Social Climbing on Annapurna: Gender in High-altitude Mountaineering Narratives[1]

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SINCE 1950, ANNAPURNA has been known in climbing circles as one of the world's most dangerous mountains to climb. At 8091 metres in what was once a little-known part of Nepal, Annapurna is accessed from the north by a valley that was unmapped and unknown even by the villagers of Pokhara, its nearest town. It is swept constantly by avalanches in the north. Its south face has the largest and most difficult "big-wall" ice cliff in the Himalayas. Thus, although its name means "the Provider" or "Goddess of the Harvests" in Sanskrit, the hazards associated with Annapurna still make it a difficult mountain to see up close, much less climb. Although it is the tenth highest mountain in the world and the first mountain above 8000 metres to be successfully climbed, Annapurna is also not as well known to the general public as Mount Everest simply because it is not the highest mountain in the world. But to mountain climbers, Annapurna is the site

1 For the purposes of this study, high-altitude mountaineering refers to the practice of climbing mountains when oxygen apparatus is used or when the decision not to use oxygen is seen as the assumption of an additional risk. This is usually at altitudes above 7000 metres or 22,960 feet above sea level. See the UIAA Mountain Medicine Centre's 2002 study of the effects of supplementary oxygen at extreme altitude: www.thebmc.co.uk/world/mm/mm9.htm.

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of some of the greatest achievements in high-altitude mountaineering. According to Reinhold Messner in *Annapurna: 50 Years of Expeditions in the Death Zone*, Annapurna has never become a fashionable mountain to climb but it remains a credible goal for climbers who wish to push the limits of climbing (150) because it is more difficult to climb than Everest or other "easy eight-thousanders" (149). Even today, it is still considered to be too dangerous and difficult a mountain for those with minimal experience to attempt.

Unlike Everest or other less technically-demanding high mountains, Annapurna is also seen by professional climbers as a "pure" mountain unsullied by alpine tourism. Perhaps for this reason, Annapurna has also been the subject of some of the best-known expedition narratives in the world which have detailed some of the turning points in the history of high-altitude mountaineering itself. Because it is *not* Everest, with its status as the world's highest mountain, Annapurna is an excellent site to begin an examination of the ways in which that history is informed by another narrative thread: a history of gender in high-altitude mountaineering accounts that surfaces in these narratives but is rarely discussed directly within them.

In this paper, I examine the politics of gender in texts where it is not possible to speak openly about gender at all. I look at accounts of climbing Annapurna as complex formulations of identity, and especially of gendered identity, which were not created by theorists, philosophers, artists, career activists, or even professional writers. Like the activity of mountain climbing itself, many of these texts nevertheless have helped to shape what the developed world thinks about nature, bodies, history, and heroism. What it means to be a man or a woman in harsh circumstances is central to all of these concerns. And, yet, there has never been scholarship which has treated the accounts of expedition mountaineers as rhetorical and which deals with gender as a social construction which men and women must negotiate, although there are a growing number of critical works which do deal with the politics of masculinity, imperialism, and racism in mountaineering more generally. These narratives about climbing Annapurna can, therefore, provide a test case for looking at how gender issues emerge where we usually do not look for them, in texts that most critics are not accustomed to thinking about as rhetorical at all.

In this study, I also want to answer the following questions: Why are there so few feminist accounts concerning mountaineering, and why do masculinity and racism in mountaineering often get discussed by critics but the social construction of gender for women does not? One reason

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is that expedition accounts follow a generic convention that is common to almost all books produced about climbing: it is not possible to discuss political matters openly, even though the uses and representations of the body in wilderness environments are always politicalized and always involve issues about power, knowledge, and pleasure (or pain). To provide a framework for dealing with gender issues in light of this context, I discuss narratives about Annapurna as part of what Sherry Ortner has called the "bodily politics" (231) of high-altitude climbing, where gendered struggles are played out indirectly as controversies about the uses of the body in registers like proper climbing style, heroism, and leadership during the transition from the golden age of mountaineering and its use of siege-style climbing techniques to alpine climbing style, with its emphasis on lighter equipment and faster climbing techniques. Annapurna is a site of important turning points in the gendered nature of this transition in these expedition narratives: Herzog's *Annapurna: The First Conquest of an 8000-metre Peak* (1952), Arlene Blum's account of the first all-women's expedition to summit an 8000-metre mountain, *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* (1980), Sir Chris Bonnington's account of the first big-wall alpine climb in 1970 called *Annapurna South Face* (1971; 2001), and Reinhold Messner's history of Annapurna climbs (2000). All of these books have much to tell us, I believe, about the ways in which mountaineering is narrated within climbing culture and how ideas about gender move far beyond that subculture to become (indirectly) embedded within mass cultural formations worldwide.

Mountain Rhetoric

Before I turn to an analysis of the gender politics of climbing and writing about Annapurna, it is necessary for me to lay some groundwork for thinking about gender in the context of mountaineering as an activity. First of all, it is time for the study of mountaineering generally to take mountain writing into account as rhetoric and not just for its ability to relay events and experiences. Bruce Barcott has written that "mountaineering is the most literary of all sports" (65), an observation that a number of critics have repeated because writing does seem to be central to the activity itself. One of the most compelling reasons why expedition narratives get written is financial: expedition accounts help to pay expenses and are often commissioned in advance, just as filmed accounts and interviews are. These narratives also serve as ways for mountain climbers to prove their worth in the mountaineering communities because they document the climb itself and provide climbing advice for anyone who will repeat

a route as a type of "debriefing" (Mitchell 72–75). But, so far, there have been few studies of expedition narrative rhetoric itself. Expedition narratives are a way that mountaineers "talk" to or about each other, and so they provide much more than factual information. They are about social issues as well as about climbing, because they tell other climbers not only how to climb a certain mountain but how to *be* a climber too. Mountain rhetoric *produces* a specific kind of climbing subjectivity which relates climbing to Western notions of selfhood.

One of the important aspects of mountaineering rhetoric, therefore, concerns its representations of gender in its production of subjectivity.

One of the important aspects of mountaineering rhetoric, therefore, concerns its representations of gender in its production of subjectivity. Many critics have noted that mountaineering has been one of the key ways that modern, Western ideas about human activity, the idea of the body and the linking of gender to ideas about nationalism, colonialism, and race have been formulated. But the majority of mountaineering narrative studies have focused on male mountaineers and their experiences. There have been some histories of women climbers which show that women have been climbing mountains at least since 1808,[2] but these studies are mostly about bringing women into the historical record. They are not concerned with figuring out how gender works within the narratives of climbing and of self which women have produced. The criticism about the role of masculinity in mountaineering is, on the other hand, more detailed because mountaineering is part of a culture of masculinity that has always been closely associated with climbing and the outdoors. Climbing, particularly before the 1970s, was a key way for modern men—and especially middle-class and upper-class white men associated with imperial and colonial regimes—to imagine themselves as men who are socially productive *because* they are engaged in what is essentially an unproductive activity. Although this sounds contradictory, the contradiction itself is what helped to make mountaineering such a popular activity for men of leisure in the aftermath of industrialization. As early as 1760, Horace Benedict de Saussure—the first man to summit Mont Blanc in the Alps—was able to make this connection. His *Voyages dans les Alpes* of 1779 contains the Romantic ideology of masculinity that would fuel the dreams of mountain climbers thereafter. In *Voyages* Saussure decides (without actually consulting the local villagers of Chamonix who called the Alps "*montagnes*

2 See Arlene Blum's Preface to Rachel Da Silva's *Leading Out: Women Climbers Reaching for the Top* (xi–xiv) for a discussion of the role of women in mountaineering history. Arlene Blum also includes a more detailed history of women mountaineers at the beginning of *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*. I will discuss this later in the paper.

maudites") that the local hunters who were his guides do not climb on the basis of economic need but for "the danger itself—the alternation of hope and fear, the continual agitation that these emotions make in the soul" (Bernstein 31).

Saussure's insistence on a non-economic basis for climbing moved the ideology of climbing away from rural necessity, where the guides and hunters make a living by learning how to travel in the mountains, to the idea that climbing is really about *summiting* the mountain and not about work. This transference of mountaineering to the domain of the soul linked mountain climbing and mountains to Romantic ideas of the sublime already well known in England and Germany.[3] Saussure's further association of climbing with masculine virtues usually reserved for the description of heroic soldiers in battle also helped to make the act of climbing an acceptable occupation for men during times of peace. His description of climbing as a manly Romantic ideal proved to be attractive to middle-class British outdoorsmen, who saw themselves as heroes who still could conquer some part of the world and claim it for the British Empire, with the help of loyal "natives" to guide them.[4]

Mountaineering still draws on some of these ideas of masculine primacy. For example, the question often put to climbers about why they would *ever* want to climb a mountain points to the unproductive and dangerous nature of the activity. As Richard Mitchell has pointed out, answers to this question are often connected to Romantic ideas of the sublime that make climbing a creative act or to the belief that climbing returns people to "primal" selves muted by civilization (152–53). As a result, high-altitude mountaineering is loaded with much more Romantic symbolic value than other leisure activities. And since climbing was literally and philosophically associated with "high" ideals, other Romantic ideas about nationalism and the nature of manhood became attached to it. As Susan Frohlick points out, the narratives of high-altitude climbing in particular have also helped

3 See the chapter "On the Sublime" in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophic Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1857) for a full description of the relationship between danger and exhilaration in the aesthetics of the sublime. Although Burke was not a Romantic himself, his ideas about the aesthetics of the sublime proved to be important to English Romantics like William Wordsworth and John Ruskin, who traveled to Chamonix and wrote a book about the Alps that contributed to the rise of interest in tourism and mountaineering in that region (Bernstein 54–55).

4 See Peter Hansen (1995) for an account of Victorian mountaineering as a British middle-class sport and for a discussion of the beginnings of British imperialism, leisure sports, and mountaineering.

to produce and change what masculinity means (87–88). The classic texts of mountaineering feature the intense symbolism of a militarized push to the empire's vertical limits, and, when the climbing takes place in non-European locales, exotic descriptions of landscape and its inhabitants also appear. Readers of these narratives learned about what it was to be a heroic white man (who wasn't a soldier but an adventurer) from these texts. They also learned how desirable it could be to "master" an empire by exploring and claiming it vicariously. After World War II, for instance, summiting the highest peaks in the Himalayas became a way to prove to the British public that Britain was still a powerful country in a symbolic sense even as its empire began to shrink (Bayers 2–3). When the summit bid for Mount Everest by Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary was deliberately set to coincide with the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, the symbolism of a first ascent by two subjects of the British Empire and the crowning of the symbol of British power made the ascent take on imperial significance in the minds of the English public during the post-war era (Morris 5).

With help from its expedition accounts, mountaineering became central to ideals about cultural superiority and masculine heroism from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the end of what is called the golden age of high-altitude mountaineering in the 1950s, when all the 8000-metre peaks in the Himalayas had been climbed. Theodore Roosevelt had already suggested to Americans in the nineteenth century that mountaineering is a sport which is part of "the strenuous life" of manly imperialism, an activity which could keep American men virile as they sought to increase and then maintain American dominance overseas. Many Americans, until mid-century, clearly believed him and took up mountain climbing (Bederman 184–85).

But, in Europe, national achievement became more essential than imperial achievement for mountaineers after World War II. For countries like France, Germany, and Japan which were conquered or defeated during the war, high-altitude mountaineering was a symbolic way for its men, who often had been forced to take part in military defeats, to regain respect for their nations and to reinvigorate a national sense of male power as well. The readers of these narratives, especially in France, saw the successes of "their" heroes on mountain peaks as symbolic of a national and masculine success which had eluded their country in other ways.

In light of all this, the obvious way to study the cultural meanings of high-altitude mountaineering has been to examine the links between early high-altitude mountaineering and discourses of European masculinity and

to connect the discourse of mountain conquest and exploration to imperialism and colonialism.[5] Studies of later eras in high-altitude mountaineering and of mountaineering narratives about those later climbs which took place in the Himalayas tend to focus on other cultural issues than those connected to gender, most notably the impact of commercialization on climbing. Even as older ideas about masculine heroism began to mix uncomfortably with what Ortner calls the "countercultural" style of high-altitude mountaineering of the 1970s, both discourses of masculinity resisted the commercialization of Everest expeditions and the advent of mountain tourism.[6] Although this is a major issue in mountaineering and one worthy of study, the focus on commercialization seems to bypass any focus on gender issues. The emphasis on masculinity in the gender politics of high altitude mountaineering which is found in critical literature has meant that feminist studies of women climbers and women-centred expeditions are still rare. Gendered analyses of high-altitude mountaineering that do not have masculinity as the only focus are rarer still, whether the subject at hand is the narrative of an expedition or the activity of climbing itself.[7] As David Mazel has pointed out, a complete history of women climbers does not even exist, much less a sustained treatment of gender issues in women's mountaineering (xi–xii).

5 Peter L. Bayers makes the connection between British and American imperial adventure and masculinity explicit in *Imperial Ascent: Mountaineering, Masculinity, and Empire*, and Reuben Ellis discusses early twentieth-century climbing and what he calls the neo-imperialism of Britain and Europe in *Vertical Margins: Mountaineering and the Landscapes of Neoimperialism*. In the case of Mount Everest, Stephen Slemon looks at narratives about Mount Everest as part of the discourse of British colonialism in "Climbing Mount Everest: Postcolonialism in the Culture of Ascent," while Sherry B. Ortner in *Life and Death on Mount Everest* devotes a chapter to men and masculinity. In a rejection of Ortner's concept of masculinity, Susan Frohlick has discussed high-altitude mountaineering as an example of hypermasculinity in "The 'Hypermasculine' Landscape of High-altitude Mountaineering."

6 Many of these studies focus on John Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, which stages the conflict between countercultural climbing values and commercialization clearly, although this is not the only way the issues are discussed. For general studies of commodification, see Barbara Johnston's "The Commodification of Mountaineering" and Catharine Palmer's "'Shit Happens': The Selling of Risk in Extreme Sport." For a study of the advent of high-altitude mountain tourism, see Susan Frohlick's "Negotiating the 'Global' Within the Global Playscapes of Mount Everest." Sample studies of Krakauer's work can be found in Gene McQuillan's "'No Anthems Playing in My Head'" and in Slemon (24–25).

7 Most studies of early women climbers and gender politics have North America as their focus. For examples, see PearlAnne Reichwein and Karen Fox, "Margaret Fleming and the Alpine Club of Canada: A Woman's Place in Mountain Leisure

However, as I said briefly in the beginning of this paper, gender does get discussed in expedition narratives in an indirect way, where it appears as part of what Ortner calls "bodily politics." Bodily politics displaces issues about gender onto controversies about climbing leadership and style. It is a politics that makes its meaning gendered by what it does *not* say about manliness, and by what—in contrast—it shows about how to be a real man or (much less often) a real woman in physically and emotionally trying conditions. Like Eve Kosofsky-Sedgewick's characterization of "closetedness," a condition that says through silence what "cannot" be said out loud (3–6), bodily politics in mountaineering constitutes a set of gendered assumptions about what good mountaineers are supposed to do, and it informs whatever is said about anything else. Mountaineering discourse is less about "rules" than it is about the "style" of a climb, which "evolves out of an ongoing process of discussion and negotiation" in the climbing community (Mazel 17–18). And style, I argue, has assumptions in it which are gendered. The indirect way in which conflict about gender issues appears as debates about style explains why discussions of masculinity and imperialism in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mountaineering fail to see the rhetorical construction of gender as significant. It also explains why, with the exception of the work of Sherry Ortner and Dianne Chisholm, feminist scholars of mountaineering have not addressed why after the 1930s women writing about mountaineering had little or nothing to say about gender issues.[8]

Or did they? The assumptions about what "proper" climbing style in many memoirs about expeditions include a set of shared understandings

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and Literature, 1932–1952" and Karen Routledge's study "Being a Girl Without Being a Girl: Gender and Mountaineering on Mount Waddington, 1926–1936." David Mazel's introduction to *Mountaineering Women: Stories by Early Climbers* is another feminist account, but it is brief. The other feminist studies of women and high-altitude mountaineering are found in selected chapters of Sherry B. Ortner's *Life and Death on Mount Everest* and Susan Frohlick's 2004 article "'Who is Lhakpa Sherpa?' Circulating Subjectivities within the Global/Local Terrain of Himalayan Mountaineering." Dianne Chisholm's study of Lynn Hill's memoir and feminist phenomenology is the first sustained examination of rock climbing which employs feminist theorizing. See "Climbing Like a Girl: An Exemplary Adventure in Feminist Phenomenology," *Hypatia* 23.1 (Winter 2008), 11–40.

8 For two early views of *la cordée féminine*, see a 1933 piece by Nea Morin, "La Cordée Féminine" in *A Woman's Reach: Mountaineering Memoirs* (1968) and the account of "manless climbs" of the 1920s and 1930s in Reichwein and Fox. For a more contemporary discussion of *la cordée féminine*, see Cicely Williams's *Women on the Rope: The Feminine Share of Mountain Adventure* (1973).

about gender which most often understand strength to be male strength, heroism to be male heroism, leadership to be the heroic model of a leader as an unchallenged decision-maker, and the community of climbers to be—as it was called earlier in the twentieth century by Gaston Rébuffat, a member of the 1950 Annapurna expedition—a brotherhood of the rope (1999). But what does it mean to be part of a "brotherhood" in mountaineering? Literally, "the brotherhood of the rope" refers to the fact that when climbers are roped together, they are responsible for each other's safety. The use of a rope means that all climbers must work together as a team in order to be successful and even—at times—to survive a dangerous situation. But Rébuffat thought of "the brotherhood" in much more philosophical and even spiritual terms. "The brotherhood of the rope" refers as well to the whole community of mountain climbers who share a common bond in their desire to do something that is difficult and dangerous. Although he does not discuss this further (in a way, evoking a term like "brotherhood" means that such matters can be regarded as almost spiritual and, therefore, are felt rather than analyzed), it is clear that "the brotherhood of the rope" is what I would call a grammar for talking about—or not talking about—profound bonds between men. It is a way of alluding to the homosocial bonding of men in climbing without having to call attention to the erotic nature of the bond. "The brotherhood of the rope" becomes a substitute which actually *creates masculinity* as a legitimate way to talk about homosociality. It provides a Romantic vocabulary for masculinity so that it becomes possible to express how good it felt for so many of these climbers to be a "true" or "pure" man with other men, without speaking about erotic attraction at all. In its very essence, then, this phrase turns any discussion of gender politics in mountaineering (for men) into a discussion about the activity of climbing itself, since it is impossible to refer to its actual address, which is the nature of masculinity and the limits of its expression. This is how detours in mountain writing—and especially in Herzog's *Annapurna*—that seem to lead away from an affirmation of "mountain masculinity" (including so-called "feminine" behaviour like crying, being afraid, or expressions of empathy) in fact reclaim any non-masculine action as an affirmation of true manhood.

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In its endorsement of the "maleness" of climbing, too, the social grammar of "the brotherhood of the rope" effectively excludes women from this fraternity, since the detour away from manhood must lead not toward femininity but toward a more profound expression of manhood. It is not possible for women to ever be part of "the brotherhood of the rope." The name some female climbers of the 1920s and 1930s gave to all-female

rope teams, *la cordée feminine* (the feminine rope), shows how climbers of that era (and even some climbers at the present time) understood how exclusive the brotherhood was and how important the idea of "the rope" is as a symbol of communal bonding and identity.[9] But, over time, both phrases fell into disuse. With their disappearance, there vanished too any direct way of discussing issues about gender that still formed so much of what mountaineering meant to its participants. Even today, the assumptions contained in these more silent discourses of mountain masculinity and femininity are rarely challenged head-on or even discussed much in the literature about high-altitude mountaineering itself. But as we will see in mountaineering writing about Annapurna from the 1950s to the present time, ideas about gender and identity do reappear in discussions about proper mountaineering style. As the origin for so many heroic narratives about mountaineering and the inspiration for many people who went on to become mountaineers themselves, Maurice Herzog's text *Annapurna* is also the first text where unvoiced concerns about masculinity, nationalism, and heroism appear in extended discussions about proper style and leadership, and where "unmanliness" becomes part of mountain masculinity.[10]

Annapurna: The Heroic Era

The importance of the Annapurna 1950 climb to the people of France cannot be underestimated. When the members of the expedition stepped off their plane in France, they were surprised by the size and enthusiasm of the cheering throng which greeted them. All of France thrilled to the story of what the expedition had accomplished. Early accounts of the climb in *Paris Match* sold out immediately, and it took more than three hundred lectures by expedition members to satiate the public appetite for stories of the climb, the heroic summit bid, and the agonizing descent where the injured team members had to be carried by porters for weeks (Roberts 135–36). The myth of the Annapurna climb and its heroes became vital to the postwar French who badly needed to see French people, and especially French men, in a victorious light:

> For the French, still stuck in the humiliation of World War II, the conquest of the first 8000-meter peak ever climbed became at once a matter of incalculable national pride. Indeed, it could be argued that no triumph of sport in the nation's

9 Thanks to Andrew Gow for inventing the term "mountain masculinity."

10 For a detailed look at the development of a mountaineering counterculture, see Ortner's chapter "Counterculture," 185–216.

> history ever meant so much to its people. Nor was the glory to be short-lived. Fifty years later, Annapurna still occupies a sovereign place in the French soul. (Roberts 133)

The summit of Annapurna by the French team is still a landmark achievement in high-altitude mountaineering. The team did not have accurate maps of the Nilgiri region where Annapurna is located, and the climbing team members, including the Sherpas, were the first non-local people to enter the region where Annapurna was. It took weeks for the team to even find the mountain, and by then they had less than two weeks to climb it before the monsoon came. Climbing did not seem to be possible at first. Although the French members of the team were all excellent climbers in the Alps and some of them were widely thought to be the best in the world, with one exception none of them had ever been to the Himalayas before. No Sherpas in the party had any knowledge of ice climbing, and most of them were not comfortable leading a climb in deep snow. Relatively little was known about the correct medical treatment for frostbite or exposure, and even less was known about the problems with acclimatization at high altitudes. Although British climbers on Everest had used supplemental oxygen as early as 1924, the French team had not brought oxygen along and did not have a plan to acclimatize its climbers.

Nonetheless, the team quickly established five alpine camps and a base camp on the mountain, although many of the team members were too ill to try to attempt the summit. But two of them did: after an uncomfortable night at Camp V, on 3 June 1950 Maurice Herzog and Louis Lachenal arrived at the summit of Annapurna. Lachenal pleaded with Herzog to descend at once because Lachenal felt that his feet were freezing, but Herzog, lost in what he later wrote was the national and religious grandeur of the moment, had Lachenal snap photos of him with the French flag held over his head. He was unwilling to leave a very dangerous place. Finally they started down as a storm began to break. But both men were beginning to experience frostbite in their hands and feet, and they were probably beginning to experience the effects of altitude sickness as well.

Somehow, both climbers staggered back to Camp V, where Rébuffat and Terray did their best to help them. But their suffering did not end there. The climbers started down to the next camp on the next day, but Rébuffat and Terray became snow-blind and could not lead the party as the storm closed in around them again. The climbers huddled in a crevasse for the night with almost no equipment and no food, a situation that was made worse when an avalanche buried their boots, ice axes, and other equipment. When they emerged the next day they were near death, but

they were rescued by Marcel Shatz, another team member who was at Camp IV just below them. The journey down the mountain was agonizing for the team, particularly for Herzog and Lachenal, who were suffering from gangrene. They both lost toes and Herzog lost most of his fingers to amputation by the expedition doctor as they were carried down the mountain on the backs of porters. When the French members of the expedition finally got back to France, they were hailed as national heroes for the summit victory and, particularly in the case of Herzog, for courage in the face of extreme suffering.

The story of the 1950 Annapurna climb is dramatic. But Herzog's expedition account turned the drama of the climb into an enduring myth of suffering, heroism, and triumph over nearly impossible odds. Herzog's image of himself as a leader plays a central role in this myth. When the expedition members swear an oath of loyalty to the expedition and the leader, Herzog sees this as the moment when he becomes a leader:

> They [the climbers] were pledging their lives, possibly, and they knew it. They all put themselves completely in my hands.... [T]here is no feeling to equal this complete confidence of one man in another, because it is the sum of so many feelings put together. In that moment our partnership was born. It was for me to keep it alive. (6)

Here, Herzog assumes that leadership is more than good management, and it is here where "bodily politics" come into play, because Herzog is clearly a leader of *men*. Although he ostensibly talks about leadership and duty, his rhetoric of sacrifice and his reference to the trust between men makes the moment homosocial, giving it spiritual overtones and establishing an emotional basis for the relationship between men which exceeds ordinary friendship.

Herzog's stress on duty is due in part to the type of climbing that the French team had decided to employ. This style is called siege- or expedition-style mountaineering, where climbers, Sherpas, and porters carry loads to successively higher camps on the mountain. They supply the camps so that a few members of the team can make a summit bid. Siege mountaineering requires a significant amount of supplies and many porters who can carry loads because it takes so long to establish the string of camps. The leader of a siege-style climb has to be highly organized in order to ensure that supplies keep flowing, and he or she has to be able to manage large numbers of climbers and porters. The success of siege mountaineering depends on climbers who are willing to sacrifice their own

climbing goals for those of the team, since not all members of a siege team can make the summit. For this reason, most early siege expeditions had the character of military campaigns (as the mountain is literally besieged by large numbers of porters and climbers) and were often led by military leaders, as Herzog himself had been during World War II (Ortner 160–61). Loyalty to the leader, as in a military campaign, was understood to be important to the success of this type of climbing style, and this is why Herzog often portrays the other climbers as a single unit who unequivocally follow him. Meanwhile, he alone makes decisions at key points. Herzog frequently uses such terms like "attack," "victory," or "retreat" to describe climbing, and he calls a discussion about a climb "a council of war" (68). Terms like these show that, for Herzog, a mountain climber's loyalty to the climb and the leader is very much like a soldier's loyalty to the cause and his commander. It is easy to view this connection between climbing and militarism as an expression of the need for masculine heroic strength and the need for patriotic self-sacrifice. This is also why in *Annapurna* the other climbers rarely stand out as individuals, appearing instead as masculine types. Terray and Lachenal, for example, are introduced as "a couple of regular steam engines" (2), a phrase that makes them appear to be superhuman as well as interchangeable. Later on, the climber Jean Couzy agrees to carry loads up the mountain and forego a summit attempt. Herzog makes Couzy's agreement into a general statement about the right way to climb in a group: "[I]t is this admirable spirit of self-denial which determines the strength of a team" (95). Terray also gives up a summit chance, causing Herzog to feel guilty that he may not be as heroic and selfless himself because he wants Terray, the strongest climber, to be his summit partner (133).

Therefore, individuality in *Annapurna* is not thought to be a good trait for mountaineers to have, except when the leader possesses it. Loyalty, self-sacrifice, and obedience are seen as better traits, as Herzog points out when he discusses how all the climbers had no thought of profit. The effect of the passage is to make each man seem to be the same and to be equally heroic:"From the start every one of them knew that nothing belonged to him and that he must expect nothing on his return. Their only motive was pure idealism; this was what linked together mountaineers so unlike in character and of such widely dissimilar origins" (5). This type of heroism may not appear to be overtly gendered except for its use of military discourse, but in places where heroism fails, gender and race politics do emerge. Lachenal chides Rébuffat and Herzog by calling them "'a pair of sissies'" (87) for not continuing up the mountain more quickly,

Weak or selfish climbers were not real men or real mountaineers in a siege expedition.

which implies that they are not truly masculine because they are not tough enough. In keeping with a view of many climbers at the time that Sherpas are not true mountain climbers (Ortner 42–43), Lachenal and Rébuffat complain later that they are not "'beasts of burden'" (105) like the Sherpas and that they shouldn't have to carry loads. When Terray retorts that the two climbers are not acting like true Chamonix guides (which both of them were) but like amateurs, he deliberately refers to the class politics of climbing in France, where guides did heavier work than their amateur clients. Lachenal replies to this in gendered terms when he sarcastically accuses Herzog and Terray of being "'supermen, real supermen, and we're just poor types'" (106). This exchange shows that racial stereotypes about Sherpas (they are beasts because they are not white and European) and assumptions about class position (guides are also beasts when they are at home) were closely related to ideas about masculine strength and sacrifice (real men would not complain and would remember to be sacrificial) on the Annapurna expedition, at least in Herzog's account. Weak or selfish climbers were not real men or real mountaineers in a siege expedition. They could be compared to a group of men who weren't "real" men either because they were not European: the Sherpas. Although it might have been possible to understand the Sherpas as sacrificial and potentially as real men too, the pervasive belief that they could not climb because they were not "real" mountaineers means that all team members assume that the Sherpas would have nothing to "sacrifice." The sacrifice which undergirds this understanding of masculinity is the sacrifice of class position in the Himalayas for the good of the team.

Herzog's account of his summit experience conforms to this association of manly heroism with idealism. But his account of the ascent does something else: it equates the (temporary) loss of ideals to the loss of masculinity itself. On the final push to the summit, Herzog underscores his courage and leadership ability. Lachenal asks if they should go on in sub-zero temperatures. Herzog's "voice rang out" (158) as he says that he would go on alone. Although Lachenal simply says that he will follow him, Herzog sees this as a homosocial moment of bonding: "[T]he die was cast. I was no longer anxious, I shouldered my responsibility. Nothing could stop us now from getting to the top … we went forward as brothers" (158). At the summit itself, Herzog interprets the summit bid in idealistic terms as a human and a national achievement. As he takes out a French flag from his knapsack and asks Lachenal to take pictures, he thinks: "[O]ur mission was accomplished. But at the same time we had accomplished something infinitely greater. How wonderful life would now become! What an incon-

ceivable experience it is to attain one's ideal and, at the very same moment, to fulfil oneself" (159–60). As Lachenal begs him to descend, Herzog keeps thinking of great mountaineers of the past and his own childhood in the mountains of France. When he finally descends (after he loses his gloves), he tells Terray that his emotion at the summit was not egotistical, "[I]t was a victory for us all, a victory for mankind itself" (164). Even against considerable evidence that Lachenal did not share his feelings on the summit, Herzog still saw his own experience as a paradigmatic experience of brotherhood with his climbing partner and with all humankind. Later, he would describe this experience as a religious one in the book *L'Autres Annapurna* (Roberts 124). On the summit, Herzog is at his most heroic and is most like a leader. He not only represents all mountaineers in history, but he becomes a point of symbolic condensation of mankind itself. His presence on the summit also symbolizes a national achievement for the men of France, since he holds the French flag in his hands and says afterward that "the victory that we had brought back … would remain for ever [sic] with us as an ecstatic happiness and a miraculous consolation. The others must organize our retreat and bring us back as best they could to the soil of France" (187). *Annapurna* ends with a picture of climbing as an expression of the highest human ideals when Herzog writes: "[T]here are other Annapurnas in the lives of men" (246).

Herzog's version of summit and the horrors of the descent which followed placed the event within a tragic frame, where the climber reaches the heights of joy, only to be sorely tested and, as we shall see, transformed by suffering into a true hero. But Lionel Terray's attempt a decade later to emulate the poetic highlight of Herzog's book—when Herzog and his partner Louis Lachenal finally arrive jubilant at the summit—detours away from the intended heroic effect in order to recapture suffering, not triumph, as the ultimate expression of manly heroism. In his memoir *Conquistadors of the Useless*, Terray meets Herzog and Lachenal as they stagger down from the summit, disoriented from the cold and exposure. Terray's self-assurance deserts him as he looks at his friend Lachenal's frozen feet: "Annapurna, the first eight-thousander, was climbed, but was it worth such a price? I had been ready to give my life for the victory, yet now it suddenly seemed too dearly bought" (288). But as Terray busies himself with helping Lachenal, his best friend and climbing partner expressed no joy at being on the first team to summit a Himalayan peak of more than 8000 metres: "[T]hose moments when one [Lachenal] had expected a fugitive and piercing happiness had in fact brought only a painful sense of emptiness" (288–89). During the descent of the climbing team, Lachenal

would have to have part of his feet amputated, while Herzog had to be carried down, losing his fingers to amputation even as the team descended. Lachenal, one of best climbers in the world, would never be able to climb seriously again. Rather than discussing this situation as a tragedy, Terray describes this moment of his friend's career as a deeply heroic:

> I listened to him [Lachenal] in silence. The willpower and sacrifice of my friends had crowned all of our efforts and dangers. The action of the hero had fulfilled years of dream and preparation. Those whose work, undertaken in the service of a pure ideal, had made it possible for us to set out, were rewarded. And with what typically French panache Herzog and Lachenal had set the coping stone in this great arch of endeavour, showing the world that our much-decried race had lost none of its immortal virtues! (289)

"French panache" and "action of the hero" hardly seem to be fitting ways to describe how Lachenal, having lost much of his equipment, had fallen and how Terray had found him alone in the snow, screaming that his feet were frozen. But Terray redeems this detour through suffering and doubt as a detour *for masculinity*: it is part of the suffering that a real man must undergo in order to reach his goal. Meanwhile, Herzog was found wandering dreamily in sub-zero temperatures without his gloves. He did not even seem to understand that his hands were frozen irreparably and could not explain why Lachenal was not with him. He could only talk about the summit victory, with his "eyes shining" (287). He, too, routs his masculinity through suffering so that, even as he is about to lose his hands and feet, he appears to be more of a man (and more of a Frenchman) for his country and for all mankind. However indirectly, this is how gender is represented in this paradigmatic summiting of a Himalayan peak, as a small detour, or gap, between the horror of the real and the belief in an ideal.

During his own account of the descent, or as he calls it, "the retreat," Herzog suspends this sense of his own power and destiny so that he can more fully occupy the centre of what manhood is in a Romantic sense. Herzog indirectly describes this process as a loss of adulthood before he "grows" up by means of suffering and receiving care from another man. When he endures painful injections for frostbite and begins to experience gangrene as he is carried down by porters, Herzog turns to Lionel Terray for comfort: "I whispered to Lionel what a fearful ordeal I found it all, and begged him to hold me close … I howled and cried and sobbed in Terray's arms while he held me tight with all his strength" (193).When he hears cracking ice at night, Herzog is terrified but is "ashamed at these

childish fears" (198). At another point, Herzog sobs in Terray's arms about how he will never climb again, "while Terray soothed [him] with infinite gentleness" (200), placing his head against Herzog's. Later, Herzog would refer to experiences like these as mystical and religious. He understands his suffering to be like the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ (Roberts 125–26). Herzog also interprets his suffering as childlike (he cries and is comforted), a metaphorical descent into hell that the narrative will later redeem when Herzog shows that his injuries make him *more* manly, not less. His behaviour is *unmanly*, but only temporarily. Herzog's unmanliness is cast as part of his heroic journey into "hell" and not as sissiness, childishness, or womanly behaviour.

Herzog's insistence on the greater meaning of the events, especially his idea that weakness is the spiritual centre of masculinity, have made the Annapurna expedition into the mythic journey that captivated readers first in France and then all over the world. The book became required reading for French youth, particularly boys, who loved the exploits of the French mountaineers. Maurice Herzog emerged as the paradigmatic hero for France, someone who was universally respected not just as a leader but more particularly as a *French* leader because (like France) he overcame his own suffering. Herzog's vision has proven to be very popular. Fifty years after it first appeared, *Annapurna* has been published in forty languages and has sold more than eleven million copies (Roberts 22). The book has had a tremendous impact on young people who want to be mountaineers and who, in many cases, go on to become climbers themselves. Frequently, these climbers also are major authors, arguably because *Annapurna* inspired them to write as well as climb. David Roberts, the author of *The Mountain of My Fear* (1968), credits his reading of *Annapurna* as a teenager with the beginning of his burning desire to become a mountaineer himself. Joe Simpson, another well-known mountaineering author, writes in an introduction to a recent edition of *Annapurna* that reading it when he was fourteen "led me into what has become a life-long affair with the world's great mountains" (xiii). Reinhold Messner credits *Annapurna* with inspiring him to climb (24).

But the publication in 1996 of Louis Lachenal's unedited diaries (and the revelation that Herzog himself had tried to suppress them) in addition to the publication of Gaston Rébuffat's criticisms of Herzog in a biography of him called *Gaston Rébuffat: une Vie Pour La Montagne* (1999) made it clear that Herzog's idealist vision of the expedition and of himself was open to challenge. *Paris Match* republished the famous summit photograph of Herzog with a French flag and pointed out that Herzog does not even

appear to be standing on the summit, raising the question of whether Herzog and Lachenal had ever reached the top at all (Messner 58–59). It was discovered that during the ceremony in which the climbers were forced to swear an oath of loyalty to Herzog as the expedition leader (the oath that Herzog claimed they willingly took) the climbers also had to sign a contract forbidding them from publishing anything about the expedition for five years afterward. Consequently, Herzog's version of events became suspect and his leadership was called into question. The suspicion that now surrounds *Annapurna* as an account highlights the discursive nature of heroism in the most famous mountaineering book of all time. As other questions begin to be raised about the myth of *Annapurna*, the ideals of naturalized, Romantic masculinity and homosociality in the mountains can be looked at more critically.

Once again, Annapurna would be the focus of a turning point in the history of mountaineering.

Alpine Style and Countercultural Climbing

First published in 1971, Chris Bonnington's *Annapurna: South Face* deals with another pivotal moment in the history of high-altitude mountaineering: Bonnington's British expedition of 1970 was the first to climb a big ice face in the Himalayas with the help of modern climbing techniques and equipment. A lot had changed in the world of high-altitude climbing since 1950. All of the major peaks in the Himalayas had been climbed, including Everest, Nanga Parbat, and K2. Approach routes in the Himalayas were now accurately mapped. Mountaineers began to look for new challenges at high altitudes, which meant that they tried to climb mountains via more difficult routes. Most important of all, lighter equipment and other technical advances meant that siege-style mountaineering, with its emphasis on lengthy times at high altitude and its reliance on large numbers of Sherpas and porters, was becoming less popular in favour of a lighter, faster approach to climbing called alpine style. Once again, Annapurna would be the focus of a turning point in the history of mountaineering as Bonnington's team tried to adapt alpine-style techniques for climbing big walls that they had learned in the Alps to a high-altitude environment.

The move from siege-style to alpine-style climbing in the Himalayas has been called one of the most significant changes to mountaineering since the end of the Heroic Era of first ascents and exploration (Willis xii-xiii). But the change in climbing style also signaled significant ideological changes in the world of high altitude mountaineering which were related to the development of youth cultures in different locations around the world. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, youth were at the heart of new political movements in Europe, Britain, China, and the United

States, including the American civil rights movement, anti-war movements, student movements for better education on university campuses in North America, and the formation of the Red Guard in China during the Cultural Revolution. Teenagers and young adults in Europe and North America began to experiment with drugs, questioning the values of their elders and openly looking for new ways of living and new avenues for religious expression. Nepal became the focus of this particular aspect of the countercultural movement because it represented an escape from Western society, where hippies and other countercultural youth could learn about Eastern religions and experiment with drugs. Kathmandu became a preferred destination for these youth. Because Nepal is also the focus of so much climbing activity, climbing itself began to be seen as another way to reject the materialism of the West. Mountain climbing communities began to adopt countercultural values, while at the same time countercultural approaches to climbing became more popular as climbing itself became less elite and more people of working-class and middle-class backgrounds began to climb in the Himalayas. Countercultural ideology meant that leadership styles became more egalitarian and collective decision-making was used far more. The relative simplicity of the alpine climbing style, where there was little Sherpa support and climbing teams climbed as quickly as possible, was also attractive to countercultural climbers because it seemed to be less materialistic and hierarchical than siege climbing had been.[11]

During this time, the Romanticism of the Heroic era gave way to the Romanticism of the countercultural movement. The Romantic ideology of climbing and its relationship to heroism did not end but shifted away from military metaphors and the need for self-sacrifice to mystical metaphors for climbing and a sense that climbers were in rebellion against what they saw as the dangers of civilization. These climbers had a new goal: individual self-realization. For climbers who saw themselves as participants in the countercultural movement, the adaptation of alpine style underscored the need many began to have for as pure an experience of nature that could be had in the mountains. The moral purity of Herzog's vision gave way to another, more rebellious sense of moral purity which gave climbers a sense that they were outside meaningless social restrictions. However, most gendered assumptions about climbing did not change very much, and

11 The April 2005 issue of *Outside Magazine* has "Women of Rock" as a cover story. The photo features a major climber, Sara Carlson, posing provocatively in the nude on a rock. One of the stories in that issue is called "Babes on Belay" and features similar photos of other female climbers.

the freeing up of some social customs in climbing did not necessarily alter ideas about masculine supremacy in the mountains. For instance, although as Ortner observes more women did begin to climb and the idea of masculine "sensitivity" did enter climbing discourse, it "is not that 'machismo' disappeared, but that it became problematised in this period" (196). And the decision of some climbers to begin to climb without oxygen was just as much based on ideas about machismo (in the need to do something more difficult and daring to prove oneself as a climber) as it was on the need for simplicity and the faster alpine style. As before, central ideas to climbing like brotherhood and manhood were worked out indirectly as the bodily politics of climbing and leadership style.

Annapurna South Face marks a transition from the Heroic era to countercultural mountaineering in a number of ways which highlight how ideas of masculine toughness and the idea of the brotherhood of the rope are retained within alpine style. The climbing team included Dougal Haston, who was known for his hard drinking, partying, and nonconformist behaviour (5), and Don Whillans, a plumber from England's industrial north who had a reputation for getting into fights (12). Mountain climbing culture in this account is masculinist in its refusal of the trappings of ordinary life, including cleanliness: Bonnington observes that this is "one of the big differences between climbers and ordinary mortals, for the climbers rarely washed either themselves or their clothes" (140). To illustrate this point, Bonnington repeats what Nima Tsering, a young Sherpa, told climbers who slept in after partying hard the night before: "'You Sahibs are like buffalo; filthy lying, filthy eating'" (141). This anecdote ends with Bonnington saying that the television team was "more civilized" than the climbers themselves (141), a comment that makes climbers into a breed apart as it shows how they rebel against social restrictions or disregard them. Activities like this are interpreted in a gendered way when two women come into the camp, for "the presence of Babs and Cynth at Base Camp was also welcome, giving it a more relaxed and civilized atmosphere" (145). Cleanliness and a lack of debauchery are associated with the presence of women, but dirt and debauchery are also what separates climbers from non-climbers. It is implied that women cannot be part of this anti-establishment world. In the only other description of women climbers in the book, Bonnington emphasizes the fact that women are not part of the climbing brotherhood when he describes the arrival of a Japanese women's climbing team:

> On 30 March another expedition arrived at our camp. This was the Japanese women's expedition to Annapurna II, consisting of nine petite ladies and nine Sherpas to look after them. We entertained some of them with tea, amidst giggles and clicking of camera shutters … that night Alan Hankinson and Mick Burke made a social call on the girls but were firmly shepherded away by the leader to talk to the Liaison officer. (83–84)

Except for these brief encounters, the society of *Annapurna South Face* is masculine.

In this anecdote, Bonnington describe these climbers in an Orientalist way as exotic and childlike (they are described as "petite ladies") and as women who might be sexual objects but ultimately are not to be taken seriously (they giggle, they are called "girls," Sherpas need to look after them). They snap pictures as if they were tourists, as opposed to the "authentic" mountaineers who—it is implied—would not engage in this sort of thing. This is in contrast to how Bonnington describes the Sherpas on his team, whom he regards as fellow climbers who look after him simply because they are generous (116–17). Although he admires the physical fitness of these women (83), Bonnington's rhetoric makes clear that the climbers—because they are women and because they are Japanese—are not colleagues and are merely an exotic social distraction. After this episode, these climbers are never mentioned again, even though they were making an attempt on Annapurna at the same time.

Except for these brief encounters, the society of *Annapurna South Face* is masculine. But anxieties about what masculinity means in times of conflict surface, particularly when Bonnington discusses his own leadership. Bonnington is not sure of himself as a leader, in part because of the changing culture of high-altitude mountaineering with its new emphasis on collective decision-making and its questioning of absolute obedience but also because the expedition itself had started as an alpine-style climb and had been forced to adopt the siege style because the wall the team had to ascend was so difficult. Bonnington admits that "there is no doubt that the larger the party, the further you are separated from the feel of big mountains" (25) but explains at length that this could not be an option on this particular climb. For Bonnington, this meant that he had to become a siege-style leader who thought more about supplies and the placement of camps than climbing or sharing chores like campsite cleaning, even when other members grumbled about this (104), or that he had to assert his authority and not give in to attempts to change his plans (238). Essentially, Bonnington would be forced to act like Maurice Herzog and adopt his version of heroic and militaristic masculinity when in fact he

did not wish to. The result is that he worries constantly in the text about his adequacy as a leader:

> I often worried about my ability to hold together a group of individualistic and very talented climbers. For the past eight years I had worked as a freelance with very little responsibility to anyone but myself. The last time I had had any kind of command responsibility was back in 1960 when I was in the army, protected by the pips on my shoulder and the might of military discipline. This is very different from conducting a mountaineering expedition, where one's authority rests solely on the loyalty and respect of the team. (28)

Bonnington resolves to mitigate this by thinking of himself as a co-ordinator and of mountaineering as a game rather than a military campaign:

> [A]s leader, it seemed to me I had to be a diplomat and co-ordinator of ideas rather than a disciplinarian ... yet at the same time I realized that I should have to make decisions at times that might be unpopular … we were not fighting a war, but rather were playing an elaborate, potentially dangerous game; therefore each individual had the right to decide how far he should drive himself and the level of risk he was prepared to accept. (28)

By turning the expedition into a "game," Bonnington invokes discourses of leisure that could potentially diffuse the militaristic and heroic masculinity that the siege style of mountaineering would require him to perform. But, perhaps because game-playing itself is often a mark of masculine heroism, he is not very successful in changing the discourse he must adopt. Many of the conflicts in *Annapurna South Face*, including the agonizing moment when Bonnington realizes that he has spent too much time carrying loads and does not have the strength to get to the summit (195), are expressions of Bonnington's desire to be a different kind of leader with a different type of style. Given Bonnington's ambivalence about siege-style mountaineering, it is perhaps fitting that the two climbers who most represent the advent of the countercultural climbing aesthetic, Dougal Haston and Don Whillans, are the climbers who do reach the summit of Annapurna.

Feminist Mountaineering: *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*

Sherry B. Ortner has described *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* as "one of the most extraordinary mountaineering books ever written" (228) because

of its unusually detailed look at the problems of gender and race politics. More than twenty years after it was first published in 1980, *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* still has the most sustained discussion of gender politics that can be found in any expedition account. Moreover, *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* is intended to be a feminist document of its time. Arlene Blum, the leader of the expedition and the author/compiler of *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*, produced a chronicle of the climb that was designed as a very strong political statement about female mountaineers in history and the sexism that women in mountain expeditions have faced. Features such as its Introduction, where Blum details how men have tried to exclude women from climbing and what Mazel has called its more "open and inclusive feel" as a text, mark *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* as an important feminist expedition account (18–19).

But the book is not, as Mazel assumes, just about "feminism" as a singular alternative to an androcentric tendency in climbing. Blum's text is actually about "feminisms" that in some respects complement each other and at other times so divide the team that the expedition threatens to fall apart. The result is a text that tracks the successes and failures of different strands of feminism during the climb as it documents the first successful ascent of Annapurna by an all-female team, the first ascent of Annapurna by an American-led team, and the deaths of two climbers who tried to make a second summit attempt. This is all the more interesting because the women who were part of the American Women's Himalayan Expedition to Annapurna in 1978 were not activists in the women's movement of the 1970s. None of them were feminist authors or intellectuals in the strict sense of the word. Yet they were participants in the women's movement in the sense that they attempted to break down barriers which existed for women in the climbing world, and they tried to do this by changing how climbing itself was conducted and written about. *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* is a unique document for this reason because it shows how non-activist women from a variety of cultural backgrounds tried to integrate feminist approaches and principles into a pursuit that is known for its machismo culture.

Annapurna: A Woman's Place also remains an important document about the history of sexism in mountaineering because sexism is still very much part of mountaineering discourse. In her 1973 book *Women on the Rope*, Cicely Williams claimed that sexism was not part of mountaineering; Blum dismissed this book as "'ladylike history'" (quoted in Mazel 20). Today, female climbers are now very much part of the international climbing scene, but major outdoor sports magazines such as *Outside*

continue to portray female climbers as scantily-clad sexual objects.[12] In their biography of Alison Hargreaves, one of the best climbers of her generation until her death on K2 in 1995, David Rose and Ed Douglas argue that she was vilified in the popular press for neglecting her duties as a wife and mother. Her death was even blamed on what was described as self-centredness in the face of her family obligations (270–75). Sherry Ortner's study of Mount Everest shows that women climbers on Everest since the 1970s have had to negotiate the expectation by male Sherpas and male members of their climbing teams that they are not very serious climbers and that they should want to have sex with men on the expedition (228–30). Sexism is not confined to the experiences of climbers from outside Nepal, either: Ortner also says that Sherpa women still encounter resistance from Sherpa men when they want to join expeditions or lead a climb themselves, activities which are essential for anyone, whether he/she is a Sherpa or not, who wants to work in the mountaineering industry or to become a more experienced professional climber (236).

However prevalent sexism still is in mountaineering, a reading of *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* highlights that overt sexism does not quite explain how gender differences and rather anachronistic attitudes about women continue to be perpetuated in mountaineering writing and in mountaineering itself. Even today, very few female mountaineers ever say publicly that they are feminists. Some of them insist that their gender does not and should not affect how they are seen.[13] In many climbing accounts, mountaineering could be described as a "postfeminist" activity, where gender politics does not appear to surface except in oblique references to the need to empower women so that they can achieve what men can achieve. Despite the fact that there continues to be much evidence of

12 Although there are some exceptions, most notably Rachel Da Silva's anthology *Leading Out*, popular magazines about climbing tell a different story about feminism and mountaineering. More women are climbing than ever before and there are more aspects of climbing that are geared to women, but most feminist thinking in women's climbing presently is limited to the idea that climbing is generally empowering for women. Many leading female climbers resist this and go on record saying that they would prefer to be thought of as "climbers" and not "female climbers" because they do not support the empowerment discourse. For recent examples, see Mick Ryan's article "Climb Like a Girl" in the online magazine *UKC: UK Climbing.com* (2005) and Lizzy Scully's article "In the Footsteps of Fanny: Climbing in the Karakoram" for *Climbing Magazine* (2003).

13 For a sustained discussion of the problem of sisterhood in light of other conditions of inequality, see Audre Lorde's essay "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" in *Sister Outsider* 114–23.

sexism in mountaineering circles all over the world, many leading female high-altitude and big-wall climbers tend to talk about sexism as if it were a thing of the past. According to Dianne Chisholm in her study, "Climbing Like a Girl," this is how it is possible to understand the activity of rock climbing as *informed* by gender at all times even if gender difference is not seen as important by the climber herself, because (in a phenomenological sense) gender forms both the background and the situation of each climbing encounter: "[I]n a society of masculine domination, every situation a woman negotiates is framed by gender so that she is seen as 'other' even if she, herself, does not" (12). *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* remains valuable as a portrayal of how complex the negotiation of sexism and gender difference can be, and what some of the problems that feminists still face looked like three decades ago. The struggles of these women—most of whom are American or who lived in the United States—in their attempt to apply feminist ideas of the 1970s to mountaineering clearly demonstrates the strengths and the limits of American feminisms in that period in the heady times before the final defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982, when feminists all over North America thought that they could challenge any injustice they experienced in their daily lives, anywhere in the world (Mathews and de Hart viii).

In her Introduction, Arlene Blum presents the project of the Annapurna climb as explicitly feminist. She details the sexism which prevented her from joining an expedition in Afghanistan (1) and recollects Sir Edmund Hillary's view that women should not climb but stay at home instead while their husbands go out climbing (3). She writes about common expectations in mountaineering that women should sleep with all men on a climbing team, and she addresses arguments that women are biologically unfit for climbing (2–3). She moves on from this discussion to a short history of women in mountaineering to prove that women can climb and discusses recent achievements in the Himalayas, including the first ascent of an 8000-metre peak by women unaccompanied by men in 1975 (7) and the first ascent of Everest by women climbers, the Japanese climber Junko Tabei and the Tibetan climber Phantog. She makes sure to include Reinhold Messner's sexist and racist assessment of Tabei—that, more important than her strength as a climber, she has "Oriental" grace and, above all, is a good wife and mother (7). This record of discrimination contextualizes the decision in 1975 by Blum, the Polish climber Wanda Rutkiewicz (who later had to withdraw from the expedition), and the British climber Alison Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz to organize an all-women's

expedition to the Himalayas, the expedition that eventually became the 1979 American Women's Himalayan Expedition to Annapurna.

Blum's intention in the opening chapters of *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* is to make mountaineering itself a political act and to point out how the often-invisible politics of that act had worked to marginalize the achievements of women climbers or downgrade their contributions historically and at the present time. But here is where *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* becomes a very complex narrative about feminism and mountaineering. Although the undertaking of an all-women's expedition was radical for 1978, Blum's own politics is centrist because she finds an answer to the problem of sexism in mountaineering in the ideology of American liberal feminism. According to Zillah Eisenstein, the values of liberal feminism from that period included independence, equality of opportunity for men and women in the public sphere, and the preservation of individualism (4–5). Therefore, following the lead of Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, and Germaine Greer, liberal feminists believed in the need to work for change within political systems, preserved the public/private split in their thinking about women's roles, and did not (at least at first) have an analysis of patriarchy that would theorize fundamental differences between women and men as part of fundamental inequalities between both genders (Whelehan 28–29). The belief many liberal feminists had in the right of all women to equality with men also meant, as the expedition T-shirts that the team sold to raise money for the climb rather puckishly say, "A Woman's Place is On Top," and not just in the home.

Arlene Blum accepted many of the tenets of liberal feminism and repeated them in *Annapurna: A Woman's Place.* She ends her Preface with the belief that equal access and individual achievement are paramount in mountaineering because in her view "individual differences are more important than sexual ones [in climbing]. Women do have the strength and endurance to climb the highest mountains, just as men do, and both men and women should have the chance" (8). She ends the 1983 edition of the book with an even stronger endorsement of gender equality: "[N]ow the time has come for people to be accepted on expeditions not as men or women but as climbers. Women and men have complimentary abilities, and they can and should climb their 'Annapurnas' as equals, with mutual respect" (246). As we shall see shortly, Blum's belief in the equality of all people on the team becomes an important aspect of her struggle to become a good expedition leader.

The liberal feminist discourse in *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* also contains—in miniature—a major problem that faced the North Ameri-

can women's movement. Many liberal feminists in the second wave of the North American women's movement who believed in the worth of the individual and the need for equality did not understand that they themselves contributed to inequalities based on race, class, and sexuality differences. Sisterhood, in other words, was not transcultural and did not traverse class boundaries either.[14] Like many liberal feminists at that time, Blum's understanding of sexuality also did not include an understanding of lesbianism. At the same time, many radical feminists in the women's movement were not just "lesbian feminists" but thought of themselves as lesbians. Betty Friedan's well-known denunciation of lesbians as "the lavender menace" at a NOW convention was merely the most public response of many straight liberal feminists who thought of any kind of difference within the women's movement as a possible threat to the success of the whole movement and who tried to emphasize the sisterhood of all women.[15] Although Blum is no Friedan and probably was not overtly seeking to exclude lesbian experiences, as a straight liberal feminist at the time she may not have recognized what their absence might have meant. When Blum says that when the climbers read an article about their expedition called "What Will Their Husbands Think" and talked about it, she also mentions that in fact most of the expedition had left husbands or lovers in order to do the climb (79). This assumption probably does not include lesbian experience: the sexuality of climber Piro Kranmar, who is a lesbian and who had a permanent partner,[16] is not discussed, although the boyfriends or husbands of all the other climbers are mentioned. While Kranmar may have chosen to remain closeted or at least private about her sexuality given the climate of the time, Blum's reaction to Kranmar's need for privacy indicates that she saw this as a personality trait (and an annoying one at that) and not as anything more. For instance, when Blum says that Kranmar did not want to share her personal diary with the rest of the group and guarded her privacy, she describes this as a problem for expedition records (13–14). On other occasions, she sees Kranmar's withdrawal as a refusal of her leadership and (unlike her assessment of other team members) does not look for other reasons why this might be the case.

Sisterhood, in other words, was not transcultural and did not traverse class boundaries either.

14 For a complete account of Betty Friedan's confrontation with radical feminist lesbians, see Susan Brownmiller's *In Our Time* (1999).

15 Although Kranmar's sexuality is not discussed in the earlier editions of the text, her partner is mentioned in the Afterword to the twentieth-anniversary edition of *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* (234).

16 See Arlene Blum's website for a full account of her workshops at www.arleneblum.com.

This reaction appears to be similar to the initial incomprehension of many liberal feminists at the NOW conferences in the early 1970s when lesbians demanded to be heard and represented in their own right.

In a similar way, in *Annapurna: A Woman's Place,* the expedition also faces the problem of cultural difference and feminist transnationalism, just as the larger feminist movement has had to do. For example, when base camp manager Christy Tews beats a male Japanese climber in sumo wrestling, she is angered by accusations from the Japanese team that she is really a woman in a man's body. Blum sympathizes with Tews and says that "women who are stronger or smarter or taller or better at things than men often must pay a price" (130). But Blum only thinks about the treatment of Tews in terms of gender inequality. The fact that Tews—a white Western woman—beat a man at a sport that is central to Japanese masculine culture has political overtones beyond those of gender which could explain the reaction of the Japanese climbers. But Blum's belief in the universality of gender inequality means that she cannot think about the role that cultural differences played in the conflict.

The liberal feminist view of transnationalist feminist analysis also explains why one goal of the expedition members—to train Sherpanis (female Sherpas) to climb so that they could be empowered—was never realized. The expedition members had made the liberal feminist assumption that as all gender relations are comparable, so all kinds of oppression are universal. But the climbers know relatively little about Sherpa culture and its view of gender relations (Ortner x). As Blum points out, she learns the hard way that her feminist beliefs are too utopian when she is forced to fire Sherpanis who want more pay for laundry work and who say that they don't want to climb:

> We had wanted to help the Sherpanis, teach them to climb, give them a new opportunity. Instead, here they were, leaving feeling cheated and betrayed, and we felt the same. Our frames of reference were too different. We had probably been naive to try bringing such changes into their lives. (89)

The results of the difficulty that Blum and the rest of the team had with understanding Sherpa issues in any terms other than gendered ones meant that Sherpa discontent was high for much of the expedition. Indeed, as *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* details, the working relationship between Sherpas and climbers became so tense that the Sherpas mounted a strike for better treatment during the expedition (162–72). Some climbers complained that Sherpas were making obscene comments about them

(110), while others complained when Sherpas wanted to break trail and deny them the chance to lead (118). Although some of the problems with Sherpas on the expedition probably were about gender differences, others (such as the issue of Sherpa pay) were about working conditions and the class differences between the men who climbed for hire and the women who paid them.

Although Blum is more direct than other authors about the nature of gender politics in mountaineering, *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* is also an expedition narrative that is firmly rooted in the tradition insinuated by Herzog's account. The close connection with Herzog's narrative in particular is deliberate, and it shows how much Blum owes him: *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* even opens with a Foreword by Herzog himself in which Herzog strongly endorses the presence of women in mountaineering and states emphatically that women have the right to be leaders in all areas of life (ix). At the end of the Preface, Blum rewrites a passage of Herzog's by making it gender inclusive, a move that installs her narrative as part of his tradition, even as she makes sure to change its original gender politics: "Maurice Herzog expresses this [the challenge of the climb] well in his account of the first ascent of Annapurna: 'In attempting to do the hardest tasks, all our resources are called upon, and the power and greatness of man*kind* [my emphasis] are defined'" (8 emphasis Blum's). Herzog's words reappear and are altered at another key point of Blum's narrative, for the same reasons. The last words of *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* deliberately echo Herzog's famous ending but give the ending a feminist twist: "As Maurice Herzog declares at the end of his book: 'There are other Annapurnas in the lives of men.' And in the lives of women as well" (244). And in the Preface to the twentieth anniversary edition of *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* Blum rewrites Herzog's message again and gives it an even more inclusive political meaning: "There are still many 'Annapurnas' to be climbed in the world—such as protecting our natural environment; decreasing the gap between rich and poor; providing basic necessities for everyone on this planet; and raising our children to live with love and good values" (x).

The rhetoric of Blum's account resembles the rhetoric of Herzog and Bonnington, especially when she talks about leadership and style. Although in places she is more direct than Herzog or Bonnington about gender issues, Blum often does write about gender much as they do: as a bodily politics related to the problem of leadership and the problem of climbing siege style. Like Bonnington had done, Blum makes use of expedition diaries by the other climbers in order to talk about a similar type

of conflict on her team between siege-style mountaineering techniques and alpine techniques. And like the climbers who appear in *Annapurna: South Face*, the climbers in *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* experience this conflict as one about gender, but this time the disagreements on the team about climbing style refer to differences within feminism itself.

The nature of leadership is a major part of *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*. In fact, leadership issues are so important in this text that in the Preface to the twentieth anniversary edition of the book, Blum says that she mainly wrote *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* to help herself understand the challenges she faced as an expedition leader (ix). She now leads seminars on leadership, including a workshop called "Climbing Your Own Everests: Leadership Skills to Meet the Challenge of Change." This is related to the problem of siege style. In *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*, as in Chris Bonnington's text, the expedition considers climbing alpine style but decides to try siege tactics because Alpine style might prove to be even more difficult and dangerous (75). And just as siege style forces Bonnington to become a different kind of leader, so Arlene Blum has to emulate the masculine heroic model of leadership that siege style requires. This is against her nature, in part because the militaristic style in this kind of leadership is not what she, as a woman, had learned:

> Although my upbringing and experience had taught me to be moderate and soothing, I was learning the hard way that these traits are not always compatible with effective leadership. Although I didn't yet sound like an authentic army general, I was moving in that direction. The trick was to move just far enough … the expedition needed a strong leader but not a dictator. (36)

Moreover, the ideology of siege-style climbing, with its stress on unquestioning obedience to the leader, is at odds with the feminist principles of the climbers, who often want to make group decisions. For example, when Blum tells the group that the Sherpas Ang and Lakpa will be among the climb's leaders who will establish Camp I, the group rejects this decision and has a discussion about the decision's problems. At one point, the climber Annie Whitehouse asks Blum to make an executive decision, and Blum observes, "[H]ere was the essential paradox again. I was supposed to be the leader and decide what was going to happen, yet everyone wanted decisions to be made democratically" (116). Here, Blum experiences direct conflict between alpine climbing style, where decisions are made collectively in accordance with countercultural values, and siege style, where decisions are made by the leader. In the end, she decides that in this case,

Here, Blum experiences direct conflict between alpine climbing style, where decisions are made collectively in accordance with countercultural values, and siege style, where decisions are made by the leader.

consensus decision-making would have been the better course, and she affirms that "it had been worth it to take the time to face each other and expose our vulnerabilities" (119).

But conflict continues throughout the expedition when competing versions of feminist politics become enmeshed with debates about style. The focus of this conflict in the text is Alison Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz. Blum introduces her as "a purist" who believed that the climb should be women-only, without Sherpas (27). This is not a colonial attitude to the Sherpas as mere servants, although Chadwick-Onyskiewicz does get angry at Sherpa requests for more remuneration and makes little effort to understand why they might be upset (109). Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz's opinions are in keeping with the ideology of alpine style, with its assumption that climbs should be "pure" and as simple as possible so that all team members can achieve individual goals. Her belief that there should be no Sherpas on the climb at all is also in keeping with alpine style's emphasis on small teams and minimal or no Sherpa/porter support. But Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz's belief that the expedition should be women-only is a feminist interpretation of alpine style that is not liberal but radical. Unlike Blum's more conciliatory approach toward men on the expedition and in climbing more generally, Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz constantly repeats in *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* a separatist view of climbing that is more in keeping with the separatism of radical feminism during the 1970s, where the presence of any men in the women's movement was thought to prevent women from developing their own ways of thinking and being (Whelehan 39). At first, Blum shares this view about who should be on the summit team when she opposes a Sherpa request to summit first and interprets the request as "paternalistic" (169). Later, however, she compromises, and the summit team did include two women and two Sherpas.

But Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz's desire to summit in the alpine style also involved her goal of not only climbing Annapurna but of climbing the middle summit of the massif, which had never before been attempted. In this way, Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz is much more like climbers Haston and Whillans in that she has little patience with siege style or with its hierarchical way of decision-making. She preferred the riskier approach and its Romantic associations with achievement, creativity, risk, and simplicity: "'The route straight up from camp is the most aesthetic line,' Alison said. 'I'd rather go that way. If two of us [Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz and Vera Watson] could climb that hard rock together, it would be more an achievement than my Gasherbrum climb'" (206). After a debate about the safety of this approach, Blum reluctantly lets Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz

and Watson do the climb to Camp V to start the summit attempt, without oxygen. At this point, siege style gives way to alpine style in the narrative because Blum has no authority over the summit team: "I [Blum] had to admire Alison's single-minded dedication—not just to climbing the mountain but to doing it in a certain style" (206). Tragically, Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz and Watson fall even before they reach the high camp, and they are killed instantly (230). Although it is not the style of climbing that kills them (if there had been Sherpas with them, they would not have been able to stop the fall because they would have climbed on a separate rope), Blum questions her leadership ability because she let them go and has to be reassured by other members of the team (234–35). In the end, Blum finds some healing with the rest of the group when they chip Watson's and Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz's names onto a memorial stone at the foot of Annapurna.

Backlash: Reinhold Messner's History of Annapurna Climbs

Reinhold Messner is arguably the most iconoclastic living high-altitude mountaineer who climbs in the alpine style. His achievements have helped to push mountaineering in the Himalayas to new levels: he was the first to climb an 8000-metre peak in the alpine style in a single push; he was the first to climb Everest without supplemental oxygen; and he was the first person to climb all fourteen 8000-metre mountains. Messner's climbing philosophy has been to increase climbing risks while simplifying the logistics of the climb itself and to oppose the commercialization of high-altitude mountaineering entailed in the growth of guided climbs.

Messner measures the quality of climbing by its challenge and originality. In *Annapurna: 50 Years of Expeditions to the Death Zone,* Messner affirms his belief that Annapurna is one of the most difficult mountains to climb and adds that it should remain this way or climbing itself will become impure. As he says, "the eight-thousanders first became a vanishing point for national pride, then an exotic destination for millions, and today they are a 'heroes playground,' because their 'challenge' has not been completely expended" (68–69). Messner, therefore, wishes to restore a heroic element to mountaineering that he believes has been lost as climbing these mountains becomes more popular and less risky. And, for him, national motives or other social reasons to climb are simply not heroic enough. To this end, he defends Maurice Herzog against the accusations that have been made against him about his leadership in the name of heroism itself and ignores the nationalist overtones of Herzog's own account. According to Messner, "the ascent of Annapurna is and remains

Herzog's own personal feat of heroism" (24), a statement that reinstates heroic discourse at the heart of mountaineering. He ends his retelling of the expedition story with this poem to Herzog: "*Maurice Herzog. / What a career! / What a personality!*" (64 italics in original). The poem serves to literally underscore Herzog's heroic status, despite the criticism of his leadership that has been in evidence since 1996.

Messner goes on to describe the other expeditions on Annapurna that he sees as ground-breaking within his criteria of pure mountaineering and heroism in climbing new routes. These include the climb of Bonnington's team, a traverse of the whole Annapurna ridge, and his own first ascent of the northwest ridge. Messner's decision to discuss only the climbs of Annapurna that were notable for their first ascents means that he leaves out any other criteria for achievement. National or even cultural achievements do not matter: there is no mention of the first Japanese team to summit or who the first Sherpas were. There is no discussion of gender either, except in the abstract language of masculine toughness when he and his climbing partners come across one of the dozens of corpses on Annapurna and photograph it. Although Messner says of the body, "[I]t was as if death belonged here in this bizarre glacial world … we wasted no time puzzling over who he might once have been, or how he had died" (111–12), for reasons why Messner does not explain, the photograph is repeated later in the book. Why does the photograph appear twice if "death" does not bear thinking about? The corpse serves as the reminder to be stoic and brave in the face of death, but because the gaze of the living climber cannot ever be returned by the body itself, the image of the corpse or its sign, the grave marker, appears repeatedly in Messner's *Annapurna* as the sign of difference that must be surmounted by manly stoicism.

This tendency to surmount difference by means of a particularly type of mountain masculinity and its endorsement of toughness is particularly important for Messner's treatment of the American Women's Expedition to Annapurna. Although he could leave out a discussion of the expedition as he leaves out others, he does not. Rather, Messner includes it much as he includes the unknown corpse which he says does not matter but which he cannot ignore. In *Annapurna*, he includes a photograph of the memorial to Vera Watson and Alison Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz with the caption "Memorial to the dead at Annapurna Base Camp" (167). He never identifies the women by name. And in his list of expeditions to Annapurna, Messner says that Ian Clough from Bonnington's climb "is tragically killed on the descent" but of Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz and Watson he says only that on that climb "one English woman and one American woman fall to their

deaths" (154). Messner also includes a photograph of Wanda Rutkiewicz, the woman who originally had the idea to do an all-women's climb to Annapurna. Messner's caption identifies her as "the most successful female high-altitude mountaineer to date" before he says that the photograph was taken just before her death on the mountain Kanchenjunga after her ascent of Annapurna in 1991 (171). Like the other narratives I have examined, Messner's treatment of women in *Annapurna: 50 Years* shows that gender can only be represented indirectly as part of bodily politics, but in this case bodily politics only revolves around the twin signs of death and heroism. Messner's book, therefore, is more than a call to value climbs for their difficulty and risk. It also contains a backlash discourse against the achievements of women climbers in its own use of bodily politics because of its insistence on a narrow type of heroism as its criteria for climbing success. The only other option in this representational system is to be represented as a corpse that must resurface in order to recall the importance of masculine values to mountaineering.

The only other option in this representational system is to be represented as a corpse that must resurface in order to recall the importance of masculine values to mountaineering.

Conclusion

I'd like to conclude with a discussion of an image: the famous painting by Kaspar David Friedrich called *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* of 1818. As one of the most Romantic interpretations of mountain climbing ever made, *Wanderer* highlights what I have been saying about the connections between gender, heroism, and the purity of the climbing experience in books about high-altitude expeditions. We cannot see the face of climber in *Wanderer* because he faces away from us, feet firmly planted on a rocky spire, walking stick at his side. We see the view he sees: a mystical landscape of mountain peaks and swirling clouds. It is clear that we are meant to share in his view but not in his experience, which is private. We can see from his clothes that he is a gentleman and that he is young and fit. Otherwise, he is anonymous. This climber is above civilization and is part of a higher realm: he is the embodiment of the Romantic ideal for mountaineering as a quasi-religious experience. Here, the heroic climber is pictured literally at the peak of success, without anyone to help him. He is rewarded with a mystical experience almost as if he were divine himself. Because his face is turned away from us, we are invited to imagine that we could take his place. This ideal view of mountaineering has endured for almost two centuries: it is the ideal which Herzog did so much to perpetuate in *Annapurna*.

The belief that mountaineering itself is literally "above" political concerns like race, class, or gender and that in theory "anyone" could have this

mountaintop experience has endured too, even though (like the climber in the painting) the traces of gender, race, and class mark the bodies of climbers and shape the experience of climbing just as they shape other forms of experience. And, yet, we are invited to imagine that here at least, gender (among other things) does not matter. Like the mountaineering expedition narratives which invite us to share vicariously what the intense experience of climbing a major mountain is like, *Wanderer* holds out the promise that it is possible to be "above" things like gender and not to mention it, even though the very materiality of its hero forecloses that possibility. What cannot be mentioned occupies the very centre of the painting.

For more than fifty years, the mountain Annapurna has been the site where a complex history of gender in mountaineering literature gets written much as the heroic climber of *Wanderer* can be viewed, as a "bodily politics" that does allow gender to have a central place in the creation of mountain masculinities and sometimes mountain feminisms, even within the most Romantic documents of mountaineering. Discussions about siege-style climbing or the purity of alpine style are also discussions about the politics of using these styles and about what kind of social organization they also imply. In a postfeminist climate where so many discussions about the power of women seem to have altered the politics of feminism beyond recognition, the narratives of Annapurna climbs have something valuable to tell us about how politics does enter at least one form of everyday life, even when political talk seems to be silenced. If we look closely at the rhetoric of mountaineering expedition memoirs, it is possible to see how the Romantic ideals in Herzog's often-repeated statement that "there are other Annapurnas in the lives of men" can be given a politics and a history—and even, when Arlene Blum rewrites them, to become a call for political change.

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