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Step by step: Understanding perceptions of time and space in Nepal

Lillian Norton-Brainerd
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Step by step: Understanding perceptions of time and space in Nepal

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SIT Nepal: Development, Gender, and Social Change

Suman Pant

May 17, 2022

Abstract

Time and space are part of everyone's daily life; however, these concepts are rarely explicitly discussed. Hegemonic interpretations of time and space are part of capitalist, colonialist structures, thus understanding alternative perceptions is important to resisting these structures. To understand perceptions of time in Nepal, I spent a month in Gre, a small village near Langtang National Park. I interviewed villagers and spent time observing how people spend their time, talk about time, and give directions to physical places. While there is not one perception of time and space, I learned how time and space influence each other. Geography and consistency of resources influences how people talk about time. The small space of the village changes how people interact with each other and integrate their social lives with work. I argue that people's perception of time and space only exists in relation to other villagers. In addition, time is not fixed only based on a clock, and instead moves according to weather, meals, and sequences of tasks. People plan their days in relation to the current day and other people. Time and space can exist outside of rigid, standardized systems.

Keywords: time, space, geography

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Introduction

Flexibility. Moving with the flow. Asking for help. Here are some things I learned about space and time while in Nepal, before even starting this paper. The idea that conceptions of time and space could actually be different than what I can imagine seemed unreal, yet this question of what time is has long been sought to be answered by philosophers and theorists from many fields. Religions place great importance on time (see Bateau, 1957; Narayanan, 1999), psychologists and anthropologists question the idea of time (see Casasanto & Boroditsky, 2008; Schmitt et al., 2021; Smith, 1982), scientists form theories (see Massey, 1999), and scholars from all disciplines challenge hegemonic ideas of time and space (see Harley, 2009; Killsback, 2013; Schmitt et al., 2021; Soderling, 2016).

Many scholars critique hegemonic notions of time and space for their standardization, confinement, and rigidity, particularly because of their relationship to capitalism and colonialism (Birth, Schmitt et al, Smith, Soderling). Maps have a history of dividing up far away land to colonize or accurately drawing an area in order to exploit the natural resources (Harley). The rigid workday and need to standardize time is closely related to industrialization and capitalism (Schmitt et al). However, alternative ways of understanding time exist, such as seen after looking at Buddhist and Hindu philosophies (Bateau; Naranayan), exploring indigenous ways of knowing (Killsback, Schmitt et al., Smith), or looking at marginalized or oppressed groups (Soderling).

I look at time and space in Nepal because I grew up in an upper middle class family in a majority white community in Southern California. I learned about time management in school, I was told to use my time efficiently, and I was supposed to put my events and tasks on a calendar with my family so that everything was planned. In general, time and space were measured,

linear, and exact. After spending time in Nepal and joking about “Nepali time” whenever something changed or someone was late according to our schedule, learning the words people use to talk about time, and finding out that there are not addresses, I became curious about how people perceive time and space. Alternative conceptions of time and space to ideas that perpetuate capitalism, colonialism, and other systems of oppression are one way of resisting these systems, thus it is important to understand and explore the possibilities.

Literature Review

Time and space are intertwined concepts, involved in our everyday lives, as well as in academic work, although it is often not at the forefront of the research. The philosophical question of what time is has long been attempted to be answered, with theories coming from science, philosophy, psychology, and other disciplines. It is important to emphasize how conceptions of time and space are socially constructed and closely interrelated with systems, such as capitalism and industrialization (see Birth, 2004; McLafferty, 2005; Schmitt et al., 2021). Time and space are measured, whether through miles or minutes, the sun or steps, clocks or calendars, meals or money.

Time and space can be understood through activities, although scholars caution about making assumptions of time based on the standard minutes spent on each activity, language and metaphors, although Birth (2004) emphasizes how these are metaphors, not the concept of time itself (p. 74). These metaphors can be geometric, although Birth questions why metaphors of time are continuous (p. 74), or related to other aspects of life. Time and space are closely interrelated and are frequently used when talking about each other, at least in English (Casasanto & Boroditsky, 2008). For example, distance is not only a spatial concept, as it also implies time

(Tuan, 1997, p. 118). Time is material (Soderling, 2016, p. 334). Thus, ways in which time and space construct and create each other need to be further studied. If people refer to these concepts similarly metaphorically, maybe the concepts cannot be understood without one another.

Stages of life and family

Soderling's (2016) piece highlights a queer intentional community in a rural area in the southern US, using theories of queer time and materiality to explain how time moves in this community. Here, theories of queer time rely on assumptions that time throughout one's life is often measured in life stages dictated by heteronormative ideas of marriage and family, and that many queer people often work against these assumptions and thus have slightly different ideas of life stages (Soderling). In one Tamang village in Nepal, the average age of marriage for women was 19 in 1989, and by 25, 91% of women were married, showing the expectation of marriage by a certain age (Dahal, 1993). Dahal argues that marriage timing is related to social capital and domestic needs, as marriage and labor are closely linked. Family and other people are thus a part of how one measures time throughout their life and affect the timing of certain life stages.

Unpredictability of nature

Living closely with nature is also closely related to perceptions of time and space. When most tasks, such as farm work and cooking, are necessary to do every day, time is dictated by what needs to be done, rather than someone else's work schedule. This makes it both more challenging to take days off and simultaneously easier to spontaneously celebrate something, changing the mix of leisure and work. Weather and having to work on nature's schedule make it more challenging to plan, meaning time becomes more fluid (Soderling, 2016).

Time is also measured by nature and the sun or crops are prevalent in how people talk about time. For example, in a village in Papua New Guinea, a month is over when the moon has

waned; villagers are confused by the concept of calendar months (Smith). Holidays and festivals are often centered around nature (Soderling). When villagers in Smith's study talked about their day going quickly or slowly, it was often relevant to the sun. In addition, people frequently mentioned plants being ready to pick when talking about working and tasks. If a plant is ready, then they have more work; if not, then they find something else to do. The timing of daily tasks and the timing of years is intertwined with nature.

Systems of oppression

Dominant concepts of space and time are essential to question and understand as they are used to formulate society and often oppress people. Constructing space and time as rigid, objective concepts ignores people's lived experiences through space and time every day. Time changed with European industrialization as industrial, capitalistic workplaces rely on a precise measurable concept of time (Birth, 2004). Colonization is perpetuated through this space-time framework. Similarly, accurately drawing space on a map helped enable the exploitation of natural resources and contributed to capitalism (MacLafferty, 2005). Western expansion within the US and the European colonization of other continents could not have occurred without maps and lines that divided space without actually being there (Harley, 2009). This also shows how place and resources affect people's conceptions of time and space. Thus, understanding narratives of space and time outside of the dominant white, Western narratives is important to ending exploitation.

Smith's (1982) study of the effect of colonialism on time in a village in Papua New Guinea displays how the imposition of rigid structures from European influences has increased views of time as a scarce resource. People complain of the inflexibility of the schedule and about the bell to call people to events ringing too much, although these complaints are often phrased about

authority, rather than the lack of time. When villagers were scolded by the village leaders for being late one day, people were upset because they felt the leaders were implying they did not know how to work, displaying how equating timeliness with work ethic came from a colonial influence (Smith, p. 511). Villagers feel that having to earn money has increased their work, and thus they have even less time, although Smith argues that time has not simply become scarcer. Instead, Smith explains that the increasing colonial influence and capitalistic forms of production in this village has added a concept of time scarcity.

Daily life

Time and space affects people's lives in tangible ways on a daily basis, as these concepts are created and recreated by the social and institutional structures we live in Birth's (2004) work explores concepts of time among Trinidadian people. While describing how Trinidadian people often leave later than they say they will, Birth positions the duration of time they are late as the amount of time it takes to get ready, not as a measurable number of minutes (p. 72). Positioning time as a duration of an activity, rather than an amount of minutes, shows how different conceptions of time affect what it means to be late or on time and thus when people do activities. Similarly, Soderling (2016) describes the lack of a regular meal time; people eat when dinner "happens" (p. 341). Time does not have to line up with clock time, yet is still measured and moves.

Time is also portrayed as a sequence of activities, such as when Smith asked villagers in Papua New Guinea if they have enough time. People would sometimes respond with a description of their sequence of tasks throughout their day, showing how they did not always conceptualize time as having "enough," it was simply about working throughout the day. This reflects Soderling's idea that some methods of communal living only worked because of its so-

called “inefficiency” and lack of expectation about timeliness. When people do not perceive time as only by the clock, activities throughout their life happen in relation to other events or people.

Words for time

Time and space are clearly intertwined, as seen in language. Linguistic metaphors display these associations between time and space, such as how Casasanto and Boroditsky’s (2008) study suggested that, in English, spatial metaphors for time are unavoidable, while one can make do without temporal metaphors for space. In their study, this linguistic asymmetry is reflected in how spatial information impacted temporal judgements, but temporal information did not affect spatial judgements. However, this study was limited to an English speaking perspective in the US, leaving the question of how different languages are related to alternative conceptions of time and space. For example, the Koragur language in the village in Papua New Guinea has no word for “time.” In addition, they have no words equivalent to the days of the week, days are talked about as compared to today (Smith, 1982). Baumann (2008) points out how wrongly translating units of time loses a lot of their meaning, showing the importance of language in understanding time.

Time and religion

Buddhism theorizes about the fundamental nature of time, with different Buddhist texts and schools of thought having different ideas. Bareau (1957) discusses how Buddhist thought delves into the existence of past, present, and future and the meaning of a moment. Early Buddhist thoughts on time are related to Buddhist’s central ontology of unsubstantiality. In some thoughts, time is an empty frame. In another school of thought, everything is instantaneous and a single instant “possesses the three characteristics of production,” although they were critiqued for introducing too many things into one moment (Bareau, p. 354). Here, the past, present, and

future all exist, but are not things; rather they are modes of being, and time is not different than its composites. In other thoughts, time is a thing and is different than its composites. While “the substance of the composites is impermanent,” time itself is permanent (p. 359). Alternative Buddhist texts argue that pure momentariness is impossible because natural phenomena exist and “last longer than a single instant of thought” (p. 354).

Space and time are also intertwined in Buddhist texts. According to Buddha, there is no spatial extent to the world systems, which he describes with a metaphor using godly time to show how they would reach nirvana before finding the extent of the universe. (Gethin, 1998, p. 115). In another metaphor, Buddha uses physical landmarks to describe a length of time. In an aeon, he says, if there was a seven-mile high and wide mountain of rock that was touched once lightly with a cloth by a person at the end of every hundred years, this mountain would decay from this cloth hundreds to thousands of times in an aeon (p. 113). Time is the beginning of the universe in Buddhist cosmology (Coward, 1999). In Buddhism, the extent of the universe, which is also where the four elements “cease,” an idea closely related to time, “is in the consciousness that knows nirvana” (Gethin, p.114). In addition, ideas of meditation are related to giving a current moment attention. Time and space are folded into one another through these metaphors and theories of the universe.

Ideas of time and space in Nepal

While information about time and space is scattered across disciplines and geographical locations, I bring together ideas of time and space relevant to my research in a small village in Nepal. Discussions of conceptualizations of time and space in Nepal in academia is limited. Outside of academia, the phrase “Nepali time,” which I frequently heard and referenced in Kathmandu, is discussed in multiple news articles and even books (“Nepali time,” 2016, Sharma,

2008). Although one tourist discusses the value of slowing down time and going literally in circles, others critique it for being too laid back and say that it makes workplaces inefficient (Weiner, 2018). One book gives advice on how Nepali workplace managers should plan their time, using evidence that time is valued in Hinduism to create a suggestion of a detailed schedule. Although this book is critical of Nepali time and making people wait, even the schedule leaves room for food and breaks (Sharma). After searching #NepaliTime on Facebook and Instagram, all posts using this hashtag to describe something other than the Nepali time zone were commenting on waiting for someone running late or how plans always change or being late and still being the first person there. While a few posts critique Nepali time, most are making fun of this cultural habit, some even sound proud.

There is also very little research on how people navigate spaces in Nepal, thus leaving space for this to be studied. Thus, I have brought ideas of time and space in Buddhism and Hinduism with theories of time and family with concepts of rurality and its effect on time. I hope to better piece together how all these ideas are related linguistically and on a day to day level through my discussions and observations with people in Nepal.

Research Question

How do people talk about time and space, both on a day to day basis and on a larger scale? What perceptions do people have about the concepts of time and space?

Methods

I conducted this research while living in Gre, Rasuwa, Nepal for about a month. Gre is a 3-4 hour walk from Dunche, Syaphru Bensi, and Gatlang, all accessible from Kathmandu by a

public bus. While reachable by roads, people do not have cars and few have motorcycles, so many people walk when visiting other villages. Gre is located on a steep hillside at about 2000 meters. Most people are farmers with crops including potato, corn, onion, lentils, and other vegetables. Gre has a school that goes until year 8; after that, people must go to nearby towns for education. As Gre is a Tamang village, everyone speaks Tamang to each other most of the time. Nepali is taught in the school, so many young children and older people either do not know Nepali or have a limited vocabulary.

After spending about a week in Gre walking around, hanging out with our homestay, and talking to villagers, I begin interviewing people, starting by reaching out to members of my homestay family, then when walking around to find people with free time to interview. Because anyone has useful information for my project and I do not need specific participants, my participants were chosen by convenience. However, I ended up interviewing five people who had a range of jobs within the village. While one younger person, Kalpana, goes to boarding school in Kathmandu so is only in Gre during breaks, everyone else lives in Gre full time. Roshan works at the school, Dawa works as a construction worker, and Geeta and Pasang do farm work and other housework (Appendix A).

My interviews were conducted casually, either entirely in Nepali or in a mix of Nepali and English. The prevalence of Tamang language made it more challenging to find older people to interview, so besides one attempted interview with someone over 50 where none of my questions were understood, all of my interviews were with younger, more educated people. \ I asked people if they had free time and explained that I was doing research and wanted to ask them questions. I tried to explain my topic and what I was doing with the information, although the language barrier made this challenging. I then asked people questions about their work, free

time, planning ahead, clock time, and what they usually do in a day to see how people talk about how they spend their time. I asked questions about laziness and rest, how long ago things were built, marriage in Gre to understand broader concepts of time and space. Finally, I asked people about the distances of nearby places and how they learned how to find new places to understand perceptions of space. I also spent time, mostly with my homestay family, observing how people spend their time, how people meet friends, and when they take breaks. I also wrote notes about my experiences and perceptions of time and space in all of Nepal, specifically Gre, as well as in the US, in order to understand how my perceptions of time affect my research.

Because most of my interviews were conducted in Nepali, the language changed how I was able to ask questions. For example, to ask when someone usually does a certain task, I use *kati baje* for what time (clock), *kati belaa* for what time of day (morning, evening, etc) or *kahile* for what day (tomorrow, Monday, a certain date, etc). I use *kati bhayo* with a different structure to ask how long ago something started or for how long something has been happening. There is another word for time in Nepali, *samaya*, but to ask someone if they have time the word *phursad*, or free time, can alternatively be used. To ask about if someone plans their day, either the word *plan* in English is used or I ask if people think about their next day. When asking about distances, I can either ask how far or how many hours/minutes/days does it take; I can't ask how long it takes to get somewhere. In Nepali, to say "a long time" one says *dherai samaya*, where *dherai* means a lot and *samaya* means time. Thus, the words used for time in Nepali shape how I was able to ask questions.

Because of some of these linguistic differences, my paper is limited by the cultural and linguistic differences in asking about time. Some of the questions I wanted to ask simply did not make sense to translate in Nepali, showing how my questions came from my upbringing in a

white, upper-middle class in the United States. My way of looking at time comes from a structured perspective where my life has been scheduled, even more than many of my friends. As an outsider in Nepal, many aspects, including ways of looking at time and space, seemed different to me and I often looked to compare aspects of culture.

Another ethical challenge is how this research benefits the villagers. While I explained that I was doing research on time for school, my limited language ability made thoroughly explaining this more challenging. As my topic is abstract, people often seemed slightly confused about what I was studying or why I was studying this topic. My research does not benefit the villagers, but I am also not asking about very sensitive information, meaning there are few risks. I tried to thank people for teaching me to show how they are producing knowledge, but again, I am not sure how well this was conveyed. The power dynamic of me as a white foreigner as well as guest, which Nepali people take very seriously, also felt prevalent to me, so I tried to really make sure it was okay that I wrote down their answers. I also spent time in the village talking with people and making sure they knew who I was before I interviewed anyone.

The abstract nature of my topic also affected my research. Besides the obvious limitation of my limited Nepali ability, asking people directly how one thinks of time would be ineffective. Although I did not ask participants any questions like “what is time?,” when I tried to ask people bigger questions about what things mean or why they do certain things, people would not know the answer. A few participants also told me that my questions were hard, even though they answered all of them, showing the cultural difference and abstract nature of my questions. Giving people more time to think about these questions or being able to explain my view on these questions in Nepali to spark thoughts could help with this limitation.

Findings

Narrative

Here, I contrast my experiences with time and space in the US and Nepal, knowing that both of these perspectives are limited to my specific experiences.

Taking buses, planes, and jeeps in Nepal has shown me new ways to go with the flow. Because of weather, we couldn't fly back to Pokhara so we took a jeep. While on the jeep we stopped for over 30 minutes without warning, and no one seemed angry at all. When we flew back to Kathmandu, the plane was delayed, but rather than having a new time we just waited until the other plane showed up and then they shouted for our flight, no warning. My first time using public transportation in Kathmandu, I was told to go find the bus stop and ask where the bus was going. My first times using public transportation in different cities across the US, I found the bus schedule online, down to the minute, and it is also posted at the bus stop. The bus says destinations on it and the buses are numbered, so in the US, one must read or find out information on one's own, rather than ask. Taking the public bus from Kathmandu to Dunche, the bus stopped many times and I was never sure if we were supposed to get out or not. Of course, this was partly because of the language barrier, but there was also no announcement of a time the bus would be leaving. The bus would turn on or honk its horn and everyone would get back on. When I walk as fast as I do around my college campus in Kathmandu, I am usually one of the fastest walkers. I feel more similar to everyone else when I take my time and do not rush.

Trying to get to Gre for our ISP, a place we were told to "just show up" to and stay there for a month, we walked around and asked several different groups of people how to get there. Without signs like I am used to, without maps that would have made me look even more like a clueless tourist, enacting the countless pieces of advice I'd been given in Nepal to simply ask for

directions when lost, I knew the only way was to ask. Gre was *u tyaahaa* and to get there, we either had to take a bus to a different village, take a bus *u tala* and then go *u maathi*, or simply walk *tala* and then *maathi*. Each person had a different estimate of time and if we had to take a bus or not, but all were happy to help us and give us directions. Finally, we found someone who was taking the bus and would show us where to get off. Countless people told us where to get off, pointed out the trail and confirmed we were going in the right direction as we were walking. The only time I can think of when I asked a random person for directions in the US was while touring a college campus and directions were given reflecting the structured organization of the space “go right on this path, then go left and you’ll see the big building”.

Living in Gre, without a specific schedule to follow or specific times I had to do anything, I stopped worrying about clock time as much. I got up, ate when my family had free time to make food, went on a walk when I felt like it, and interviewed someone when they had time. When I was little, I didn’t like sleeping without a clock beside my bed because I always wanted to know how much time was left (sometimes I wanted more time to sleep, sometimes I wanted to know if it was a “reasonable” to get up/if I had slept enough). The time of my sleep mattered more to me than how I felt. In Gre, some of this stuck with me, although

At the water tap while I am doing laundry with two other people, others gather to chat and come over. Some are getting water, some are washing dishes, some are just chatting with friends. In between turns at the water tap, we wait and talk with people around us. Sometimes, there is only one person at the water tap, but it is hard to be uninterrupted the entire time. I talk while doing laundry, I talk while cooking, while gardening. Although I barely do any housework here, especially compared to everyone else, the little I do feels very social. One day, about ten women all working on making yak wool into yarn and weaving it all sit in the shade of a big tree

and weave all day, thus work and leisure are again integrated. In the US, my parents go to work each day, then when they come home, they rest and do any housework necessary. For my mom, who works in a home office, work and home are slightly more intertwined, but she explains the importance of keeping them separate for her. She tries to work in the office, then go to a different room to take breaks.

My house was especially scheduled throughout my life, more than most of my other friends or family. Things were allowed to change and there wasn't anger or frustration if the schedule wasn't followed, but everything on our calendar was planned way in advance – not only school and work times, but dinners or events with family and friends, when we would clean our house, when we would do family yard work, etc. Our menu was planned out – just dinners, but every week a regular menu was planned so I always knew what was happening in advance. In high school, I would become stressed when people would ask me to hang out last minute because I felt I always had to know how I was spending my time ahead of time. Even if I didn't write my schedule down, I had a general plan of what I would do each day, up until recently. In Gre, one day I decided I was going to wash my hair and do my laundry the next day, but when I went to the water tap the next day, there was no water. The water did not start again until other things were happening at our house, and I did not have time. I learned that I could not plan and instead had to take my days moment by moment.

Interviews and observations

Giving directions

Living in a small village for a few weeks, every direction that was given to me was someone pointing their finger, with the expectation that I would be able to find it without much effort.

Instead of giving directions on *how* to arrive at a place (ex: follow this road, then go right), directions were given based on *where* the desired destination is located, particularly described relevant to geography (ex: *u tala*/way down there, along with a finger point). Walking around with my homestay family, especially when with the young kid, we walk slowly, stop and take breaks, and sometimes go different ways there and back.

All nearby villages that people frequently travel to they learned by visiting with friends or family, possibly as a child, as Kalpana, Geeta, and Pasang all expressed. Thus, it seems to me as if understandings of space and where things are formed directly by the community. In addition, Geeta and Pasang described how they ask people when they are going to new places; Geeta emphasized that she does not use maps or google, something that reflects the advice I was given in Nepal. However, Kalpana, a young student in Kathmandu, does use the internet when she is needs directions, possibly reflecting technology's and city's impact and on how people use time and space.

Socializing in a small space

People move in and out of our homestay family's house frequently and meeting places are not decided on. Kids leave the house in the morning to play with their friends and wander in and out throughout the day. Each evening before dinner, one of the homestay family members goes to collect their two-year-old child, shouting and asking people where she is. The small size of Gre means that one's friends, or at least neighbors are often just there. The space of Gre is created by the small community and affects how people use the space. Kalpana and Pasang mention how they don't have to look for friends or plan meetings in the same way they would in a city, following my observation that people just show up. Time spent socializing and any planned times are formed by the space and how people move about this space.

Even my methodologies of the interviews reflect the small space and a more fluid approach to time than I am used to. For each interview, I approached the participant when it looked like they were not busy or were able to talk while working and asked if they had free time to talk with me about how they spend their time for my research. Whenever my friend tried to plan a time to meet someone for their research, the person shrugged and would answer with tonight or whenever in response to when, but the only successful meetings were the seemingly random moments when we ran into someone we'd previously talked to on the street.

Measuring time with and without clocks

Time, both on a daily scale and across a lifetime and throughout generations, is measured in some way, whether this is the standardized clock time or relative to some other indicators. In some cases, time was measured and moved relative to other events. For example, Kalpana responded that the road was built 2-3 years after the 2015 earthquake, and that electricity came after the road, and mobiles after that. Rather than expressing the information by a date or certain number of years ago, Kalpana compared it to a major event in her life. On a smaller scale, Pasang estimated that people usually go to bed around 8pm and before this, eat dinner. Again, the time of dinner only mattered relative to sleeping.

Because electricity existed only in the past ten years or so in Gre, I was able to ask participants how they measured time before constantly having mobiles to check the time. Sundials, birds, and chickens let people know what time it is, relying on the shadow of the sun or the sound of a chicken in the morning. Nature, something not standardized and rigid, was an essential part of telling time. Dawa and Roshan also explained that earlier they were not always aware of the clock time. Again, resources and development affect people's perception and knowledge of clock time.

Time does move by the clock or standards of time some, however. Both Kalpana and Pasang check the time on their watch or mobile frequently, Roshan and Dawa both watch the clock for certain times that they work or have school. Both Dawa and Roshan have paid jobs, thus a schedule dictates their work some of the time. Dawa watched for 12 and 1 to know when he eats and goes back to work, and Roshan has set hours he is supposed to be at the school. However, there is no “clocking in” when one gets to work and the hours are not quite as rigid as I am used to observing in the US. Kalpana explains that, when in Gre, her parents will tell her to do certain tasks or to be home at certain times, so she must check the time to know this. In Kathmandu, her school schedule is dictated by having classes at certain times, such as one class for 45 minutes and then the next subject. Her school has the same schedule every day and students are scolded for being late, suggesting the school’s value of promptness.

The calendar is one way of measuring time. In Gre, there is both the Nepali and Tamang calendar, although only the older people know both the Tamang and Nepali date; most people just use the Nepali calendar. A few people at the school know the English calendar date as well. Everyone said they use the calendar to know what date or day of the week it was. Roshan also added that his main use of the calendar is to know when holy days are, pointing to a relationship between religion and time. Two people told me that all festivals fall on the same days every year, although Kalpana explained how fixed dates on the English calendar do not necessarily line up with the Nepali calendar.

Flexible time

Although some activities occur at certain times or on certain days, many things are not fixed or consistent. When I ask anyone what time they are leaving in Nepal, they give me an answer, but I quickly learned to put an hour or two margin around this number. One leaves when they are

ready, one does not get ready by a certain time, except for school. In my experience both in Kathmandu and Gre, I never know we are leaving until an adult tells me to grab my stuff and go, an experience exacerbated by the language barrier. We eat at different times every day, whenever someone finishes something else in order to make dinner. Sometimes the resources available impact the ability to plan, which then spreads to everything else. When doing laundry, Geeta cannot give a definite time because who knows how many people will be at the water tap. People take turns doing their laundry, socializing, and sitting in between turns, stretching out the time of the task, blending work and breaks simply because of the resources, making the time inconsistent and unable to be estimated.

Ek chhin in Nepali best translates to one moment, but the way it is used proves slightly different. When trying to get to Gre, someone told us to “*ek chhin basnus*” (sit for a moment), then we would leave, so we assumed we would leave in no more than 30 or 45 minutes, but instead we waited for 3 or 4 hours. Members of our homestay family would often say they were leaving for *ek chhin* and come back one or two or three hours later. *Ek chhin* is also used for a few minutes, such as *ek chhin basne* while hiking. When they gave us a time they would be gone for or get back at, it was almost always an hour after they said when they were actually came back. Another time, I was sitting on a rock where someone wanted to put something and they told me *ek chhin* which I at first interpreted as I just needed to move for a moment, not that I needed to move out of the way.

Time related to food

Meals are not eaten at the same time every day. Kalpana says “we eat whenever we are hungry;” there is not a fixed number of times she eats in a day. Geeta and Pasang explain that meals are not at a “fixed” time, sometimes it is later, sometimes it is earlier. Pasang says he

usually eats between 8am and 10am, the time depending on how busy he is and what else he is doing. People are also not met at exact times in Gre, according to Kalpana, Geeta, and Pasang. Kalpana also says that she and her friends never plan ahead to meet each other in Kathmandu, they just call when they want to hang out to decide on a place to meet. Everyone who I asked about when people get married in Gre respond with an estimate of a range of ages, but add that this is not fixed nor the same for everyone. People also explain how the times of day people do certain activities depend on the person and are not the same across Nepal.

Food, often both cooking or farming, is typically a major part of people's days when I asked them about their typical day. All participants talked about watering their plants or picking vegetables for food and both the women mentioned cooking. Food is also centered around breaks for many people. In Kalpana's school in Kathmandu, she talked about her lunch break and getting up early enough to make her own breakfast. Dawa and Pasang both mentioned the mid-morning meal of daal bhaat as a break from their sessions of work. Dawa explicitly explained how he rests when he eats meals, and if for some reason he doesn't eat one meal, he will still make sure to take a break around that time.

Food also takes up a significant part of people's time each day. Leafy greens are picked fresh before each meal, meaning someone has to go find the vegetables. In order to cook over the wood fire, only one dish can be made at a time, stretching out the cooking time over a few hours, depending on what else needs to be done in between the dishes cooking. When I ask how long any of the dishes cook for, cooking time is measured in whistles of the pressure cooker. For example, rice cooks for 3-4 whistles, depending on if there is water coming out when it whistles or not.

Planning ahead or passing time

One way time is spent and planned in Gre is by the routine of every day, as Pasang described, one “just continues”. When I asked people if they plan their day ahead of time, which is literally translated from Nepali as if you think about what you will do the next day, most people responded that they do think about it. Geeta even used the word “plan” in English, even though everything else she said was in Nepali. Pasang was the only one who said “who even knows the next day,” yet proceeded to explain how unless something happens with other people, you “just continue.” Similarly, Kalpana was surprised at the question and explained how she mostly does the same thing every day. Dawa and Geeta both think about their day ahead of time. Geeta has different work she does every day, yet her “continuing” or routine with her life is doing work all day. Their plan for tomorrow seems to be based on today. If certain tasks were not done today, then they plan to do those tomorrow. Similarly, Pasang described how he knows the date or day of the week relative to the days before it.

Pasang also describes how knowing the clock time is important for some people, but for others, time simply passes. Geeta says her day passes with work and children, Kalpana says her day passes with her parents telling her what to do and her friends, and Roshan’s day passes with work at school. Dawa and Pasang’s days pass with their routine of food and work. Even though people are busy, they spend the day how they want. Pasang mentioned that time was wasted if it passes with no benefit and Kalpana also believes that everything should be done “in time.”

Other people are also a significant factor in planning and how one uses and perceives time. As guests, we change how our homestay family plans their time, showing how other people affect routine. If a neighbor says they need help with a task, then they will help them tomorrow. When Geeta’s kids come and say they are hungry, then she must make food for them. Not only is time quite literally dictated by what others are doing around you, but time is also perceived and

measured by other's actions. Both Geeta and Kalpana describe time as passing based on other people, either their friends or kids, and explained boredom as worse without friends.

People also spoke about time over many years. I asked multiple people the same question about when the roads were built, when electricity arrived, and when the current water facilities were built and received a range of answers. Several people would often respond to my question about when a past event occurred with either the Nepali word *dherai* (a lot/many) or *bhayo*, which roughly translates to “happened/became.” The exact number of years ago that something happened did not matter. One road was built one to two months ago, depending on who I asked, although people first responded by saying it was new or recently built. For the other road, I heard between 4 and 10 years, except for Kalpana, who said after the earthquake. Although everyone I asked knows how old they or their older family years are to an exact year, sometimes I would hear different answers for the same person. Geeta also described how, in her opinion, arranged marriages are better than love marriages because love does not last, showing the temporal aspect of marriage.

Nature and weather

Weather and nature also affect people's sense of time. Kalpana explains that there are no specific breaks from farm work throughout the year, as crops are planted seasonally. It depends on the season or weather for what work needs to be done. Crops are picked based on indicators of the plants or when the old men start picking certain crops, according to Pasang. One follows other people and nature. Sudden changes in weather also dictate certain actions or tasks. For example, if it starts to rain, then the laundry has to be put inside.

Marriage and education

Education, employment, and marriage are also related to people's sense of long-term time. When I asked people about when villagers typically get married, I received large range of ages from 15 to 25, with people often saying it's not fixed or consistent. People explained how the age of marriage used to be earlier, starting as early as 12. Pasang attributed this change to more education because people cannot attend school while married because of the responsibility. Kalpana also related this to education, saying that people often get married around 15 or 16 because this is when they finish year 10 of school. Pasang also adds a gendered aspect to the age of marriage, suggesting that men are usually a few years older. Many people often leave for foreign employment as soon as they finish school because they need money.

Work, free time, and rest

I also asked people about work, free time, rest, and breaks to explore concepts of leisure and work and how these are separate or intertwined. Everyone, except for Dawa, said they talk with friends throughout the day, both at home and while doing work. Geeta explained how most of her work at home is done alone, although friends randomly come over to socialize. However, she calls friends on the phone and when she works in the field she works with friends. Everyone else said they find people to talk to either during their free time or while working. As I asked most of the participants what they do for work and what they do in their free time, the division between work and free time was different for each person. For Kalpana and Pasang, their free time consists only of looking at their phones, talking with friends, or sleeping. For everyone else, free time included tasks related to farming or other housework. For Dawa and Roshan, who have structured jobs, they garden or feed their animals in their free time. Roshan also walks around and talks with neighbors or friends in his free time. Geeta's division of free time and work is

different, with tasks including cooking, gardening, collecting firewood, in the work category, and cleaning the house and sleeping in the free time category.

While everyone has differently structured days that affect when they can rest, rest is incorporated into people's days. Even though Geeta said she has no time to rest and is never free, she says that she likes to sleep in her free time, and I have noticed her take naps occasionally. Dawa also does not have time to rest while working, yet my interview was while he was sitting in the shade, taking a break. Roshan said that during school hours, he has no time to rest, but after 4pm he finds time. Pasang and Kalpana talked about rest during the day and Pasang's interview was while he was sitting on the path by his field, resting. One aspect of rest more challenging to understand, as the Nepali words for "break" imply a formal, longer break from school, is how people take breaks, or rest, while working. No one explicitly said they rest while working; however natural short "rests" are built into tasks, such as sitting for a moment while the food is cooking or waiting your turn at the waterspout. Everyone I spoke with said that rest is important and necessary, but that laziness is a negative attribute because nothing will get done when people are lazy. Geeta even related laziness to money, stating that one will not get money if they are lazy. Rest is thus important, although rare for some, even though ideas of rest appear different than what I imagine.

Analysis

Space and geography

Space, including the roads and layout of a village affects how people give directions and use and learn space. Villager's directions and assumptions of space reflect the small village on a steep hillside, as directions do not rely on a grid and frequently use geography. The frequent use

of *maathi* (up) and *tala* (down) in addition to directions telling me where something is rather than how to get there fit with this. The land shapes people's sense of direction and concepts of the space around them; there is less imposition from an above grid or human structures.

One's sense of space and directions is, at least in part, created and learned from others. Directions are often vague, as space is assumed to have other people in it, and using transportation involves interacting with other people. The assumption of space and time having other people in it frames it as a relative concept where space-time is created by those inhabiting it (Raper and Livingston, 1995, p.363). People are actively creating their sense of space and thus a few Nepali people I talked to do not know how to use a map, yet frequently navigate spaces, relying on other people and their memories learned from their social networks. "Accurate" maps are thus not the only way to understand space, which is important because accurately displaying space from an overhead view in part developed with capitalism, colonialism, and environmental exploitation (Harley, 2009).

The geography and resources are also intertwined with ideas of efficiency. It is almost as if people assume one are not trying to get there as fast as possible. The steep hill and small community make for frequent breaks as one runs in to people they know and stops to catch their breath. One participant said people build their houses where they want, so the layout of space has no apparent organization according to my experiences with cities and villages in the US. Instead, the people move about the space with the steepness of the hill. The lack of use of maps and signs creates a flow between people, space, and time where all depend on one another. The lack of so-called efficiency reflects Soderling's (2016) observation that "inefficiency" made it work. Without the expectation of getting somewhere as fast as possible, the time and space of the village move and flow together.

Time and space are also intertwined for larger scale directions, as people will say that it depends on who are you are or the method of transportation, rather than assuming you are going as fast as possible. Especially when so many directions rely on walking, an inconsistent and uncontrollable factor, time is given in larger ranges. The resources in Nepal also affect senses of time and space, hence why directions are given in days. Because so many people rely on public transportation or walking, it is easier to complete the journey in multiple days. The roads are not necessarily the most “efficient” and construction or other factors frequently affect the times, such as the number of breaks on the bus ride. Thus, it does not matter how many miles away something is, only the time based on one’s chosen method of transportation. Again, Soderling’s idea that inefficiency works can be applied, as the lack of attempts to standardize times make the system work (2016).

Again, the small space and layout of the village create and affect people’s sense of time in relation to community and meeting people. When friends and family exist in one’s daily uses of space, social time is integrated into daily life. There is no need to decide on a meeting place or time, everyone always knows where everyone is. The lack of anonymity affects how people use time and think of space, as planning is not necessary, space means that time becomes more flexible.

Measuring time without standardization

Measuring time with a clock is only one way of measuring time. As even the younger people in Gre have relied on the birds or the sun to tell time, time exists for villagers outside of looking at the clock. It does not always matter exactly what time it is or exactly how many years ago something happened. Time can be measured by what one needs to do, by the weather, by when something else happened, or by routines that others or animals do.

Each task is done after another one and is affected by the previous task. People begin to make dinner when they are close to getting hungry. In general, schedules imposed by others tend to rely the most on clock time (Smith, 1982). The example of the consistent English calendar date that lies on a different Nepali date each year shows how time only exists as fixed relative to a certain system. People answered my questions about fixed time relative to a standard clock, however, several tasks are not fixed. Maybe some of the inconsistent times are fixed relative to a different system, whether this is when one gets hungry, when it gets dark, or when your kids come home. Although these are not “standard” systems of time, they are a way of measuring time relative to something else, just as cooking exemplifies time measured relevant to other indicators, such as the steam or the doneness of the food, rather than a clock time. Recipes I use in the US also rely on other indicators, but they often additionally have a clock time. Times often rely on what else is happening, rather than only the clock; things do not need to happen at the same time every day. Tasks take different amounts of time every time, dependent on who else is using the same resource, the weather, if others are helping you, and other uncontrollable factors.

The passage of time and completion of tasks

Rather than a rigid schedule planning a routine or planning your entire day in detail based on a routine, people’s days are more taken moment by moment, yet based on a routine. Personally, I would describe my routines while in school as thoroughly planned, rather than a vague idea of the work that needs to be done. The routine is measured by work, which creates a general plan. Today dictates tomorrow and each week, day, or moment is taken one at a time, with the expectation that one’s life is generally the same.

Time moves based on what is done in that time or who the time is spent with and doing nothing is negative. All participants described the ways their time passes, whether with work,

with food, with other people, with little rest, and so on. Food is an essential part of one's perceptions of time, as it takes a lot of time to cook every meal and, for many of the components, one is involved from the planting of the seed. Rest is related to meals, thus another measurement of time is if one has eaten. In fact, people even greet each other in Nepal asking if you've eaten. Time is based off of food and people.

The awareness of different methods of standardizing time, even if people do not know all of them, points toward a different possibility for understanding time. Time could become less unified and the social construction of it could become more apparent. Especially when a consistent date on one calendar lines up differently with the other calendar depending on the year, one can see that measurements of time are formed by people. The use of *bhayo* or *dherai* to talk about events in the past show a feeling of time passing when looking at the past. The differences in numbers for when things were built shows that the exact number isn't known or doesn't matter.

Time is sometimes measured and conceptualized by tasks getting done, just as Smith (1982) discusses villagers listing a sequence of tasks when talking about the passage of time. Laziness is negative because one doesn't get anything done. Time is planned and measured by what needs to get done and what was done. Housework tasks, the majority of many people's workload, are not done at specific times; they are done after the previous task is completed. One knows they have to cook and do laundry tomorrow, so you start cooking when the laundry is finished, if there was room at the tap. Although there is no Nepali word for "productivity," a word associated with capitalistic notions of monetary labor (Birth, 2004), people placed value on work and on not wasting time.

Time in relation to nature

Nature and time cannot be understood without one another. Indicators of when the corn or tops of garlic plants are dry tells people when to pick their plants, not a calendar time. Nature, whether the sun or the birds, used to help people tell the time of day. Work also must be done during the day because of the light, thus natural patterns of night and day dictates when people socialize. Soderling (2016) highlights how the lack of electricity necessitates that work is done during the day, meaning that temporal patterns of activity are intertwined with natural factors. Nature and weather are uncontrollable factors that dictates and measures time. People are busy and work frequently, but the schedule is not rigidly imposed by someone else, it is imposed by natural factors that change every day. Even schools, the most rigid aspect of time, are related to weather in Nepal, as in hot areas the longest break is in the warm season and in cold areas the longest break is in the cold season (Bhandari, 2015).

Marriage, family, and education

Another way people talk about time is in relation to age, family, and marriage. The periods of one's life for specific tasks is related to education and school. When one finishes school, they are expected to get married and find employment if necessary. While historically, people got married earlier, maybe in relation to puberty, now education has become another marker. However, Dahal (1993) cautions that education is not the only factor that affects the age of marriage; other factors in one's family also affect the time. The age people are in certain classes in school appears to be fairly irregular in Gre. This could potentially be because many people leave Gre to go to school and there are different academic standards at different schools, meaning that people tended to not assume someone's grade from their age. In terms of the future, people do think about the future, at least in terms of a marriage lasting, hence why Geeta saw the value of

arranged marriages lasting. A sense of commitment could last throughout time, while love changes more quickly.

Categories of work, leisure, and rest

People consider themselves quite busy, yet the stream of work and rest flows differently than I am used to. Work and leisure blend into each other and last throughout the whole day for many people, especially those who do not have jobs with semi structured hours. One can see how the imposition of rigid jobs changes perceptions of work and leisure. Tasks that may once have been considered work become part of free time when work is formalized into a structure. For example, formal schooling dictated people's sense of time, as this was the place where being on time and knowing what time is it mattered (Bhandari, 2015; Smith, 1982). As the first formal school in Nepal was inspired by a visit to France and England, schools are one way that Western industrial thoughts of time are being spread and coloniality is maintained (Bhandari, p. 7).

The contrast I see between how people talk about their rests and how they rest may stem from cultural differences in language, as well as the definition of a rest. Because their workday starts at 4 or 5 in the morning and doesn't end until they go to bed at 9 or 10pm, working with no pauses would be impossible. Thus, the small rests seem necessary to work and may be considered part of work. A "rest" may need to be longer than what I am counting as a rest in my observations. The water tap and physical resources also affect how people blend their social time, rest time, and work time.

Discussion and Conclusion

There is not only one way to understand or measure time and space (Killsback, 2013; Birth, 2004; Smith, 1982) and assuming so reinforces dominant structures, such as

heteronormativity and cities (Soderling, 2016), capitalism (Harley, 2004; Soderling, 2016; Smith, 1982), and colonialism (Schmitt et al., 2021; Smith, 1982). Research specifically on time or space, particularly when in other cultures (Birth, Smith), often confronts these assumptions by noticing confusion when asking certain questions. Similarly, both while translating my questions into Nepali and asking people questions, I noticed how planning is not as rigid or important as I have been taught, rest and work are more integrated than I am used to, and finding places is rarely done with a map. The English words included when people were otherwise speaking Nepali, fixed, plan, etc, displays how more rigid Western perceptions of time can only be displayed in Nepali through English, showing how colonial powers change perceptions of time (Schmitt). Time can also be measured by what work one has done, the sun, the birds, or by what meals one has eaten. Even though there are general themes that emerged from my time in Gre, and generalizations about Gre's villagers or Nepalis that my participants made, even within Gre, there is not one perception of time and space. Everyone's life experience, whether their job, their age, where they went to school, their family, and more, impact their conceptualizations of time and space.

However, as Gre is undergoing more development, more and more people are going to Kathmandu for school, and mobiles and electricity recently became a part of village life, Western colonial and capitalist ways are changing the village and how people think about time. For example, with mobiles, people do not rely on nature in the same way as they used to for knowing what time it is, but still have fewer tasks that happen at a certain time than I do in the US. Similarly, the age of marriage has changed to become more closely related to school, something directly built off of the British schools (Bhandari, p. 7). Schools and jobs with hours were the clearest example in my research of how structures impose time and schedules on people, as this

is where I saw the most differences (Smith). The alternative to rigid jobs, farm work, what most villagers did, cannot be made rigid in the same way because of the unpredictability of nature. Crops have to be picked when they are ready, not at a certain time. Even those with somewhat rigid jobs are still involved with farming or at least live close with nature, meaning that nature and weather controls perceptions of time and is part of how people understand both time and space in Gre.

Nature as part of the environment, or space, is just one way the interrelatedness of time and space is seen. Geography affects the words people use to give directions, the length of time it takes to get places, the amount of walking one has to do, and more. Space is thus perceived as up or down and distances are measured in a wide range of hours to leave room for construction or a slow walking speed. The consistency of resources in one's environment also affects how one perceives time. The water tap cannot be relied upon, either to be available or have water, thus planning will not happen exactly. Planning does not happen rigidly either for space or time, as one has to go with the flow and take it moment by moment.

Perhaps the most consistent observation I found in talking to people about and observing time and space is the importance of other people. Schmitt et al. (2021) and Massey (1999) both further argue that while dominant time and space discourses in the United States suggest that individuals fill the containers of time and space and thus have agency over them, in actuality people construct these ideas of time and space themselves. I further argue that not only are space and time constructed, but in Gre, conceptions of space and time only exist in relation to others. Space is learned from others and new places are found from others, the time to get to places depends on who you are. Meeting others is done without time in part because of the small place and one may suddenly stop work and make someone tea when they unexpectedly show up. Time

passes because of friends, the time many work tasks will take relies upon other people. Time and space move around other people.

Contrary to what capitalism has taught me about more work being accomplished when rigid impositions of time exist, people in Gre worked a lot and got a lot done within a fluid time schedule. Oppressions and judgements arise from not working efficiently, using time well, and being late. Schmitt's description of how time discourses have created the trope of the "lazy poor" in the US in addition to the frustration of villagers in Smith's study for being criticized for being "late" to work demonstrate systemic oppressions related to assumptions about time. These temporal discourses are clearly socially constructed, as for people in Gre, they work a lot and are sometimes late and not lazy. When time is measured by work instead of the other way around, people work a lot without using rigid time. People criticized laziness and said that wasting time meant that one does not do anything, meaning that, in their view, work has to be done in time. However, people did not prioritize planning at exact times or doing tasks at the time they said. Punctuality and work do not have to be related; this oppression when they are assumed to be related is another reason it is important to question assumptions about time.

Gre displays perceptions of time and space outside of the hegemonic, capitalistic ideas I grew up with, emphasizing the necessity of questioning assumptions to decolonize time (Schmitt). Space and time exist in pieces, not only as an overall structured idea one can organize and know all of. Space and time flow into one another, into nature, into other people. Accuracy does not always matter as there are other ways of talking about and measuring time besides standardized measuring systems.

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Appendix A

Interviews

*all following names are pseudonyms, but all other details are correct

1. Geeta - 4/25/22, housewife, age 20-30, female. Interview was conducted in her home, partly while she was cooking.
2. Dawa – 4/28/22, mechanic/construction worker, age 35-45, male. Interview was conducted at the school, while he was taking a break from making plaster.
3. Roshan – 4/29/22, works at school, age 25-35, male. Interview was conducted in his home.
4. Kalpana – 5/1/22, student, age 18-25, female. Interview was conducted outside of someone's house.
5. Pasang – 5/4/22, farmer, age 35-45, male. Interview was conducted outside by the fields.