in specific moments or conjunctures more ‘civic’ forms of politics come to light, perhaps especially among youth. Building on intensive qualitative field research, we show that a new generation of educated underemployed youth in Bemni serve their community in key ways. These youth also make strong arguments about the nature of ‘politics’ and how it might be reimagined as ‘generative’ – concerned with building resources – rather than ‘allocative’: a zero-sum game of competition for power. We draw attention to the potential of this practice and discourse of politics as well as its limits - it is dominated by young men and tends to reproduce caste and gender inequalities. We also call for more concerted reflection on youth community activism in contexts of predatory clientelism.

'I serve therefore I am'

Youth and Generative Politics in India[1]

In June 2012 the water pipes ceased to flow in a section of Bemni, the Himalayan village in which we were based. Several young men gathered in a nearby courtyard to debate how to solve the problem. Having argued for a while and shared a pot of tea, they then fanned out across the mountainside. They fixed pipes, checked water tanks, negotiated with villagers in different sections of the village, discussed the problem with a government water officer, and reconvened periodically to evaluate their progress. Two young men got into a heated discussion about precisely how water emerges from the mountains and the seasonality of flow. After several hours, the young men succeeded in ensuring that the water flowed evenly to different sections of the village. As they trudged back down the mountain, they looked tired: '*Woh bahut rajnitik ka kaam ho gya*' ('that all involved a lot of political work') a man called Teju said, winking at its friends.

This paper examines the nature of this type of 'political work' among young people in north India. A section of youth in the village of Bemni, Uttarakhand – especially educated underemployed young people – were channelling their energy and time into serving as community activists, assisting other members of the village with infrastructural projects, petitioning government officials for resources, resolving village disputes and helping other family members acquire healthcare, education, and other social goods. The incident at the water pipe is indicative of a wide variety of everyday activities led by young people who spent a good deal of time mending paths, mobilizing others for protests, writing letters, escorting ill relatives to the local clinic, and generally doing 'service' (*sewa*), as they sometimes put it. This reflects the emergence of a distinct 'youth' generation in Bemni since the early 1990s, the rise of education, the spread of citizenship norms and, perhaps, the more diffuse influence of the State's political history.

[1] We are grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council and John Fell Fund for funding the research upon which this paper is based.

What also emerged powerfully from our experience of fieldwork, and is reflected in the throwaway comment of Teju as he filed back down the mountain, was that young people also reflected actively and creatively on the nature of their broadly 'civic' action. They frequently referred to their work as 'politics' and distinguished it from the politics of politicians and bureaucrats. Bemni youth commonly said that they are engaged in a type of generative politics – one concerned with making and protecting resources – rather than the self-interested politics of members of the political establishment. In stressing the creative involvement of young people in civil society action and the cultural production of generative politics as an idea in this paper we offer a counterpoint both to studies of the global South that place excessive emphasis on predatory patronage (e.g. Chattterjee 2004; Bayart 2009) and analyses of young people that depict youth as violent and illegal agents (Cincotta et al. 2003; World Bank 2011).

The paper is divided into a further five sections. First we introduce literature on civil society in the global South and youth civil society. The next section introduces the region of Uttarakhand. The subsequent three sections begin with portraits of individual young people which each illustrate key features of youth politics in Bemni. The conclusions relate our substantive material to the wider literature on youth and civil society in the global South.

Youth civil society

An influential debate emerging within post-colonial studies and development studies during the past thirty years concerns the degree to which ordinary citizens in the contemporary global South are able to come together across lines of social difference to form part of 'civil society', where this term is understood, as in Hegel's writing, as a zone of rational discussion and action manifest in formal, civic organizations. A common line of argument is that civil society is thin in many parts of the global South. Bayart (2009), for example, argues that formal associational life is conspicuous by its absence in most parts of Africa. Politics occurs primarily through predatory patron-client networks based

upon kinship and ethnicity. In this account, exemplified for example in the recent political history of Sudan, Bayart sees the satisfaction of immediate and personal interest as the guiding principle of politics rather than any adherence to liberal democratic notions of impartiality and abstract citizenship. Bayart cites as his inspiration a political cartoon in Cameroon showing a tethered goat munching grass and the caption 'I graze therefore I am'. Bayart's arguments are paralleled elsewhere (e.g. Mamdani 1996; cf Pratten 2006). Mamdani (1996), for example, argues that patron-client relations are ubiquitous in Africa, reflecting the manner in which colonial powers in this continent deliberately worked through the social categories of tribe and ethnic identity preventing the emergence of 'multi-cellular' (non-particularistic) group life.

Kaviraj (1991) and Chatterjee (2004) have made somewhat similar claims for contemporary India. Kaviraj maintains that the British strategy of divide and rule strengthened the social institution of caste. The post-colonial state developed in the absence of a strong civil society because people lacked a feeling of broader (national or cross-caste) collective togetherness. Chatterjee likewise argues that 'civil society' in its Hegelian sense of formal associations rooted in impartial notions of solidarity is the preserve of an upper middle class elite in India. The majority occupy instead a zone of 'political society' in which they use caste, religious or other sectarian identities as a means to bid for resources from the state. Political society in Chatterjee's terms – like the politics described by Bayart – is founded on relationships of clientelism, and it tends to be a zone in which ordinary people adopt para-legal, violent tactics. 'Political society will bring into the hallways and corridors of power some of the squalor, ugliness and violence of popular life' (Chatterjee 2004: 202). Similar arguments have been made about Latin America (e.g. De Vries 2002; Fox 2007).

Other scholars have argued that Bayart, Mamdani, Chatterjee and Kaviraj have underplayed the existence of civic understanding and action within ordinary society in Africa, South Asia and other parts of the Global South. For example, Corbridge et al. (2005) show how the poor in north India have sometimes been able to connect with lower levels of the state to direct resources to their own

households and communities. Likewise, Baviskar and Sundar (2008) claim that much of the political activity of the poor in India is not aggressively clientelistic but organized around questions of civic and legal rights. Some commentators stress the co-existence of multiple registers of politics such that western liberal notions of 'rights' intersect with – or exist alongside – violent forms of predatory clientelism (e.g. Pratten 2006), and this is a particularly strong theme in recent literature on 'popular democracy' (Gellner 2007) and 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston 2008). Chatterjee (2003) himself has noted that ideas of universal citizenship can emerge within 'political society' and that, at particular moments, subalterns forge links with upper middle classes such that a broad-based civil society flickers into life. In contrast, Bayart is enduringly pessimistic about the hold of patron-client relations over politics in Africa. Writing in 2009 in a preface to a new edition of his book, he argues that the spread of notions of democracy has done little to erode self-interested clientelism. The language of 'democracy', he argues, is simply 'a form of pidgin language that various native princes use in their communication with Western sovereigns and financiers' (2009: xiv). As a counterpoint to Bayart's work – and developing a minor theme in Chatterjee's writing – we argue that young people in an area of north India are using ideas of democracy and citizenship to develop as alternative vision of how 'politics' might be imagined.

The category of 'youth' offers a revealing lens through which to consider civil society. Young people are disproportionately affected by capitalist globalization. They face multiple difficulties in finding secure salaried employment and are over-represented within low paying sectors of the informal economy (Chant and Jones 2005; Jeffrey 2012). Compounding these problems is a revolution of rising aspirations associated with urbanization, increased education, and exposure to images of Western consumerism (e.g. Orock 2013). These issues are pressing in both the global North and global South, and shifts in the nature of society and the economy make crude distinctions between North and South difficult. But it remains the case that, in broad terms, young people's access to state resources is more dependent in the South than it is in the North on their money, muscle power and social networking skills. Gendered and patriarchal norms are also often stronger in the Africa, Latin

America and Asia, and the relative importance of arranged marriage 'markets' in many parts of the South places additional burdens on youth (e.g. Cole and Durham 2006; Durham 2008).

A prominent argument, developed for example in the 2011 World Bank Development Report, is that marginalized youth in the global South, where they engage with politics, participate predominantly in violent and illegal forms of politicking (Bayart 2009; World Bank 2011; see also Cincotta 2003). Bayart (2009: 238) sees underemployed young people as deepening and naturalizing logics of predatory clientelism in urban Africa. Within India, several scholars have pointed to the involvement of subordinated youth in violent politics. For example, it is a central theme of Hansen's (1996) work on youth and religious communal riots in early 1990s Mumbai. Such negative evaluations of young people's political activity articulate with, and sometimes rest upon, much older notions of youth as a period of 'trouble'. During the nineteenth century in the West commentators identified youth as a time of relative instability and semi-dependence, what Hall (1904) later termed a period of 'storm and stress' (see Kett 1971). Keniston (1971) elaborates on this idea, referring to post-adolescence – people in the late teens and twenties – as being a 'protest-prone' population afflicted by feelings of disconnection from wider society. Bourdieu (1984) as well as Marx and Engels (1978) argue that marginalized youth are disengaged from politics altogether or engaged only in highly idiosyncratic, ineffective forms of politicking; either way, they are certainly not candidates for grassroots civil society.

But from another perspective we might imagine youth as well positioned to promote constructive political change within countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Mannheim (1972 [1936]) argues that within any region generations experience the same conditions at the same times during their lives and thus come to constitute social units. In particular moments this generation 'in itself' can become a generation 'for itself', and Mannheim places particular emphasis on the potential transformative power of a youth generation. Johnson-Hanks (2002) develops this idea conceptually when writing of the importance of 'vital conjunctures'. This term refers to extended

durations – anywhere from a few months to a few years – in people's lives when structures bear down especially hard but new opportunities for productive change also emerge. Johnson-Hanks points to the value of linking these moments to people's biographies; it is often after a birth, death, marriage, or adolescence that moments of change occur or in the context of social changes such as unemployment, migration, or leaving school. Since these key life changes are often concentrated in the period between people's mid-teens and late twenties in many places around the world, vital conjunctures may be especially likely among youth.

Recent events put empirical flesh on the conceptual bones provided by Mannheim and Johnson-Hanks. Since 2010, young people aged between 16 and 30 have been at the forefront of political upheavals across the globe. In December 2010, the suicide of a young man in Tunisia triggered agitations that brought down the country's President, and large-scale protests erupted shortly afterwards across North Africa and the Middle East (see Bayat 2013a; Biekart and Fowler 2013). This youth protest has continued in some regions - for example in Senegal, where urban youth played a decisive role in the 2012 elections (Fredericks 2013) and across the Mediterranean region (Castañeda 2012). Youth have figured prominently in anti-Putin protests in Russia, school and university demonstrations in South America, anti-corruption agitation in India, and the Occupy movement (e.g. Manilov 2013). People in their late teens and twenties are not always primarily responsible for these movements, but they are prominent within them, reflecting the scale of the pressures they are under and, perhaps, their greater familiarity with electronic communications. These various movements are complex and contradictory in their political effects. But many of those involved are opposed to entrenched power and mobilize in a manner that does not take party politics and local patronage networks as the primary point of reference (Glasius and Pleyers 2013; Razsa and Kurnik 2013; cf Ismail 2013).

Underlying large youth movements, and interacting with them in many ways, is an array of small-scale youth mobilizations and everyday politicking. But a paucity of empirical material on quotidian

forms of youth activism stymies efforts to assess the nature of youth civil society or identify the specific conditions in which young people are able to move beyond self-interested patronage politics. Asef Bayat's (2013b) work on non-movement based politics in North Africa aims to address this problem. He provides a detailed picture of aspects of everyday activism in that region. There is also a voluminous literature on cultural politics, which focuses on how young people's everyday activities and cultural styles serve 'political' ends (e.g. Diouf 1996; Newell, 2012; Fredericks 2013; and, within India, Lukose 2009). But Bayat concentrates primarily on visible, urban, action aimed at protest, and - with the exception of Fredericks (2013) work in Senegal and a handful of other studies (e.g. Diouf 1996) - the literature on cultural politics does not link stylistic performances to wider questions around young people's relationship to 'the state' in its different incarnations, and nor does it focus very often on issues of social reproduction, such as access to education, healthcare, and development goods, and on what is sometimes termed 'household politics', for example inter-generational relations in the home. Contemporary everyday youth mobilization outside institutions and its connections to wider processes of social and political change are poorly understood.

There are nevertheless some studies of contemporary everyday youth politics. These suggest that such politics takes one of two broad forms. A first is 'organized youth politics' – youth political activity that occurs within NGOs, associations, clubs, vigilante groups, gangs, factions, parties, or some other named grouping but which is distinct from formal politics since it does not cohere into formal movements or political parties (e.g. Snellinger 2005). A second, less-documented type of everyday youth politics consists of relatively individualized activism that take place outside formal movements and named organizations (such as NGOs), often within fields of competition for education, jobs, health care, and development resources, but also including, for example, instances in which youth negotiate with members of their household in pursuit of specific social goals. Such individualized youth politics is sometimes narrowly self-interested and reflects logics of patronage (e.g. Jones 2010; Martin 2013). But emerging studies on youth politics beneath the level of formal movements and outside organizational settings also points to the role of young people in various

forms of non-clientelistic social work (Juris and Pleyers 2009; Daly 2010; Krishna 2012). A notable example is Anirudh Krishna's (2012) account of local politics in western India. Building on survey and interview research in villages in Gujarat and Rajasthan, Krishna identifies the emergence of a set of self-styled, youthful 'new politicians' who spend much of their day undertaking everyday political work: lobbying government bureaucrats, motivating younger youth, and engaging in a wide variety of other forms of negotiation within households and in local offices. The new politicians contest established caste hierarchies, redistribute resources from corrupt middle-level bureaucrats to the rural poor, while also stressing their distance from mainstream political parties. Daly (2010) makes similar points in work on young women involved in quotidian politics in Egypt. Women activists have emerged in contemporary Egypt who reject the development philosophies promulgated by local NGOs but nevertheless engage in everyday forms of citizenship that challenge gender and class-based inequalities. Notwithstanding the difficulties associated with comparing dynamics in the global North with those occurring in the global South, Jenny Pearce's work in northern England also highlights aspects of everyday constructive youth politics. Pearce (2013) argues that in poor areas of deindustrialized Britain youth are developing what she terms 'non-dominating forms of power', which 'builds capabilities to act with others in cooperative ways' (2013: 652). That this local-level form of empowerment remains rather detached from visible forms of activism in urban areas and from party politics is partly a strength: it offers community activists some autonomy. But this separation also prevents them from broadening and institutionalizing their mobilization.

Read together the work of Krishna, Daly, and Pearce points to the existence at the local level in parts of the world of various types of youth-led political practices that occurs outside the sphere of both party political competition and named organizations and which are difficult to understand with sole reference to the language of predatory clientelism. We chart a similar form of broadly 'civic' action among youth in Bemni. But to a greater extent than other scholars we identify a preoccupation among youth with emphasizing the generative nature of their political activity. Young people stressed that their politics was not concerned primarily with competing over resources. Rather, it involved creating

resources, where resources are understood broadly to include ideas, networks – 'capabilities' in Sen's (1999) and Pearce's (2013) terms - as well as assets, money, and jobs.

Anthony Giddens (1994) also used the term 'generative politics', which he conceptualized as efforts on the part of ordinary people to develop relationships of trust with those in political authority. But Giddens imagined generative politics as a type of general capacity, and he tended to ignore the wider political economic context in which generative politics occur. By contrast, we view the emergence of ideas of generative politics, and young people's efforts to put such a politics into practice, as a specific reflection of the political, social and economic situation in Uttarakhand and the particularities of the social position of youth, for example their education and inability to obtain secure salaried work. Generative politics as we describe it here is not a layer of politics that others have missed but a contingent product of young people's insertion into the wider political economy.

Henri Lefebvre's (2008) conceptual writing on the everyday and radical politics is useful in theorizing the contingent nature of the politics we describe. Lefebvre argued that it is the experience of daily hardship that is often crucial in precipitating creative politics. He suggested that in specific 'moments' – and he wrote, for example, of love or war as such contexts – a sense of hardship might crystallize and people may come to critique aspects of their everyday life. At the same time, Lefebvre was interested in continuity and the unremitting effects of power. He argued that creative moments of political expression always bear traces of dominant power and eventually devolve back into the ground or humus of everyday life. The everyday - like the vital conjuncture in Johnson-Hanks' work - emerges a site of tension between creative efforts at personal or social change on the part of the marginalized and, on the other hand, the logic of dominant forces (see Goonewardena 2008). Youth mobilization at the quotidian level is often organized around the unequal contest of resources within patron-client systems, as Chatterjee and Bayart argued, but the hardships and contradictions of everyday life may produce moments of change (Lefebvre 2008) or critical durations (Johnson-Hanks 2002) in which relatively novel practices come to life.

Bemni, Uttarakhand

We test and develop this argument with reference to the practices of young people in contemporary north India, building on research that we conducted in a village, Bemni, in a remote part of the Uttarakhandi Himalayas. Uttarakhand was established as a separate State in 2000, carved out of the former Uttar Pradesh (UP). It contained about 10 million people in 2011. It is a State notorious for its poverty, and economic reforms in India introduced since the mid-1980s served on the whole to widen the gap between Uttarakhand and more prosperous States. UP's Gross Domestic Product grew by only 1.3 per cent during the 1990s, less than a third of the national average during this period. Uttarakhand's record in the 2000s was better, but its per capita income was still only slightly above 50 per cent of the all-India figure in 2012. The development situation is correspondingly depressing. While educational and other social opportunities are slowly opening up to women and poorer classes, Uttarakhand ranks near the bottom of the table of States in India in terms of infant mortality, life expectancy, literacy, death rate, birth rate, per capita income, and electrification of villages.

Poor governance exacerbates problems of economic growth and human development. The Uttarakhand Auditor General's reports tell of the institutionalized nature of fraud, nepotism, false accounting, the taking of kickbacks and bribery among politicians and government officials – all reflecting the entrenched nature of a predatory patronage democracy (Comptroller Auditor General 2012). The intended beneficiaries of major development projects rarely obtain the goods to which they are entitled. The central government employment programme - the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) - is a case in point. Only about a quarter of the work days that are supposed to be generated through this scheme have actually been instituted in the State. Law and order issues compound the problem of corruption: local government councils are often ineffective as instruments of complaint; the judicial system is inefficient and mired by backlogs

and personal favouritism; the police force is notoriously venal and violent; and large numbers of the Members of the State's Legislative Assembly have criminal cases against them.

Since the 1970s, there have been a number of popular environmental and social protests in Uttarakhand targeted in part against the political establishment, especially cronyism and corruption within the State of Uttar Pradesh of which Uttarakhand was formerly a part. Forests cover 63 per cent of the total area of Uttarakhand (ORG 2001). Under the British colonial regime, forests were largely appropriated by the state (Rangan 2001), a trend that was continued by successive post-colonial state regimes alongside increased commercial logging in the region. In the early 1970s, popular anger at the degradation of the forests and associated problems of flooding and village-level water shortages boiled over culminating in the formation of the 'Chipko movement' aimed at protecting the environment. This movement involved a wide variety of civil actors, including rural women, students, and low caste groups, in disparate agitations broadly aimed at improving the access of rural people to forest resources (see Rangan 2001). A later movement for a separate state of Uttarakhand was bound up not only with concerns over state and corporate appropriation of local natural resources but also with anxieties in Uttarakhand over access to salaried work in the context of new caste-based reservations in the state (Mawdsley 1997). Of the 7.5 million people living in Uttarakhand, over two thirds are upper caste (Brahmins and Kshatriyas, also called 'General Castes' (GCs)), with 17 per cent Scheduled Caste (SC) in 2011 (ORG 2011). In 1993, the Uttar Pradesh Government acceded to demands by the Indian central government that 27 per cent of government posts throughout the state should be reserved for so-called Other Backward Classes (OBCs): castes 'above' the SCs in the caste hierarchy but identified by the state as socially and economically backward. The numerically dominant GCs in Uttarakhand vehemently opposed this measure, pointing out that OBCs comprised only 2.5 per cent of the population of the hill region of Uttar Pradesh and that many upper castes are impoverished. The reservations issue became a rallying point for the successful movement for a separate state of Uttarakhand.

There is close overlap between people's caste status and access to land, social contacts, and salaried work in Uttarakhand (see Dyson 2006). But higher castes are frequently only marginally better off than SCs in Uttarakhand and until quite recently economic disparities within the GCs were also not especially marked. Although caste discrimination continues to occur (Jayal 2001), class and caste inequalities and discrimination are not as prevalent as in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh. Research on popular environmental movements in the region and NGO activity suggests that geographical identity – the sense of being part of 'the hills' (*pahari*) as opposed to living 'down below' (*neeche*) – is a powerful bond that in certain instances may overtrump class-based tensions and caste conflict (Mawdsley 1997; Klenk 2009).

Strong gender norms are characteristic of rural Uttarakhand such that women are not expected to engage in paid work outside the household or permitted to do so but only in a narrow range of areas, such as teaching and work in government nurseries (Moller 2003; Klenk 2009). Women's development indictors are below those of men, and everyday sexism is a prominent feature of village life. NGOs have emerged to address gender issues, and scholars are beginning to show how, at the everyday level, rural women in Uttarakhand find ways to challenge or transform relationships of gender dominance (Klenk 2009). But women, especially young women, remain subordinated in local and regional gender hierarchies.

The village of Bemni is located in a relatively remote part of Uttarakhand, bordering Tibet, at an altitude of about 2500 metres. Chamoli district, in which Bemni is located, is overwhelmingly rural and agricultural in character: 90 per cent of people lived in rural areas in 2011 according to the national census (ORG 2011). People typically practice a form of agro-pastoralism. They cultivate crops for subsistence – mainly wheat, millet and barley – while also managing large areas of the surrounding forest for pastoral use.

Bemni contained 940 people in March 2012, of which 69% were GCs and 31% SCs. It looked physically very different in 2012 to how it did in 2003, when Jane Dyson (2006) carried out prior research on children's everyday work and identities. Roughly a fifth of households had built two-storied houses between 2003 and 2012 and a quarter had constructed latrines. The government greatly increased its development assistance to rural areas of Uttarakhand between 2003-04. The introduction of MGNREGA in 2005 resulted in a threefold increased in the money arriving annually with the head of the village council and substantially enhanced the capacity of the village council to provide work to local people and construct village facilities, such as irrigation channels, paths, and recreational facilities. The government's increased assistance also took the form of stand alone projects: Ninth and Tenth classes were added to the local secondary school in 2005; a communications tower was constructed in the village in 2009; electricity arrived in the village in 2010; and a dirt road connecting the village to the local town became usable in 2011.

Change was manifest, too, at the attitudinal level. Between 2003 and 2012, Bemni was more thoroughly absorbed into wider circuits of knowledge and information, especially as a result of rising phone ownership: 60 per cent of households had at least one mobile in 2012, compared to just 4 per cent in 2003. Schooling levels rose sharply over the 1990s and 2000s. For example, 90 per cent of men and 69 per cent of women aged 16-25 in Bemni had at least an 8th Class pass in 2012 compared to 64 per cent of men and 10 per cent of women aged 36-45, even while girls' and SCs' education continues to lag behind that of boys and GCs.

The area being farmed in and around Bemni declined by nearly a third in the nine years between 2003 and 2012, partly because of sales to the government for the road and other projects and partly because of people's general disillusionment with farming. Villagers reported that extreme weather events have repeatedly destroyed their crops in recent years and the prices in the local town have been low. Younger generations, in particular, have little appetite for agriculture, and children were less involved in agricultural tasks in 2012 than they were in 2003. The population of livestock had

also declined markedly with this general retreat from farming. At the same time, the road and building construction had taken a heavy toll on the surrounding jungle, a situation greatly exacerbated by the head of the village council, who largely ignored his mandated role of managing the forest in favour of taking bribes from people seeking timber.

Between March and June 2012 we conducted four months of research in Bemni, examining the economic, social and political practices of marginalized youth, especially those who were educated but unemployed or 'underemployed' in the sense of being confined to work that did not reflect their educational qualifications and ambitions. Craig Jeffrey carried out follow up research in November 2012. We completed a socio-economic survey of the village, a repeat of a survey that Jane Dyson conducted in 2003. We also carried out semi-structured interviews concerning young people's educational and employment experiences, marriage, views on the state and politics, and political activity. We interviewed thirty-five of the forty young people (aged 16-30) who had at least a Tenth Class pass and defined themselves as unemployed or underemployed. Our sample included five SC men, five SC women, eighteen GC men, and eight GC women. We also carried out participant observation around the village that involved a much wider set of youth.

In Bemni 'youth' (*jawaani*) is frequently imagined as a period that lasts from puberty until marriage. Until the 1980s, young people married in their mid-teens, moving directly from 'childhood' (*bachpan*) to 'adulthood' (*bare*). But rising education among men and then women led to a delay in marriage. By 2012 the average age of young women was around 23 and for young men around 27. This shift created a new period of 'youth'. A move among many men and some young women to continue to seek educational credentials into their late twenties and even thirties, and after getting married, also meant that 'youth' had also partially become detached from its former association with a pre-marital period.

In what follows we use accounts of three young people as a starting point for discussing the nature of youth politics in Bemni. Our research concentrated on educated unemployed youth (those 18-30 with at least a 10th class pass), excluding those who had migrated successfully to urban areas or who had not managed to acquire a secondary school qualification. This paper also focuses exclusively on GCs, who tend to be more active in youth politics than are SCs.

Social men

Rajesh Singh, a Rajput (GC), was thirty in 2012 and lived permanently in Bemni. He was educated in Bemni primary school and then at a government secondary school close to the village. In the late 1990s Rajesh received a BA (Arts) from Gopeshwar College, the government degree college in the district town 30 miles from Bemni. He did the degree on a 'private' (correspondence) basis because his parents could not afford for him to study as a regular student. At the age of about twenty, and at the suggestion of friends, he went to Mumbai where he worked for six months in a hotel. He then worked in a shopping mall and computer assembly plant in Delhi. In 2003, Rajesh's father fell ill and Rajesh had to abandon his work in Delhi to fulfil obligations at home. Rajesh managed the process of obtaining treatment for his dying father in Bemni, and oversaw the construction of a new family home. After his father's death in 2005, Rajesh married, and then helped to secure a marriage for his sister. Rajesh still regarded himself as a 'youth' (*jawaan*) but he also spoke a great deal about his 'responsibilities' (*zimmedaari*).

In 2010 Rajesh went back to college as a private student. In 2012 was conducting an MA in English Literature from Garhwal University in Srinagar. The course is English medium. Rajesh cannot obtain the original texts that form the backbone of the degree. 'The books are only available in Srinagar and I am never there,' he said. Instead, he purchased six 'cheat books', which he uses to revise for possible questions he will face in the exam. He has a weak grasp of English.

Rajesh had a keen sense of being 'educated unemployed' and of the difficulty of his predicament. He spoke incessantly of struggle, hardship and toil (*mehnat*) and of being in a precarious position as someone very well qualified but without regular work. Rajesh was managing to find ways to make ends meet. He had got a job as a temporary teacher. He ran private tutorials for many local young people. He cultivated the family's medium-sized (3 acre) farm and spent about forty days a year working on government projects in the village through MGNREGA. He occasionally went to collect forest products from the jungles and meadows above Bemni, which could be sold to local traders. While juggling these various activities, Rajesh desperately hoped that he would be able to get a permanent full-time government job in the near future. His chances of success seem remote. Rajesh was among 86,000 applicants for 79 low-ranking bureaucratic jobs advertised in March 2012, and he said that bribery and personal favouritism characterize the recruitment process.

Alongside his everyday work and applications for government jobs, Rajesh spent a great deal of time engaged in social and political activity, and he once said that he is involved in 'total service' (*total seva*). School textbooks in India are full of references to the importance of serving the nation. For example a common exercise in Hindi and English primers is to write letters to government officials complaining about aspects of local governance. Rajesh showed us a letter he had written as a schoolboy to a fictional District Magistrate complaining about the poor state of the drains in his imaginary city neighbourhood. These textbooks also sometimes recall examples of successful civic action in Uttarakhand, such as the Chipko movement and agitation for the creation of a separate State. Rajesh seemed to have absorbed the ideas of citizenship that underpinned such exercises and examples. Influenced by accounts of Uttarakhandi activists presented in textbooks, he argued that his energies should be directed towards improving Bemni and the Nandakini Valley.

Like many of the young people involved in generative politics in Bemni, and reflecting too the wider detachment of youth in many different parts of the world from the political establishment, Rajesh was largely unconcerned about the activities of the Uttarakhand Government, party politics, and practices

of politicians located in nearby towns. Nor was Rajesh interested in local and district politics. He expressed disinterest in village council elections. 'It makes my head ache,' he said. Instead, Rajesh expressed his dual sense of national citizenship and loyalty to the village through becoming a 'social man' - '*samajik admi*' – and doing what he described as 'politics' (*rajniti*) in Bemni and the surrounding Nandakini Valley. Rajesh repeatedly emphasized how this politics differed from the practices of politicians at the State- and district-levels. His politics was directed towards protecting and creating social goods rather than competing for a share of resources. Rajesh assisted local people during periods of medical emergency, often by negotiating with government doctors in the village and local towns. He helped to coordinate responses to specific problems in the village, for example of water or electricity supply. He also berated the government doctor when he did not come to assist ill villagers, and he campaigned for improvements to the local school in which he taught. Rajesh specialized in petitioning government officials by phone or face-to-face in trips to the local town as well as in mobilizing other youth and villagers around issues of concern.

Rajesh also intervened within interpersonal disputes. This became particularly clear in June 2012 when conflict threatened to erupt in another of Bemni's households. A young man named Shiv Singh had been having an affair with a young woman who lived near Delhi called Meena. Shiv had told Meena that they would get married, concealing the fact that he already had a wife and three children in Bemni. Quite unexpectedly, Meena decided one day in June 2012 to make the two-day journey from Delhi to visit her lover, stumbling on Shiv and his wife in their Bemni home. Shiv's immediate response was to call upon Rajesh and three other friends from the village to help minimize the scandal. Rajesh helped to calm down Shiv's elderly parents and prevent the police from interfering in the dispute – activities that required him missing two days of work and having to undergo one sleepless night. Rajesh also ensured that the young woman left the village, telling her: 'Do not disturb the village again – Shiv will either marry you or you must accept that is over.' Rajesh said afterwards, 'I have no space left in my heart for Shiv Singh.' But he was equally adamant that it was his 'duty' (*farz*) to protect the reputation of the village and ensure that the police, who might

otherwise have used the incident to extract bribes, were kept out of the hullabaloo. Rajesh emphasized his 'sacrifice' (*tyag*).

Rajesh's case points to the difficulties faced by young people growing up in Bemni and how a section of this population responded to educated underemployment. Young people imagined 'youth' (*jawaani*) as a period of considerable hardship. Government education is in a dire condition. The state has not invested in improving the curricula in most state schools and colleges, and corruption within the process of appointments and transfers has resulted in teacher/student ratios of over 100:1 in many local schools. There was no science teacher in any of the four government secondary schools that serve the sixteen villages within the Nandakini Valley. Unemployment among educated young people is also a pressing problem. The percentage of Bemni men aged 36-45 in government service is higher than that of young men aged 26-35 in spite of the marked increased in education in the younger of these two cohorts. Several young people referred to themselves as 'unemployed' (*berozgaar*). There were few more painful conversations that those we had with formerly ambitious young people, who told us, in response to our questions about their current employment, that they are '*patthar thorna'* (breaking stones) – a phrase that was literally true in some cases but was used metonymically to suggest a life 'hanging about' or scrabbling for any form of paid work.

Young men commonly engaged in various agricultural tasks, ran small businesses, travelled to tourist spots for work, and conducted manual wage labour for the government or privately. They typically prioritized different forms of work at different times of the year. For example, before the catastrophic floods of July 2013, young men often went to work in Badrinath or Kedarnath - key Hindu and Sikh pilgrimage sites - during the June-September tourist season. Even while engaging in this array of occupations, they often continued to seek college degrees and applied for government jobs.

MGNREGA offers underemployed young men, and other sections of village society, some valuable occasional income. Under the MGNREGA scheme, each household is entitled to work for 100 days

each year at a rate of Rs. 120 per day.[2] According to our survey, 68 per cent of young men aged between 18 and 30 worked under the scheme in 2011, usually for between 20 and 35 days work a year. Far fewer young women did so. Also important are new opportunities for young people to collect caterpillar fungus – called locally 'kira jali' – that is sold to local traders. These brokers then smuggle the kira jali across into Nepal to China, where it is used as an aphrodisiac. The kira jali - thin black fungi found extending out of a mummified caterpillar - are found at 15,000-16,000 feet, one day's strenuous hike from Bemni. Many young people make good amounts of money from the fungus, and there are a few kira jali specialists in the village who collect hundreds of the fungi each time they visit the high pastures. Five young men (three SC and two GC) made more than Rs. 50,000 from kira jali in May and June 2012. But kira jali collection is illegal, and young people's efforts in this area often lead them into conflict with the police, who seized the entire crop of kira jali from twelve young men in 2010. Gendered norms regarding the appropriate activity of menstruating women combined with assumptions about the relative strength and resilience of the different sexes meant that very few young women collected kira jali beyond the age of fifteen.

Rajesh's case also draws attention to the activities of the roughly ten other men aged between 18 and 30 who work as 'social men' in the village – all of them residing most of the time in Bemni. Partly reflecting the history in this region of young men joining the army, and also as a result of the rapid increase in the number of people attending school, notions of liberal democracy, rights, and 'serving the nation' were strongly held beliefs among youth in Bemni. Although a substantial proportion of young men migrated out of the village, especially for five to ten years during their late teens and twenties, they usually perceived the village as the terrain upon which they could usefully live out their vision of citizenship and service. Educated unemployed youth had the time, motivation, and skills (especially literacy) to help local people in their interactions with state officials, particularly with regard to medical emergencies and local resource issues - water, food, schooling, and

[2] In 2012, Rs 50 was roughly equivalent to $1.

healthcare, for example. They often worked alone, petitioning government officials whom they felt would be sympathetic, and at other times engaged in politics in small groups of friends.

Young people sometimes referred to their activities as 'work' (*kaam*) or 'service' (*seva*) rather than politics. This was partly strategic: 'Politics' (*rajniti* or *netagiri*) carries a somewhat negative connotation in the village and professional politicians have a bad reputation on the whole. But young men also argued that the process of negotiating with state officials to ensure that teachers turned up at the local school or prevent the police from seeking bribes during a dispute, for example, was political in the sense that it involved generating consensus and navigating conflict in pursuit of a definite goal, and often with a larger transformative project in mind. 'It is politics because it requires so many meetings,' they said. 'It is about bargaining,' others stated. Young men also argued that it was important to promote this vision of politics in a context in which many people had come to understand 'politics' as simply 'what politicians and bureaucrats do' and therefore as narrow, self-interested, and focused around a zero-sum competition for resources. 'Politics is not just about getting a slice of the pie but actually making the pie,' one young man said.

Rajesh and other 'social men' said that they were motivated to help others in the village out of frustration at the aggressively acquisitive natures of local politicians and state officials. They said that they felt a sense of responsibility connected to a feeling that others were not there to help. Yet at the same time their social action seemed to be founded on a sense that, if they got the politics right, sympathetic government officials would be there to help and that, however craven and inefficient the state might be, Government had delivered an impressive range of benefits to Bemni in recent years – the road, communications facilities, and (slightly) improved schooling, for example.

Social men developed a sense of what it was to act well in the political sphere by making sure that in their approach to politics, decision-making, action and general comportment they did everything that politicians did *not* do. They tried to be accountable to those they helped; they did not take money

from people in return for accomplishing tasks; and they were careful to act in a polite, unaggressive and 'civilized' manner. When young men in Bemni entered offices in the local town to petition bureaucrats they did not typically bring with them the 'squalor, ugliness and violence of popular life', to recall Chatterjee's (2004: 202) description of political society. They sought instead to present themselves as educated citizens, well versed in the law.

Social men's generative politics should not be idealized. They made no effort to address the specific problems that affect low castes – poverty and a lack of access to the ration cards required to obtain subsidized food, for example. Moreover, and notwithstanding the relatively muted character of caste inequalities in Uttarakhand, the actions of young political men actively reproduced wider divisions in the State between relatively well-connected GCs and SCs isolated from political processes. Likewise, their actions perpetuated gender norms, for example by side-lining women (especially young women) during political negotiations and operating with largely socially conservative ideas about the appropriate role and capacities of women in the village. Several social men were involved in disciplining young women who had had pre-marital sexual relations often by facilitating their being banished to live with an urban relative. Social men were very different from the 'thugs' described by Ravinder Kaur (2010) who police marriage practices in the plains of north India, sometimes violently punishing couples who marry across caste lines, and the aggressively masculinist 'fixers' that Craig Jeffrey (2009) described in ethnographic research in north India. But the actions of social men were often conservative in terms of caste and gender.

Good politicians

There was also a set of five young men in Bemni who were more explicitly and self-consciously 'political' than the 'social men'. These men sometimes referred to themselves as 'good politicians' to distinguish their activities from politicians at the district and State levels. Unlike the 'social men', the

‘good politicians’ were interested in becoming involved in representative politics at the village or district levels.

Kirpal is a case in point. He was a twenty-eight year old GC man from a poor household in Bemni. He did his primary education in Bemni and then passed Tenth Class in the local town. He married at the age of 21 and left to work in Mumbai where he manned a speak-your-weight machine in a shopping mall. He returned to Bemni in 2007, when his first son was born. He now has two sons and a daughter.

Kirpal was not a professional politician. Like Rajesh, he was not especially interested in long conversations about party politics at the State level. He said that he loathed national and State-level politicians and bureaucrats, who he said were only interested in making a fast buck. But Kripal imagined himself as a type of ‘good politician’ (*attchha neta*), with a capacity and responsibility to assist, motivate, and mobilize his peers. As in the case of social men, Kripal explicitly discussed his politics as generative. ‘Politics is not only about fighting for seats’, he said once as we were walking through the forest, ‘It is also using your energy and negotiations to produce things for your people.’

Kirpal and other self-styled ‘good politicians’ channelled a good deal of effort into circulating critiques of local corruption (*brushtechar*). Among their most common complaints were that schoolteachers are absent from school and that the government’s midday meal scheme in schools does not function. They also criticized the system for awarding contracts to build government facilities and they berated the village council head (*pradhan*) for reserving plum posts on local construction projects for his relatives. ‘Rajiv Gandhi once said that of every one hundred rupees that is spent on development only one rupee reaches the poor’, Kirpal said, practising a line he had used in public meetings, ‘But the poor would be lucky to even receive that rupee these days.’

Paralleling wider work on youth mobilization in the 2010s, the creative use of technology was a significant aspect of Kirpal's work as an anti-corruption activist. He used his mobile phone to photograph examples of corruption - the badly constructed village paths and leaking government buildings in the village - and he also put his mobile on speakerphone when having conversations with local officials so that his friends could hear that he was not doing secret deals behind their backs.

There were four educated unemployed young men from Bemni aged between 18 and 30 who had capitalized on their charisma through taking on responsibility for construction projects, run as part of MGNREGA. These young people could usually make an average of Rs. 15,000 a month through working as contractors – roughly six times the salary of a manual labourer in the village but still only half that of a government schoolteacher. Kirpal was especially fiercely critical of the contractors and said that the 'true path' lay in trying to help the village.

Kirpal also acted as a motivator, persuading villagers to invest in government micro-credit schemes, explaining to them ways of managing the forest sustainably, and negotiating with government officials over issues such as water and electricity. Kirpal had been especially active in developing a rotating credit association in Bemni that enrolled both GCs and SC. He had also been involved in an effort to encourage SCs to attend vocational training events laid on by the government in the district town. Daly (2010) emphasizes the self-imposed distance that young female activists in Egypt placed between their actions and those of local NGOs, but 'good politicians' had no such concerns. Kirpal had twice been involved in camps organized by local environmentally oriented NGOs and he and other good politicians also occasionally travelled to the district town to attend training organized by NGOs that were linked historically to the Chipko movement and struggle for a State of Uttarakhand.

To a greater extent than social men, Kirpal and other good politicians were eager participants in public meetings of the local village council and parent/teacher meetings at the school. They were keen to raise their voice (*awaz uthaana*). They were also frequently involved in protests. Kirpal, for

example, was a prominent figure in a village protest regarding the non-construction of a road promised for the village. Kirpal and many others borrowed tools from the local town, went to a nearby area of jungle and hacked out a 100 metre of road themselves. This took a total of eight days, during which time villagers camped in the jungle. The political stunt worked. Newspapers picked up the story – 'villagers build their own road' – and the district administration was embarrassed into action. Kirpal had also protested on the topics of electricity provision, the construction of a communications tower, and poor quality of local schools. All these demonstrations involved older villagers and SCs but tended to be led by GC young men in their twenties.

What was also striking was Kirpal's sense of himself as part of a generation intent on change (cf Mannheim 1972 [1936]; Johnson-Hanks 2002). Kirpal said that, 'the new generation have new ideas, new projects, and new energy. Between the ages of 18 and 30 you have the chance to alter what is happening.' Kirpal said that when he is older he will lack the same energy and that youth provides a moment to reflect upon the world. Kirpal was particularly aware of the newness of 'youth' as a category. He said that his father's generation lacked the same room for manoeuvre because they had not been educated, did not have the same level of awareness of politics (associated both with education and the rise of mobile phones), and had moved quickly from childhood into adult responsibilities on their farms. Echoing ideas we heard repeated by many other good politicians, Kirpal said that it was the experience of emerging from school to find a lack of employment opportunities that had partly motivated him to get involved in politics. 'It is frustration', he said, 'plus a feeling that we should serve our people'. He was quite keenly aware of occupying a 'vital conjuncture' in Johnson-Hanks (2002) terms.

As the example of Kirpal suggests, young people were important not only in managing interpersonal conflict and negotiating with officials over resources, as in Rajesh's case, but also in communicating political critiques in the village, participating in local-level representative politics, and conducting motivational work. There were five educated underemployed young men living in Bemni who

referred to themselves periodically as ‘good politicians’ and played roles akin to that of Kirpal. There were a further three young male ‘good politicians’ who originated in Bemni but now lived outside the village. Two were studying, one was a teacher, and two were in the army. They returned periodically to do work as helpers, motivators, and mobilizers. One of those out-migrants, Jaipal, had won election to a sub-district council and then to the district council. Jaipal was especially important in bringing electricity to the village in 2010. He launched a concerted campaign over several months to persuade district officials, including the district Magistrate, to extend electricity lines to Bemni. He spoke enthusiastically: ‘I led the electricity officials through the thick jungle, discussing where high tension wires needed to be placed’, and he described burning leeches off officials’ legs and how he later became friends with the bureaucrats, who even came to his wedding. Another major achievement of Jaipal’s was using his influence among educational officials in a local town to improve the ratio of teachers to students in the two main secondary schools that cater for young people in the Nandakini Valley and to get the secondary school closest to Bemni extended from 8th class to 10th class in 2004.

Good politicians identified ‘youth’ as a period of generational possibility (see also Snellinger 2005). In addition to referring to the period between 18 and 30 as one of ‘action’, young people sometimes said that the present generation (*pithi*) of people in their late teens and twenties are especially able to effect change. They said that today’s youth in Bemni are more educated, better informed, and in closer contact with the outside world than are previous generations and that their experience of hardship primed them to act.

Older generations tolerated the activities of Bemni’s ‘social men’ and ‘good politicians’. But there were three prominent contractors in the region and several government bureaucrats, all of them in their forties or fifties, who resented the rise of young men like Kirpal. This was in part a reflection of the threat posed by politically active young men to bigwigs’ capacity to embezzle funds.

The activities of young good politicians not only addressed immediate problems: They also produced ideas and practices that could serve as precedents for later action. Arjun Appadurai (2002) has described systematic processes of 'precedent setting' among NGO activists in Mumbai, who closely archived their activity as a basis for making future claims on the state. In Bemni there was no coordinated process of recording political action. But one of the effects of young men's assertion was to ensure that ideas about citizenship, rights, and entitlement to government assistance circulated with a new intensity in the village. People remembered incidents in which good politicians had achieved something and cherished it as an example of how the state (*sarkar*) could periodically work in their interest. Good politicians' actions also left particular traces on the landscape that could serve as motivational material for future assertion. For example, young men often stopped us on the walk up to Bemni village to point to the remnants of the road that they had constructed to shame the state into action.

It is important not to romanticize the work of 'good politicians', who – like the 'social men' – rarely worked with SCs and were reluctant to be drawn into discussions of caste discrimination as an aspect of local hardship. Low castes in Bemni occasionally bemoaned their relative exclusion from politics and said that they lacked a set of 'good politicians' who could represent their somewhat distinctive interests. Politically active young men rarely involved young women in their mobilization, either, and protests were founded in part on a type of masculine camaraderie.

Gender exclusion

The importance of gender in shaping young people's political work in Bemni can be developed through consideration of Lila, who was 28 in 2012 and one of seven young women born in the village to have acquired a degree. Lila had a BA (Arts) from Gopeshwar, which she did by correspondence and Bachelors of Education degree from a college in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Lila's family effectively bought the Jammu and Kashmir degree. Lila did not have to study very much, and many

people describe such degrees as 'fake' (*naqli*). The Uttarakhand Government has recently introduced a new test that people with B.Ed degrees will have to pass before they are allowed to apply for teaching jobs, a measure that is designed to weed out precisely those students, like Lila, who have purchased degrees from distant colleges.

Lila had found it impossible to acquire a teaching position because of a lack of opportunities. She said that as a woman she could not enter business. The only forms of paid employment that she said a woman could do locally – teaching and NGO work – had little scope. In the spring of 2012 Lila was living in Gopeshwar doing a MA in Economics from the college there. She was also looking after her two nephews in Gopeshwar. Her brother-in-law had an army post and could afford to send his sons to a private school in the town. Lila did much of the everyday work associated with ensuring that her nephews obtained good quality tuition in the town, moved up through school classes smoothly, and obtained good marks in examinations – all tasks that entailed negotiating with school principals, teachers, and tutors in a crowded market for credentials and educational assistance.

Lila had recently become engaged to a young man who has a BA and small business in a nearby village. Her choice of marriage partner was highly constrained because young men were concerned about marrying someone so 'old' and with such high-level educational qualifications. One of her prospective marriage partners complained after meeting her of her being too '*tez*', a double-edged word which means both 'bright' and 'headstrong'. Lila said that she suffers from a great deal of 'tension' (using the English word) as a result of her unemployment and with respect to her upcoming marriage.

Lila is not especially interested in politics, in the sense of party politics. But she participated in several village-based rallies on the theme of improving local schools. In addition, education and the experience of applying for government jobs had given Lila a sense of being able to cope with social hardships and public life. Lila repeatedly referred to an instance in which a man was speaking rudely

to young women in a local city who had come to do a government employment examination. Lila not only upbraided the man for his rude assumption that rural young woman would be dull and ignorant, she also arranged for the young women in the examination to sit together in a particular section of the examination hall where they could concentrate. Lila: 'I showed him that I was someone who could speak, that I am not afraid of raising my voice'.

This brief portrait of Lila is more broadly indicative. There were some opportunities for young women to obtain paid work in and around Bemni, even in the absence of secure well-paid government employment. Four of the 12 young women with high school or degree qualifications in Bemni worked part-time in local schools or had more permanent jobs in government nurseries. But the vast majority of high school or degree-educated young women in Bemni and the surrounding area found it difficult to acquire secure salaried work. There was less pressure on them, as compared to men, to acquire such work, but by equal measure it was harder for them to do so because they had to battle both the scarce job market and prevailing gender norms. In addition, the great uncertainty about whether future in-laws would support their daughter-in-law in the search for paid work discouraged single women with high school qualification or degrees from planning careers.

With the exception of temporary teaching work and involvement in local development projects, for example through MGNREGA, young women found it hard to obtain paid work while waiting for a government job to materialize. It is much more difficult for them than it is for men to spend long periods outside the village, and young women were much more involved than were men in unpaid household and farm work: conducting daily chores around the home, looking after livestock, collecting firewood and grass for fodder, and undertaking numerous tasks in the fields (see Dyson 2008; 2010).

Uncertainties over marriage often exacerbated young women's difficulties still further. Under a brideprice system prevalent in the Bemni region in the 1970s and 1980s young women were often

married within their own village and could break a relationship if they were unhappy. Under the dowry system that has become more prevalent over the past twenty years it is no longer possible for young women to negotiate a separation and they more commonly married outside the village, sometimes at a considerable distance from Bemni. The emergence of this dowry system adversely affects young people in general, and especially young women, by exacerbating a tendency for young people to assess their own appearance, education, and employment in narrowly instrumental, even monetized terms. The dowry system encourages young people to make quite direct comparisons between their own position and that of more purportedly successful youth, and it intensfies inter-generational social conflict, for example over success or failure of past social 'strategies' as these become evident at the time of negotiating a marriage. Lila felt that she had the confidence to face up to these various challenges and threats, but 'tension' was a recurrent theme of our conversations with her about marriage. For young women, the creation of a distinct life phase of 'youth' – rather than providing a straightforward space for social and political action and critique – put them under new pressures and was associated in some respects with a decline in the social agency in their late teens and twenties.

But educated young women might be viewed 'proto-political' in the sense that they often spoke of themselves as people with the awareness and sense of self-reliance required to act politically when required to do so. They said that they had courage (*himmat*) that they could 'adjust' (using the English word) to different situations, and that they had awareness (*jagaarook:* literally 'they had woken up'). Young women also spoke of having friendships within and beyond the village, mainly with other women, which could be a resource in terms of political action. This sense of latent political potential was, itself, highly important and generative of various forms of politicking within the family and, to a lesser extent, more broadly. Young women provided assistance to family members, for example medical help during emergencies and more regular assistance in negotiating with teachers and school principals, as in Lila's case in Gopeshwar. And they petitioned local government officers, especially teachers, when they felt that they had the right to do so. They acted

politically in the sense of generating consensus and navigating conflict in pursuit of a desired end – activities that bore on questions of compromise, state authority, power, and hierarchy.

Conclusions

Case studies of the type presented here are important for comparative enquiry since they can produce new questions, unsettle stereotypes, and offer a grounded examination of processes in their fullness (Flyvbjerg 2006). Our qualitative research with Bemni youth challenges received ideas about the nature of civil society and youth in the global South. Young people in a region of north India have developed in the face of considerable frustration and hardship a type of politics – and a form of civil society - that is self-consciously 'generative' and which is gradually altering aspects of local development.

Youth in Bemni faced a wide range of social frustrations that provided the context for their politicking: the poor condition of local educational institutions, deterioration in the environment, and a shortage of white-collar job opportunities. They felt demoralized and often bewildered by the changes occurring around them. As such, they stand as powerful examples of what is a global problem of youth insecurity (Cole and Durham 2006). Young women in Bemni experienced a type of double disadvantage: They were excluded from the labour market and also partially excluded from much of the male 'work' of under-employment.

Young people did not respond by becoming involved in narrowly self-interested, reactionary or violent political activities, although some were becoming profit-seeking contractors. To recall Mannheim's (1972 [1936] ideas, youth in this region were instead often a gentle generational force, incrementally seeking to improve some aspects of local society through their networking, hustle, and hard work. This action had a redistributive aspect: Some of the benefits that GC young people

obtained were shared by the uneducated, by SCs and by people in nearby villagers. Generative politics resulted in a slight reallocation of resources in favour of the poor and relatively young.

Young people in Bemni understood their civic activity as 'social' in the double sense of being organized around social issues – such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and development – and involving the construction of networks of mutual responsibility. They also frequently referred to their action as 'political'. It entailed negotiating with a broad range of agents, deliberating intensively over questions of strategy, and avoiding conflict – all in the service of a definite goal and often with broader questions of transformation in mind.

These conclusions offer a basis for widening ideas about how civil society takes place in the global South. The activities of young people in Bemni occurred in the sphere of direct negotiation between people and state officials that Chatterjee (2004) terms 'political society'. It involved persuading a police officer to overlook a fine, negotiating with a government doctor, or ensuring that a land revenue officer investigates a crime, for example. But young people's practices in Bemni differed from those of people in political society as conceived by Chatterjee: Bemni youth typically went about their daily work in a civilized manner; they showed a close knowledge of the law and practiced non-violent agitation; they appealed to the state with close reference to their rights as 'citizens'; and they possessed an ethic of 'service' (*sewa*). What is partly remarkable about contemporary youth politics in Bemni is the extent to which 'political society', in Chatterjee's terms, forms a negative point of reference for young people.

Young people's actions in Bemni provide a further contrast with Bayart's (2009) description of youth in Africa as co-opted into patronage systems (see also Arnot 2009). In Bemni educated underemployed youth referred to community service rather than resource capture as a guiding principle: 'I serve therefore I am' rather than 'I graze therefore I am.' Yet young people's practices fail to qualify for the title 'civil society' in its Hegelian sense because it was not institutionalized, for

example within associations or clubs. A more generous definition of 'civil society' might be required in this Indian context to allow for deliberative, civic, and to some extent inclusive political practices that are not incorporated in named associations (cf Kaviraj 2001; Bayart 2009).

The actions of young people in Bemni fail to align with journalistic and international representations of the politics of demoralized youth (cf Cincotta et al. 2003; World Bank 2011). Like some of their peers in North Africa, Latin America and southern Europe, young people in Bemni tried hard at the everyday level to critique class hierarchies as these became evident, for example, in bureaucrats' appropriation of resources ear-marked for the rural poor. They also argued for the importance of the state as a bulwark against poverty, and expressed their sense that as citizens of India they were entitled to basic services, such as a decent quality of education. This activity was also self-consciously generative in nature. The idea of 'creating the pie not simply competing for a slice' underpinned much youth mobilization.

It might be argued that the generative politics we are describing is ineffective. Educated youth remain in a rather precarious position and the village remains poor relative to surrounding areas, to say nothing of its position relative to large cities. Moreover, some commentators might point out that generative politics is rather convenient for the state and for powerful who are not being pressured into redistributive measures – they can simply sit back and let energetic youth play around the edges of the state garnering resources where they can. In addition, generative politics is rather short-term in nature. But such a negative reading would obscure aspects of the efficacy of the youth politics we have described. It is true that, as also noted in other recent work on individualized youth politics around the world (e.g. Daly 2010; Pearce 2013), youth community activism in Bemni flickered into life in particular moments rather than being part of a continuous social movement. But generative politics left traces on the landscape and produced ideas, such as the notion that the poor were entitled to make claims on the state. Unusual partnerships were also being tested and developed at the local level through the process of youth-led generative politics, such as young people becoming friends

with officials from the government electricity department. What our analysis also suggests is the existence of a certain amount of trust and goodwill in the minds of a new generation that could be tapped as a basis for encouraging more joined-up, lasting, and possibly also inclusive forms of generative politics.

Lefebvre's (2008) analysis of everyday life is enduringly helpful in theorizing everyday politics because it stresses the mutual imbrication of dominance and resistance in which 'moments' of creative action. Even while they sought to redistribute resources to the relatively poor, GC young men in Bemni excluded young women and reproduced conservative and exclusionary ideas about gender and to some extent also caste, and young men were better able than were young women to capitalize personally on their everyday generative politics, for example through acquiring formal positions in local government.

Where Lefebvre's analysis is slightly less helpful is in anticipating the conditions in which youth civic politics was emerging in Uttarakhand. Lefebvre's work is founded on a rather singular vision of dominant power as inevitably in the service of capitalist accumulation. But in the twenty-first century powerful institutions are disseminating notions of universal citizenship that do not conform in a simple manner to ideas of self-interested capitalist accumulation. It was the contradiction between different dominant discourses – the notion of self-maximization promulgated within patron-client networks and the citizenship ethic forwarded within school textbooks and by NGOs - that partially accounts for youth civic politics in Bemni. Influenced by depictions of the state within textbooks and regional histories of popular assertion, young people, on the whole, wanted jobs in government, degrees from government colleges, and they believed in a particular nation-state idea. Yet young people also encountered manifold examples of state ineptitude and sometimes violence, reflecting the particular 'vital conjuncture' (Johnson-Hanks 2002) – as educated underemployed youth – that they occupied. It was this mismatch between a state ideal and the state in practice - and young people's

determination to hold on to the former in the face of the latter - that fuelled the civic politics we have described.

Future comparative enquiry might productively reflect on when and how relatively 'civic' forms of politics among youth become evident and in what circumstances thicken into institutions and movements. This is a project that has being undertaken by scholars working on youth movements since 2010 (Biekart and Fowler 2013; Bayat 2013b), and it is one that might productively be pursued, too, in Latin America and South Asia.

A more focused comparative project would spring from our observations about generative politics: In what circumstances, why, and with what implications for wider regional or national understandings of politics do young people circulate visions of their politics as 'generative' – and to what extent do their actions genuinely offer evidence of 'generative action'? It seems likely that the specific mix of forces that produced a self-consciously 'generative' politics in Himalayan north India is rather unusual in some respects. It is politicians and bureaucrats' narrowly acquisitive politics, cast into a harsh light by the high-minded norms of liberal citizenship that young people encounter in school and a belief in the state embodied in some successful new government projects, that has encouraged youth in this corner of India to engage in civic politics and imagine this politics in generative terms. But there are many other young people around the world who are currently appropriating ideas of citizenship in contexts of predatory clientelism (Arnot 2009), and the degree to which these youth explicitly theorize their 'politics' and make distinctions between allocative and generative politics would be interesting topics for future research.

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