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EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES ON LANDSCAPE AND LANGUAGE AMONG  
KAIKE SPEAKERS IN DOLPA, NEPAL

By

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B.A., Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY, 2002

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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in Geography

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Exploring Perspectives on Landscape and Language among Kaike Speakers in Dolpa, Nepal

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The majority of the world's languages are in danger of extinction within this century. Of the more than 6000 languages in the world, 4000-5000 are spoken by Indigenous peoples. Accompanying the loss of languages is the loss of the capacity for these peoples to transmit those aspects of their environmental knowledge systems which are embedded and expressed in their languages. The Kaike speakers of Tichurong in Dolpa, Nepal represent one of these endangered language communities, with approximately 800 speakers remaining. The purpose of this research was to engage Kaike speakers in an exploration of the relationships among their language, environment, and knowledge systems.

Collaborative approaches based upon dialogue, informal interviews, participant observation, and participatory mapping exercises formed the basis of the research. Documentation, discussion, and mapping focused on place names and sacred sites as particularly illuminating repositories of environmental knowledge expressed in language. The maps generated in community mapping sessions allowed Kaike speakers the opportunity to articulate their perception of the relationship between landscape and language as well as express their sense of and attachment to place, offering visual mechanisms for transmission of cultural-environmental knowledge. Learning from the experiences of one endangered language community, this project also aids in assessing the larger implications of Indigenous language loss for sustainable development strategies and maintenance of Indigenous knowledge systems.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Meanings of landscapes and acts of speech are personalized manifestations of a shared perspective on the human condition. –Keith Basso<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between landscape and language is significant because all people reside in and experience landscape, or environment, and process this experience through the medium of language. Iain Davidson-Hunt and Fikret Berkes refer to this experience of, and knowledge about, the environment as adaptive learning for socio-ecological resilience.<sup>2</sup> Among Indigenous<sup>3</sup> communities, this relationship spans a long period of time and is imbued with highly-specific, localized ecological knowledge, which is expressed, embedded, and encoded linguistically.<sup>4</sup> Greater understanding and exploration of the relationship between Indigenous languages and the environment serves several purposes. First, Indigenous languages, which are increasingly at risk of extinction,<sup>5</sup> represent the primary mechanism for transmission of cultural knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Keith H. Basso, *Western Apache Language and Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 140.

<sup>2</sup> Iain Davidson-Hunt and Fikret Berkes, "Learning as You Journey: Anishinaabe Perception of Social-Ecological Environments and Adaptive Learning." *Conservation Ecology* 8, no. 1 (2003): 1, <http://www.consecol.org/vol8/iss1/art5> (accessed January 29, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> The capitalization of the word Indigenous throughout the text is used for purposes of respect and following current trends in literature regarding Indigenous research, peoples, and sovereignty.

<sup>4</sup> Darrell A. Posey, "Biological and Cultural Diversity: The Inextricable, Linked by Language and Politics," in *On Biocultural Diversity*, ed. Luisa Maffi (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 385.

from one generation to the next.<sup>6</sup> Understanding how loss of language signifies the loss of important, place-based cultural information may help maintain linguistic and cultural retention. Second, because Indigenous peoples have occupied the same landscape for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years, they necessarily have acquired cumulative, adaptive, and specialized local knowledge about that landscape which is preserved in language. Grasping and documenting this knowledge helps preserve it for future generations within that community. It also furthers general understanding regarding sustainable livelihoods and symbiotic relationships between humans and their environment. These are increasingly relevant issues. Finally, examining the relationship between language and landscape among Indigenous communities is an effort in deconstructing colonial assimilationist practices and in encouraging and supporting these communities in the pursuit of autonomy and the preservation of their cultural and linguistic ways of knowing and living.<sup>7</sup> This thesis focuses specifically upon the interaction between landscape and language among Kaike speakers, also called Tarali,<sup>8</sup> in Sahar Tara, Nepal by examining the following processes: one, how transmission of knowledge is expressed in beliefs and practices; two, how experience of the landscape is delineated by, and articulated in, language; and three, how different social roles define

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<sup>5</sup> Ninety percent of the world's languages are in danger of extinction within this century. For further discussion, see David Bradley and Maya Bradley, eds. *Language Endangerment and Language Maintenance*, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), xi.

<sup>6</sup> Luisa Maffi, ed., *On Biocultural Diversity: Linking Language, Knowledge, and the Environment*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Leanne R. Simpson, "Anticolonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge." *American Indian Quarterly* 28, nos. 3 & 4 (2004): 373.

<sup>8</sup> The Kaike language is also called Tarali Kham, and its speakers are referred to as Taralis.

the relationships among language, environment, and knowledge. I address this relationship within the context of Nepali history and politics.

### *Organization of Thesis*

Chapter II provides in-depth information about the study area, particularly regarding Nepali history and politics influencing Sahar Tara, including the Maoist People's War of the last ten years. Chapter III presents an overview of livelihood systems in Sahar Tara, characterized by subsistence agriculture, trade, and recently, the harvest of yarsagumba (*Cordyceps sinensis*). Chapter IV discusses the political history of Nepal which has been both an historical and contemporary force in shaping Sahar Tara history and political economy. Taralis' local environmental knowledge, sense of place, and the role of language in articulating these understandings within the context of the state of endangered and Indigenous languages in Nepal is described in Chapter V. The history and present state of formal education and its impact on cultural-ecological knowledge production among children is addressed in Chapter VI. Finally, the implications of language and identity loss and changing livelihoods is summarized in Chapter VII.

### Sense of Place and Language

The spaces we occupy necessarily help to shape our perception of the world, simply because we process our observations through our senses. This cognitive acquisition of knowledge is how we organize and classify that which we observe and experience. Our understanding of the landscape influences how we conceive of ourselves and our collective history in a certain place. Together, cognition and conceptualization

form a people's ecological perceptions of the spaces and places they occupy.<sup>9</sup> This understanding may be seen as an individual outlook, but our associations with the landscape are in fact socially informed. Place is not just a physical location, but a socially constructed idea that is created through interaction and discourse with others. It is also a function of memory, which does not exist outside of the social context. Rather, each family, community, and society has a tradition of remembering<sup>10</sup> which is perpetuated and maintained through language, particularly in the form of oral traditions and social narratives. Patricia Stokowski notes: "Because the significance of place emerges through interaction with others, language is central in formation of a sense of place. Place affiliations are sustained by rhetorical (i.e., in the classic sense: persuasive) uses of language, with participants using stylistic devices such as icons, imagery, argumentation, symbols, and metaphors, among others. The derived symbols of place are formalized through use into coherent language structures and appear to people as narratives, myths, fables, and the like."<sup>11</sup>

Because Indigenous communities have occupied certain areas for long periods of time and therefore sustain protracted cultural memories associated with those areas, they have a profound understanding of, and attachment to, their landscape, which is reflected in the words they use to communicate about it. Memory of, and language about, place is a form of cultural knowledge which is site-specific and processual.<sup>12</sup> Languages, and

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<sup>9</sup> Maria Fernandez-Gimenez, "The Role of Ecological Perception in Indigenous Resource Management: A Case Study from the Mongolian Forest-Steppe." *Nomadic Peoples* 33 (1993): 31-46.

<sup>10</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, "Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past." *Qualitative Sociology* 19, no. 3 (1996): 286.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia A. Stokowski, "Languages of Place and Discourses of Power: Constructing New Senses of Place." *Journal of Leisure Research* 34, no. 4 (2002): 372.

Indigenous languages in particular, are “repositories of past experiences”<sup>13</sup> and reflect a group’s mental adaptation to its environment. They embody highly specialized, culturally-specific, and diachronically accumulated cultural and ecological knowledge.<sup>14</sup> As an occurrence within language, place names epitomize a group’s collective associations with, and memory of, certain places and therefore have the capacity to position time and space historically.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, human brains are equipped with the parahippocampal gyrus, which acts in a capacity to memorize places and in wayfinding, even distinguishing landmarks from other kinds of places.<sup>16</sup> This implies a tendency for human beings to assign names to landforms and other places on the landscape which hold particular meaning for a community of people. Not only are these places named, they are organized by mental maps which assign spatial knowledge to memory.<sup>17</sup> Multiple studies have illustrated the importance of place names to Indigenous communities and the various functions signified by evoking these names, such as producing mental imagery of

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Wickens Pearce and Renee Pualani Louis. "Mapping Indigenous Depths of Place." *American Indian Culture and Research* 32, no. 3 (2008): 110.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Mulhausler, "Ecolinguistics, Linguistic Diversity, Ecological Diversity," in *On Biocultural Diversity*, ed. Luisa Maffi (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 143.

<sup>14</sup> Terralingua and WWF International. *Indigenous and Traditional Peoples of the World and Ecoregion-Based Conservation: An Integrated Approach to Conserving the World's Biological and Cultural Diversity*. (Gland, Switzerland: WWF International, 2000), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Keith H Basso, *Western Apache Language and Culture* 157.

<sup>16</sup> Gabriele Janzen and Miranda van Turenout, "Selective Neural Representation of Objects Relevant for Navigation." *Nature Neuroscience* 7, no. 6 (2004): 673.

<sup>17</sup> Niclas Burenhult and Stephen C. Levinson, "Language and Landscape: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective." *Language Sciences* 30 (2008): 135-150.

a specific location, affirming traditional values and morals, and calling to mind cultural stories and texts.<sup>18</sup>

My research focuses in particular upon place-making, an idea conceptualized by Keith Basso in his work with Western Apache in Arizona and which encompasses not only “living local history,” but also the construction of history through ongoing discussion of place worlds.<sup>19</sup> Specifically, Basso asserts that place-making can only be appreciated “in relation to the ideas and practices with which it is accomplished.”<sup>20</sup> With this in mind, I pay particular attention in this paper to Kaike linguistic renditions of places, as well as mental maps and the ways they serve to situate people culturally and historically within the landscape. An ongoing relationship with the land generated by a subsistence lifestyle ensures the perpetuation of social memory, as well as the continuous rendering of personal and social identities through, and understanding of, this relationship.

### Local Knowledge

Local knowledge is often captured under the term traditional ecological knowledge, which generally refers to a culturally specific body of knowledge acquired

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<sup>18</sup> Basso, *Language and Culture*, 170; Pearce and Louis, “Mapping,” 114; Katrina-Ann Rose-Marie Oliveira, “Ke Alanui K I Ke‘Eke‘E O Maui: Na Wai Ho‘I Ka ‘Ole O Ke Akamai, He Alanui I Ma‘a I Ka Hele ‘Ia E O‘U Mau M a Kua” (Ph.D. diss, University of Hawai‘i, 2006), 9; and Leo McAvoy, “American Indians, Place Names, and the Old/New West.” *Journal of Leisure Research* 34, no. 4 (2002): 383-396.

<sup>19</sup> Keith H Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996, 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

over, and transmitted across, generations.<sup>21</sup> Local knowledge reflects the different approaches groups of people use to adapt and relate to their environment, and differentiates one group from another.<sup>22</sup> Local knowledge is informed by sense of place and is reflected in language. According to both Henry Lewis<sup>23</sup> and David Wilkins,<sup>24</sup> worldview consists of a framework of knowledge, practice, and belief. Similarly, as Berkes<sup>25</sup> and Lewis<sup>26</sup> assert, these integrated variables serve to shape environmental perceptions and offer culturally laden meaning to knowledge accumulated about the environment. Worldview is composed of a framework of understanding the world and one's role in it, an understanding which is culturally informed and integrated to shape perceptions and provide socially meaningful context. Local knowledge is based upon and inseparable from, worldview.

In assessing local knowledge among Indigenous communities, it is important to engage Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. Employing Indigenous epistemologies involves recognizing that local knowledge is not obtained, learned, or

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<sup>21</sup> Fikret Berkes, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Perspective," in *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Julian Inglis (Ontario, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1993), [http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9321-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9321-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html) (accessed November 19, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Oliveira, "Ke Alanui," 6.

<sup>23</sup> Henry T. Lewis, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Some Definitions," in *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Wisdom for Sustainable Development*, ed. Nancy M. Williams and Graham Baines (Canberra: Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University, 1993), 9.

<sup>24</sup> David P. Wilkins, "Linguistic Evidence in Support of a Holistic Approach to Traditional Ecological Knowledge," In *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Wisdom for Sustainable Development*, ed. Nancy M. Williams and Graham Baines (Canberra: Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University, 1993), 90.

<sup>25</sup> Berkes, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge."

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge," 9.

transmitted along the lines dictated by Western research methodologies or scientific frameworks.<sup>27</sup> It means incorporating local ways of knowing and believing, which obviously will vary considerably among different groups of people. There are similarities, however, within many Indigenous communities. For instance, knowledge acquisition is often inseparable from ceremony, metaphysical phenomena, and spiritual beliefs and practices.<sup>28</sup> Margaret Pearce, Renee Pualani Louis<sup>29</sup> and Katrina-Ann Rose-Marie Oliveira<sup>30</sup> further emphasize that local Indigenous knowledge is often performative in nature. In Hawai'i, for example, songs, dances, and historical narratives, among others, all serve to express "depth of place."<sup>31</sup> Examples from the Kaike-speaking community of Sahar Tara in Dolpa also lend credence to the idea that place-based understanding is imbued with and inextricably linked to spirituality. This is manifested, for example, in Sahar Tara residents' belief in and relationship with various deities dwelling throughout the landscape, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter IV. Engaging in research with Indigenous communities requires that the researcher recognize his/her research "involves the attempt to understand the spatiality of knowledge from within the knowledge space that has been coproduced with that knowledge."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Renee Pualani Louis, "Can You Hear Us Now? Voices from the Margin: Using Indigenous Methodologies in Geographic Research," *Geographical Research* 45, no. 2 (2007): 133.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>29</sup> Pearce and Louis, "Mapping," 114.

<sup>30</sup> Oliveira, "Ke Alanui," 7.

<sup>31</sup> Pearce and Louis, "Mapping," 114.

<sup>32</sup> David Turnbull, *Masons, Tricksters, and Cartographers* (London: OPA Gordon & Breach Publishing Group, 2000), 91.



## *Gendered and Children's Knowledge*

Although communities of people share a common worldview which is transmitted through language, performance, and experiential observation of one's environment, it is important to recognize that the process of knowledge acquisition across a community is not uniform and is influenced by other factors, such as gender. One reason for this is that because work is differentiated according to gender, different aspects of ecological knowledge are accessible to men and women.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the process of learning culturally and linguistically coded beliefs and ways of knowing varies for men and women.<sup>34</sup> It is essential that any exploration of worldview and local knowledge pay attention to the gendered nature of knowledge acquisition. This is a particularly relevant endeavor in the case of Sahar Tara.

Similarly, children occupy different social roles within a community compared to other members and therefore perceive the world through a different lens. This research, in recognizing "the need to understand children from the perspective of their own life worlds,"<sup>35</sup> attempts to identify the different values of space and place of children in Sahar Tara.

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<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Ruddle, "The Transmission of Traditional Ecological Knowledge," in *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Julian Inglis (Ontario, Canada: The International Development Research Centre, 1993), [http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9321-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9321-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html) (accessed November 18, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Posey, "Biological and Cultural Diversity," 385.

<sup>35</sup> Hugh Matthews, Melanie Limb, and Mark Taylor. "The Geography of Children: Some Ethical and Methodological Considerations for Project and Dissertation Work," *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 22, no. 3 (1998): 313.

My exploration of the relationship between landscape and language among Kaike speakers, also called Tarali, examines local understandings of sense of place, particularly as it is expressed and conveyed in language. Based on three months of fieldwork from September to December 2008, five weeks of which were spent in the village of Sahar Tara, I hope to elucidate the specific strategies Kaike speakers use to relate to and situate themselves in their environment, examining gendered and children's perspectives in particular. Critically, maintenance of both environmental knowledge and language requires an "ongoing creation of relationships through land-based activities."<sup>36</sup> In spite of its remoteness, these relationships and perspectives are informed by Sahar Tara's place as a village in the district of Dolpa and in the larger country of Nepal. The research is therefore explained within the contextual background of Nepali history and politics.

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<sup>36</sup> Iain J. Davidson-Hunt and others, "Iskatewizaagegan (Shoal Lake) Plant Knowledge: An Anishinaabe (Ojibway) Ethnobotany of Northwestern Ontario," *Journal of Ethnobiology* 25 (2005): 189.

## CHAPTER II

### Study Area

#### Nepal

Nepal is a landlocked country consisting of 147,181 km<sup>2</sup> situated between India to the south, east, and west and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north. It is located between the Palearctic (Holarctic) and Palaeotropical (Indo-Malayan) biogeographical regions.<sup>37</sup>

As John Whelpton describes it, about seventy million years ago, the gradual collision of the Indian subcontinent with the larger Asian continent caused rock strata to push upward, forming mountains along Tibet's southern rim which constitute the watershed between the Ganges and Tsangpo/Brahmaputra river systems. The main Himalayan Range was formed between sixteen and ten million years ago, followed by the lower altitude mountains known as the Middle Hills in Nepal. The mountains along Tibet's southern rim continued to rise until between 800,000 and 500,000 years ago when the main Himalayan peaks were thrust upward once again to rise above them. Further movements formed the Mahabharat Hills along the southern boundary of the Middle Hills as well as the Siwalik Hills along the edge of the Gangetic Plain.<sup>38</sup> Sections of the main Himalayan Range continue to rise at rates between five millimeters and one centimeter a

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<sup>37</sup> U. R. Bhujju and others, *Nepal Biodiversity Resource Book* (Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 2007); 1, <http://books.icimod.org/index.php/search/publication/183> (accessed February 21, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> John Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.

year. These highly erosive young mountains gradually deposited topsoil two miles deep on the Gangetic Plain, which is now ten to thirty miles wide in some areas and constitutes the Terai.<sup>39</sup> It is this topsoil which is responsible for the Terai's fertility and greater agricultural productivity compared to that of the rest of Nepal. Although Nepal is generally divided into three areas, known as the Terai, the Middle Hills, and the high mountains,<sup>40</sup> it

can be more specifically divided into five levels and eleven sub-

**Table 1: Physiographic and Bioclimatic Zones of Nepal**

Physiographic Zone	Surface Area (%)	Elevation (m)	Bioclimatic Zone
High Himal	23	above 5,000	Nival
High Mountains	20	4,000-5,000	Alpine
		3,000-4,000	Sub-Alpine
Mid-Hills	30	2,000-3,000	Temperate Monsoon
		1,000-2,000	Sub-Tropical
Terai and Siwalik Hills	27	500-1,000 below 500	Tropical

Source: Adapted from Bhujju and others, 2007

levels of bioclimatic zones, ranging from tropical to nival.<sup>41</sup> These zones are displayed in Table 1. Because of the great degree of altitudinal variation, climatic conditions vary considerably in different parts of the country. While the average annual rainfall is 1600 millimeters, areas near Pokhara receive as much as 2024 millimeters and areas of Dolpa, Mustang, and Jomsom receive as little as 295 millimeters because they lie in rain shadow.<sup>42</sup> Obviously, temperature gradients are also subject to decreases or increases in altitude.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>40</sup> K. S. Sharma, "The Small Farmers' Development Programme in Nepal: Institutional Initiative in Poverty Alleviation" in *Sustainable Mountain Agriculture*, eds. N.S. Jodha, M. Banskota, and Tej Partap (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1992), 656.

<sup>41</sup> Bhujju and others, *Nepal Biodiversity Resource Book*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 8.

Land use in Nepal is divided into five categories, as seen in Table 2. The Terai constitutes 23.1 percent of Nepal’s total land area, the Middle Hills 41.7 percent, and the mountains 35.2 percent.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, James Fisher records seven types of local land classification in Sahar Tara: fields, grassy or forested areas, land along a river bed, rock cliffs, high mountainous land, pasture land, and gardens.<sup>44</sup>

Nepal continues to be an agriculture-based country, and most farming is subsistence agriculture. Over fifty percent of household incomes are

Land Use	Hectares (million)	%
Forest	4.27	29
Scrubland/Degraded	1.56	10.6
Grassland	1.7	12
Farmland	3	23
Uncultivated Land	1	7

Source: Bhujju et. al, 2007, 9

generated by farming, which employs eighty percent of the country’s population.<sup>45</sup>

Because of the great degree of altitudinal range, a variety of crops can be grown country-wide, including most of the world’s food staples, such as potatoes, taro root, corn (maize), rice, millet, barley, wheat, and other grains.

The country also has an abundance of freshwater resources, with around 200 billion cubic meters per second of water in its various rivers and an estimated 45,000 megawatts of commercial hydropower potential.<sup>46</sup> The Kathmandu Upatyaka Khanepani

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>44</sup> James F. Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 49.

<sup>45</sup> Bhujju and others, *Nepal Biodiversity Resource Book*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Limited (KUKL), however, a public-private partnership for water distribution in the Kathmandu Valley, is only able to supply 120 million liters of the 230 million liters of needed water per day.<sup>47</sup> As I write (in February 2009), Kathmandu is experiencing up to sixteen hours a day of load-shedding, in which there are scheduled blackouts according to which group one's residential area of Kathmandu has been assigned. Peak demand is over 800 megawatts, but Nepal's total electricity capacity is 689 megawatts.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, the United Communist Party of Nepal (UCPN) Maoist<sup>49</sup> government has ambitious plans to supply 10,000 megawatts of electricity in ten years. How they plan to accomplish this remains unclear given the current situation. This was partly exacerbated by the toppling of five electricity towers in Nepal and additional towers in the Indian state of Bihar in the August 2008 Koshi River flooding.<sup>50</sup> There was also a disruption in government plans and project implementation owing to the ten year civil war.<sup>51</sup> Lack of electricity for such long hours each day is having a disastrous effect on the economy and compromising critical services, such as healthcare. Hospitals are running diesel

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<sup>47</sup> Post Report, "Water Tariff Hike Looms Large," *Kathmandu Post*, December 9, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Hari Prasad Shrestha, "Nepal to Be Failure by Power Failure," *American Chronicle*, January 18, 2009, <http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/view/88220> (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> On January 13, 2009, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) Maoist, merged with the Unity Centre (Masal) and was renamed the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), UCPN (M). See International Crisis Group, "Nepal's Faltering Peace Process," *Crisis Group Asia Report No. 163*, 19 February 2009 (Kathmandu: ICG, 2009), 3. In this document, I refer to the CPN (M) when talking about the past and the UCPN (M) when addressing current issues.

<sup>50</sup> Thira L. Bhushal, "Electricity Supply From India to Resume Wednesday," *República*, February 24, 2009, [http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news\\_details&news\\_id=2214](http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=2214) (accessed February 25, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Navan Singh Khadka, "Nepal Turns Back on Hydropower," *BBC Nepali Service*, January 16, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7831911.stm> (accessed February 27, 2009).

generators, which incur greater cost, and they sometimes cannot generate sufficient power to run critically important machines.<sup>52</sup>

### *Population*

The earliest human activity in Nepal has been traced to tools found in the Inner Terai dating back at least 100,000 years, and tools were found in the Kathmandu Valley dating back 30,000 years.<sup>53</sup> Whelpton asserts that the lake which used to exist in the Kathmandu Valley may have dried up only 100,000 years ago and speculates its shores were inhabited by this time.<sup>54</sup>

Agriculture and animal husbandry began in Nepal around 2000 BC, although Whelpton points out that barley and rice have been grown in northern India since before 6000 BC, so agriculture may have earlier origins in Nepal as well.<sup>55</sup> In the foothills of the Karnali Basin in western Nepal, roughly the area currently inhabited by the Kaike speakers of Dolpa, sedentary agriculture was established between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries AD, although hunter-gatherer societies occupied this area by at least 1000 AD.<sup>56</sup> Occupation of Nepal by different groups has occurred in a gradual succession of migrants from regions now in Central Asia, India, and Tibet.

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<sup>52</sup> Sangeeta Rijal, "Load-shedding Hits Critical Hospital Services," *República*, December 29, 2008, [http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news\\_details&news\\_id=665](http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=665) (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> Whelpton, *A History of Nepal*, 15.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Nepal's population of 27.1 million people is growing at a rate of 1.9 percent, and almost eighty percent of that population still live in rural areas.<sup>57</sup> Almost half (48.5 percent) live in the Terai, 44.2 percent live in the Middle Hills, and only 7.3 percent live in the mountains.<sup>58</sup> According to the 2006 Human Development Index (HDI), Nepal ranks low compared to other countries in several categories, such as life expectancy (62.1 years at birth, ranking 129<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries) and the adult literacy rate (48.6 percent).<sup>59</sup>

There are indicators of positive trends, however, as exemplified by a decrease in the infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births from 165 in 1970 to 56 in 2005.<sup>60</sup> The average literacy rate in 2001 was 53.7 percent, up from 39.6 percent in 1991 and 14 percent in 1971.<sup>61</sup> The democratically elected UCPN Maoist-dominated government voted into power in August 2008 has launched a national plan for abolishing illiteracy in Nepal in two years.<sup>62</sup> Although this is a commendable goal and the educational budget has increased significantly, it is unlikely countrywide literacy can be achieved in such a short time. Comparing the HDI with the Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) creates a ratio that ranks Nepal 119 out of 136 countries for which a ratio has been

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<sup>57</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006: Human Development Indicators: Country Fact Sheets: Nepal* (Kathmandu: United Nations Development Programme, 2006) [http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/data\\_sheets/cty\\_ds\\_NPL.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_NPL.html) (accessed February 25, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> Bhujju and others, *Nepal Biodiversity Resource Book*, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> UNDP. *Human Development Report 2006* (accessed February 25, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> Bhujju and others, *Nepal Biodiversity Resource Book*, 10, citing MoEST, *Nepal in Educational Figures 2005* (Kathmandu: His Majesty's Government, Ministry of Education and Sports, 2005).

<sup>62</sup> Neelam Sharma, "Ending Illiteracy," *The Kathmandu Post*, October 10, 2008.



calculated,<sup>63</sup> indicative of the significant gender disparity that exists in Nepal. As a case in point, the 2005 adult literacy rate for females is 34.9 percent compared with 62.7 percent for males.<sup>64</sup> This gender disparity is also reflected at the local level in Sahar Tara, a society in which women perform most of the work and are less educated. Data for Sahar Tara regarding female life expectancy, maternal mortality rates, and other indicators of gender-based inequalities are unavailable, although much can be inferred from the data available about Dolpa, which is discussed in the next section.

Nepal represents the most varied cultural diversity in the Himalayan region,<sup>65</sup> which is reflected in its many distinct ethnic and linguistic groups. There are four language families, 123 languages, and 100 officially recognized ethnic and caste groups.<sup>66</sup> Until 2006, Nepal was the only Hindu kingdom in the world, though the country is also home to Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Bön, and nature-based religions. Hinduism is prevalent in the Terai and Middle Hills, whereas Buddhism dominates in higher elevations. There is also a Hindu-Buddhist syncretism in many places, as evidenced by shared temples, deities, and practices.<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, Nepalis largely

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<sup>63</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006* (accessed February 25, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> B. Bajracharya and others, *Atlas of the Himalaya* (Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 2005), 56.

<sup>66</sup> The number of languages is recorded differently by various groups. Ethnologue (see R.G. Gordon, Jr., ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Fifteenth edition*, Dallas: SIL International, 2005, <http://www.ethnologue.com/> (accessed May 1 2008)) lists 123 languages, but the Nepali government records 92 languages. For a discussion of these discrepancies, see Mark Turin, *Linguistic Diversity and the Preservation of Endangered Languages: A Case Study from Nepal* (Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 2007), 1.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 56.

identify as Hindus (85-90 percent), with Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians representing 5-10 percent, 2-5 percent, and 1.7 percent of the population, respectively, in 2001.<sup>68</sup> The 2001 Census also recorded the following religions: Jain, Bahai, Kiranti, and Sikh, although only Kiranti has any statistical significance, at 3.6 percent of the population.<sup>69</sup> Kiranti is the Indigenous religion practiced by Rai and Limbu people in eastern Nepal. Much available data distorts the accurate portrayal of religion, which is characterized by the Hindu-Buddhist syncretic relationship discussed earlier, as well as syncretism among other religious groups. In Sahar Tara, people practice a blend of Buddhism, Hinduism, shamanism, and animism, although they officially identify themselves as Buddhists. This mixture of religious practices and beliefs in Sahar Tara is important to understand within the context of relationship to land and worldview.

Although not everyone in Nepal is Hindu, the caste system nevertheless pervades every aspect of life. The caste system was introduced into Nepal by Hindus fleeing Muslim invasions in India in the eleventh century.<sup>70</sup> Andrea Matles Savada asserts: “Its establishment became the basis of the emergence of the feudalistic economic structure of Nepal: the high-caste Hindus began to appropriate lands--particularly lowlands that were more easily accessible, more cultivatable, and more productive--including those

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<sup>68</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, “Nepal,” *Report on International Religious Freedom* (U.S. Department of State, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> Krishna B. Bhattachan, *Indigenous Peoples & Minorities in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, 2008), 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

belonging to the existing tribal people, and introduced the system of individual ownership.”<sup>71</sup>

There are four castes, or *varnas*: Brahmin (priests and scholars), Kshatriya (rulers and warriors), Vaishyas (merchants and traders), and Sudras (farmers, laborers, and artisans),<sup>72</sup> although they are only referred to this way in the Terai. In the hills the caste groups are represented by Bahun, Chhetri, and Dalits,<sup>73</sup> corresponding to Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Sudras, respectively. Chhetris constitute 15.8 percent of the population, while Bahuns comprise 12.7 percent.<sup>74</sup> There is overwhelming evidence that high caste Hindus, who constitute 31 percent of the population in all, have greater access to services and resources compared to Nepal’s 59 Indigenous nationalities, or *ādibāsi janājati*, who make up 36.4 percent of the population. This is reflected in higher life expectancy (61.4 years among high caste Hindus versus 54.2 years among *ādibāsi janājati*), higher literacy rates (74.9 percent among Bahuns versus 13.2 percent among the Kushwadia caste group), and lower incidence of poverty (18.4 percent versus 44 percent, respectively).<sup>75</sup> Although the status of *ādibāsi janājati* will be discussed further in the section on Indigenous nationalities in Chapter IV, it is worth noting here that in the 144 years since Nepal has been a country, the number of high caste and privileged ethnic groups

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<sup>71</sup> Andrea Matles Savada, ed., *Nepal: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1991), <http://countrystudies.us/nepal/> (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Krishna Bhattachan, *Indigenous Peoples*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>75</sup> Shiv Kumar Rai, "Nepalmā Ādibāsi Janajti, Swāsthya Adhikār Ra Swāsthya Pesāma Unihariko Upasthiti." *Nepal Indigenous Journal* 1, no. 1 (2008): 4.

occupying top civil service posts has only decreased from 98 percent in 1854 to 92 percent in 1998.<sup>76</sup> These indicators of the oppressed and marginalized status of *ādibāsi janājati* in Nepal have implications for residents of Sahar Tara and the future status of their Kaike language and capacity for maintenance of cultural identity.

## Dolpa

Nepal is comprised of seventy-five districts, and Dolpa is the largest, encompassing 7889 square kilometers.<sup>77</sup> However, population density in Dolpa is the lowest in Nepal, with only 3.7 people per square kilometer.<sup>78</sup> Dolpa is bounded by the Tibet Autonomous Region and the Nepal districts of Mugu, Jumla, Jajarkot, Rukum, Myagdi, and Mustang. It is located in Karnali Zone (Figure 1).

Approximately fifty percent of the district is mountainous, and it receives as little as 255 millimeters of annual rainfall in some places<sup>79</sup> because it lies in the rain shadow of Dhaulagiri, the sixth highest mountain in the world at 8166 meters. The area of Tichurong where Sahar Tara is located, however, receives regular monsoon rains

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<sup>76</sup> Krishna Bhattachan, "Breadth and Depth of Racial Discrimination in Nepal," *The Telegraph* 19, no. 14 (2002): 2.

<sup>77</sup> Wikipedia, "Dolpa District," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolpa\\_District](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolpa_District) (accessed May 2, 2008).

<sup>78</sup> Namgyal Rinpoche, *Dolpo: The Hidden Land* (Kathmandu: SNV/Nepal, 2005), 7.

<sup>79</sup> Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, *Plants of Nepal*, <http://rbg-web2.rbge.org.uk/nepal/frames.html?climate.html> (accessed May 2, 2008).

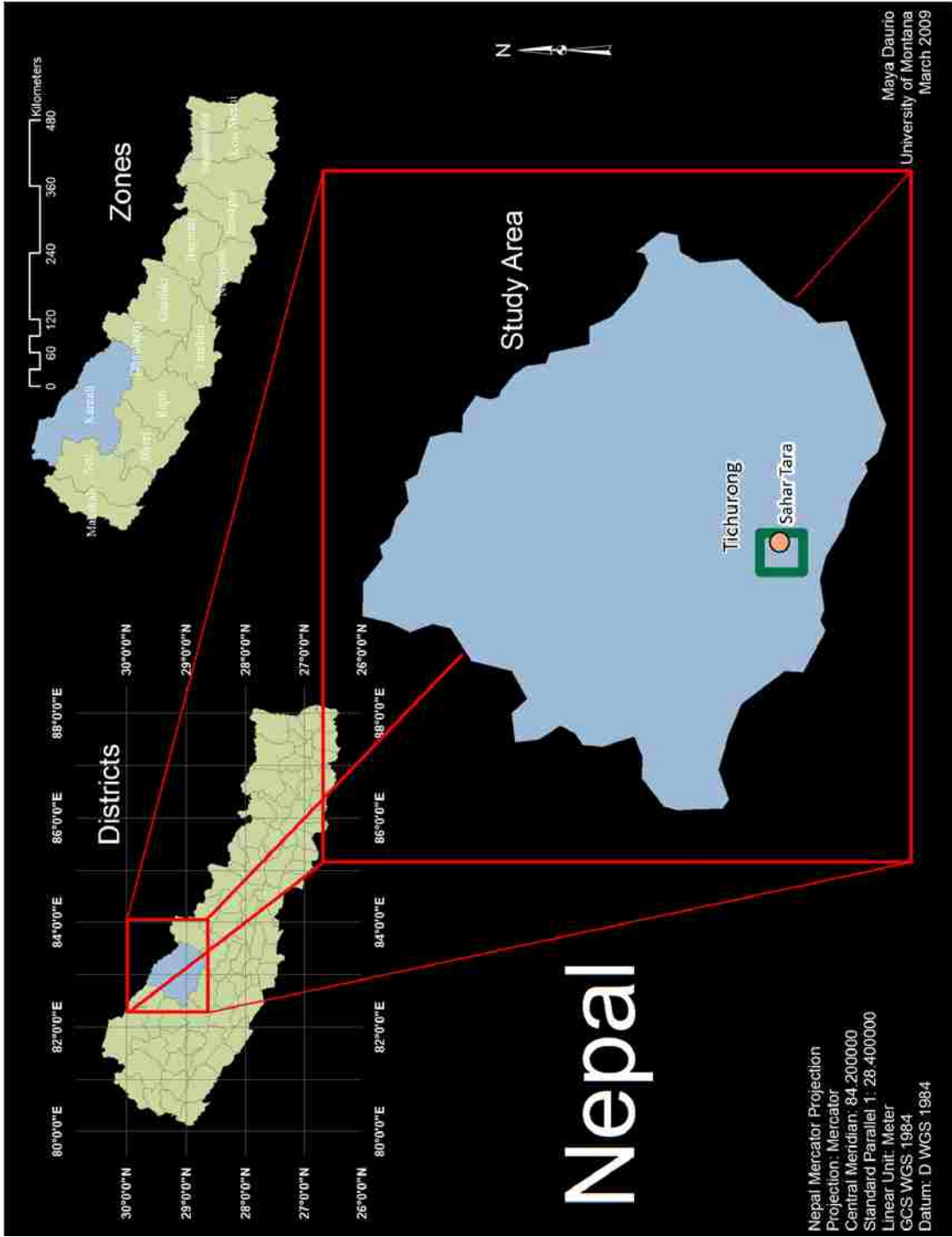


Figure 1: Nepal Map Showing Zones, Districts, and Study Area Within Dolpa District

according to Fisher's observations.<sup>80</sup> Although the population of Dolpa district was not reported in the Nepal 2001 Census, it is thought to be around 27,000 persons. There are no roads in Dolpa, and the only access is by foot or by airplane to the district's sole airstrip, located in Juphal. Occasionally it is also possible to fly a helicopter into Dunai, the district headquarters, although because the helicopters almost always bring in supplies and food, it is much easier to find a seat on their return trip out of Dolpa.<sup>81</sup> From Dunai, it is one day's walk up the Bheri river to Sahar Tara.

Shey Phoksundo National Park accounts for approximately thirty-six percent of the district of Dolpa and lies partly in Mugu district as well.<sup>82</sup> It is the largest mountain park in Nepal. Dolpa is a topographically diverse district, its territory encompassing high peaks; arid, high plateaus; steep, terraced hillsides; and irrigated paddy fields. Dolpa is made up of both Middle Hills and high mountains and is typical of Nepal's extreme relief, which is the greatest on earth. The elevation ranges from less than 100 meters at places in the Terai to over 8500 meters within a 160 kilometer north-south cross section, causing relief in places between valley bottoms and ridgetops to often reach 5000 and sometimes 6000 meters.<sup>83</sup> Dolpa district is a case in point, with elevation ranging from

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<sup>80</sup> He recorded rainfall 98 days out of a 255 day period. Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 55.

<sup>81</sup> When I was traveling to Dolpa, the 'plane used for that district had crashed in Lukla, a village in the east and an entry point for Everest-bound tourists. There was no scheduled 'plane available for two months, so I flew to Jumla, one district over from Dolpa and at least four days walk from Jumla's district headquarters to Dunai.

<sup>82</sup> Namgyal Rinpoche, *Dolpo*, 48.

<sup>83</sup> Barry C. Bishop, *Karnali Under Stress: Livelihood Strategies and Seasonal Rhythms in a Changing Nepal Himalaya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Geography Research Paper nos. 228-229, 1990), 1.

1525 to 7754 meters above sea level.<sup>84</sup> In Dolpa, the Sisne and Kanjiroba massifs, where the highest point is 6612 meters, lie in the north and northwestern tips. The Bheri River begins as streams south of these massifs and dumps into the Big Bheri River. Its headwaters lie in the glaciers north of Dhaulagiri.<sup>85</sup>

Dolpa is as culturally diverse as it is topographically varied. It is reported that sixty percent of the district is Hindu, forty percent is Buddhist, 5.5 percent Bön,<sup>86</sup> and the remainder practice animism and/or shamanism. The overlap in these statistics may be due to the fact that people are both Buddhist and Bön, for example, with other combinations of religious syncretism possible as well. The southern and southwestern areas of Dolpa are occupied primarily by Hindus who speak Nepali, whereas Upper Dolpa, known as Dolpo, is inhabited by agro-pastoralists who speak Dolpo Tibetan.<sup>87</sup> The Kaike language is spoken in only three villages, Sahar Tara, Tupa Tara, and Tarakot. The people in these villages are called Tarali, which references that they are speakers of the Kaike language. They self-identify as Magar, one of the ethnic groups of Nepal and also one which occupies an acceptable position in the caste system. According to Fisher, this identification as Magar “is simply a convenient status summation which can be readily and incontestably claimed by anyone (except untouchables) who wants it.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program & Sustainable Tourism Development Unit, "Dolpa: The Divine Land," (TRPAP, n.d.), [http://www.welcomenepal.com/dolpa/dolpa\\_background.htm](http://www.welcomenepal.com/dolpa/dolpa_background.htm) (accessed February 21, 2009).

<sup>85</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 16-18.

<sup>86</sup> TRPAP & Sustainable Tourism Development Unit, "Dolpa: The Divine Land."

<sup>87</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 19.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Similarly, Michael Noonan attributes this alignment with the Magar ethnic/caste group to the fact that Magars belong to a caste which cannot be enslaved to the higher castes.<sup>89</sup>

The Magars of Tichurong perceive themselves to have higher status than the people of Upper Dolpa when compared to the Dalits (untouchable low caste) of Riwa.

This self-affiliation with a particular ethnic group or caste is not exclusive to the Magars of Tichurong and is in fact recorded as a common practice throughout South Asia during medieval times.<sup>90</sup> The Magars, along with the Gurungs, provided a support base for the Khasas, the linguistic ancestors of the Parbatiyas, “people of the mountains,” who have always culturally dominated the Nepali state and live mostly in the Middle Hills.<sup>91</sup> Whereas the Khasas lost their stronghold in the Kumaon and Garhwal Himalayas, both previously territories of Nepal, their powerbase in Nepal was maintained under the Malla empire largely because of their support by large Magar and Gurung populations. In the nineteenth century when the caste system was codified, the Magars, Gurungs, and some of the other Tibeto-Burman groups were “allocated a position clearly below the high, twice-born castes but were not regarded as ritually unclean.”<sup>92</sup> Additionally, until the eighteenth century, there had also existed a flexible relationship sometimes resulting in

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<sup>89</sup> Michael Noonan, “Language Documentation and Language Endangerment in Nepal” (paper presented at the Dialogue of Cultures, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, 14 April 2005). The employer-employee relationship between Taralis and the low caste Dalits of Riwa, for example, illustrates that Taralis occupy a higher caste than the Dalits. This results in them being able to employ Dalits to do certain work for them and also to follow rules of social interaction in which Dalits are perceived to be polluting and inferior. Historically, Dalits may have been enslaved by higher castes in Nepal, and indentured servitude continues to be a reality.

<sup>90</sup> Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.



intermarriage between Magars and Khasas.<sup>93</sup> Later, after the establishment of Gorkhali rule in the eighteenth century, the western hills of Nepal served as a predominant source of slaves,<sup>94</sup> and the Magars were able to remain unenslaved by paying for this privilege.<sup>95</sup>

Within this context, although it is unknown when the Kaike speakers of Tichurong chose to identify themselves as Magar, it is not surprising that they chose to affiliate themselves with this particular group. The Magars of Tichurong have no relationship with Magars in other parts of Nepal, and Kaike, although officially included as one of three Magar languages, has no affiliation with the other two Magar languages, other than also belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese language group. This, too, is not unusual, and all of the languages within the Magar group are thought to have multiple origins.<sup>96</sup>

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2001 Magars accounted for 13.15 percent of the population of Dolpa with a total of 2902 people, roughly equally divided among men and women, out of a total population of 22,071.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>97</sup> Tunga S. Bastola, "Caste Ethnicity Population," *Population Census 2001* (Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

## *Demographics*

Life expectancy estimates for Dolpa in 2001 were ten years less than for the rest of Nepal, with 48 years for men and 46 years for women.<sup>98</sup> Overall, Dolpa ranks seventy out of seventy-five districts in Nepal for poverty and human development, and an estimated fifty-seven percent of households live below the poverty line, which is the equivalent of less than one dollar a day.<sup>99</sup> Dolpa also accounts for nearly fifty percent of Nepal's harvest of yarsagumba (*Cordyceps sinensis*),<sup>100</sup> an extremely lucrative crop, further discussed in Chapter III. How this trade has affected the wealth of Dolpa residents may not be reflected in household poverty estimates. Only thirty-five percent of households have electricity, six percent have solar panels, thirty-six percent have piped water, and fifteen percent have a toilet.<sup>101</sup> In Sahar Tara, only some houses have solar panels, and three out of approximately seventy households have toilets, along with the school.

District wide, the child mortality rate is 102 per 1000 births, and only seven percent of births are attended by a trained healthcare worker.<sup>102</sup> The literacy rate is thirty-four percent for men and twenty percent for women, and 107 primary schools and twenty

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<sup>98</sup>Rinpoche, *Dolpo*, 53.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> VisitNepal.com, "Yarsagumba - the Gold Rush," [http://www.visitnepal.com/nepal\\_information/yarsagumba.php](http://www.visitnepal.com/nepal_information/yarsagumba.php) [accessed February 21, 2009].

<sup>101</sup> Rinpoche, *Dolpo*, 48.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 53.

secondary schools serve a population of nearly 30,000 people.<sup>103</sup> It is likely that the literacy rate in Sahar Tara is even lower than this, with greater disparity between men and women and a lower average enrollment rate compared to the rest of Dolpa, which is reportedly fifty-six percent for men and forty-four percent for women.<sup>104</sup>

### Sahar Tara

Sahar Tara is a village of between seventy and eighty houses located at approximately 28° 53' latitude and 83° 00' longitude in Sahar Tara Village Development Committee (VDC) in the district of Dolpa in Nepal. There are seven villages comprising Sahar Tara VDC located on the west side of the Bheri River. On the east side are six villages which constitute Lāwan VDC. Both of these VDCs are located in what is known in Tibetan as Tichurong, a steep valley cut through by the Bheri River. The villages of Tichurong are situated approximately between 2352 and 3636 meters. A map of the thirteen villages of Tichurong Valley, with Sahar Tara highlighted in blue, is displayed in Figure 2. The number of fields concentrated within the vicinity of Sahar Tara compared with Tāchen in the far east is striking.

Sahar Tara itself ranges between 2432 and 3000 meters and is one of the largest villages in Dolpa district. It exerts greater political and economic influence than other villages in the valley. For instance, the majority of forests in the vicinity belong to the village of Sahar Tara. The jurisdiction of the oldest and most important Buddhist monastery is in Gumba Tara, a village an hour's walk from Sahar Tara. Tansa Monastery

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 53.

is half under Sahar Tara jurisdiction and half is shared by Gumba Tara and Tupa Tara. A *lama* and his family from Sahar Tara will take up residence in Tansa Monastery every two years and assume all the religious responsibilities that go along with that position. In addition, his family will cultivate and reap the benefits from the land associated with the monastery during this time. A *lama* from Gumba Tara, on the other hand, will take up residence every other two years, as this responsibility and privilege is shared with the village of Tupa Tara. Similarly, most of the lands in Sahar Tara VDC belong to the village of Sahar Tara and are spread out both vertically and horizontally across the hillside. There are also a larger number of shopowners in the district headquarters of

**Table 3: Place of Origin of Tichurong Shopowners in Dunai**

Village	# of Shopowners
Sahar Tara	15
Gumba Tara	9
Tupa Tara	2
Tarakot	2
Lāwan	2
Tāchen	1
Kāne	2
Bhantāra	3

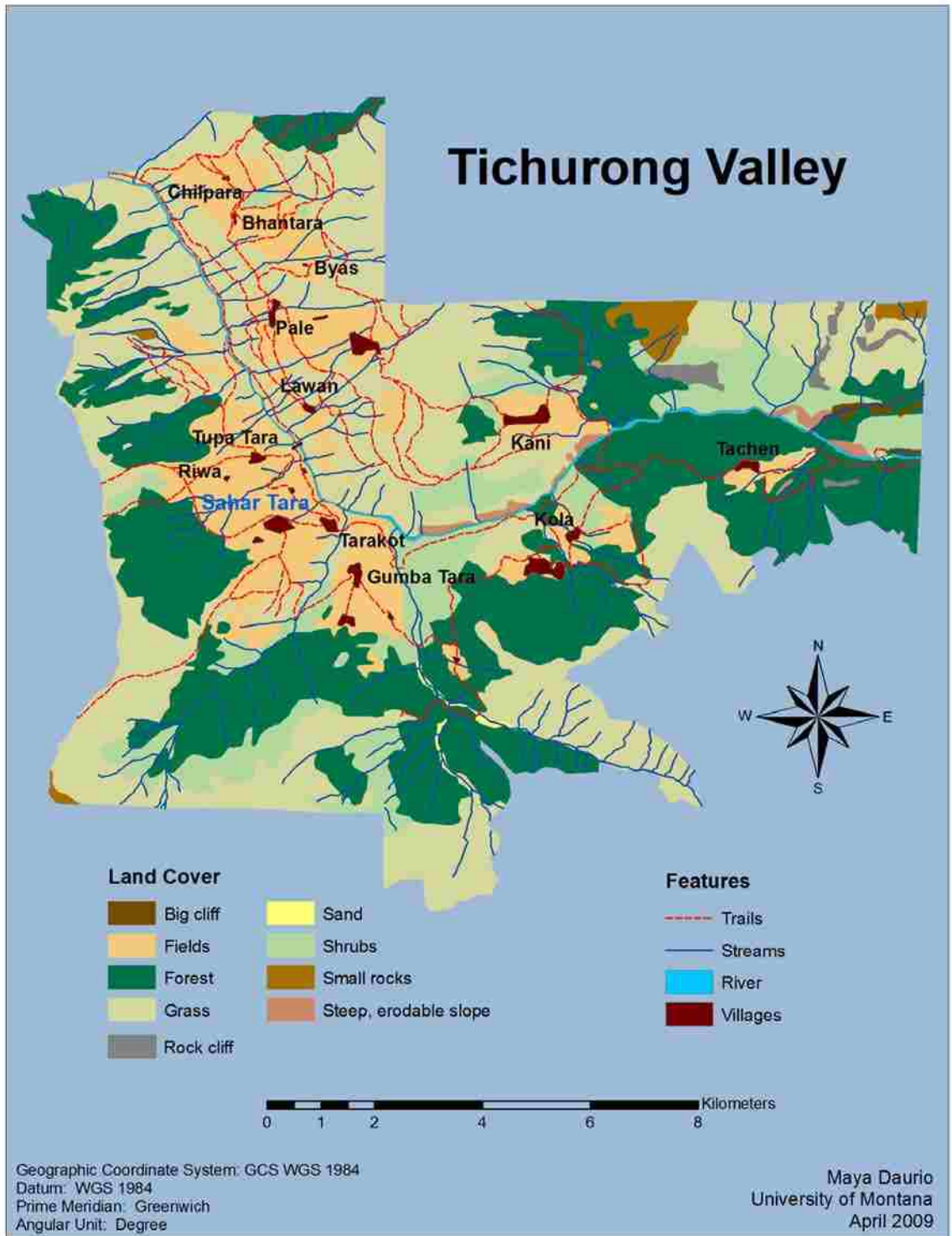
Dunai compared to the other villages in Tichurong, as seen in Table 3. Perhaps this is because of greater socio-economic or political advantages (the seat of the VDC is in Sahar Tara) or because of a larger population base in Sahar Tara relative to that of any other village in Tichurong. As Fisher aptly points out, although the villages of Tichurong inhabit the

same valley and share some of the same characteristics, they are not culturally homogenous entities.<sup>105</sup> As previously mentioned, only the residents of Sahar Tara, Tupa Tara, and Tarakot speak the Kaike language, a language distantly related to Tibetan and spoken nowhere else in the world.<sup>106</sup> Riwa is a village in between Sahar Tara and Tupa

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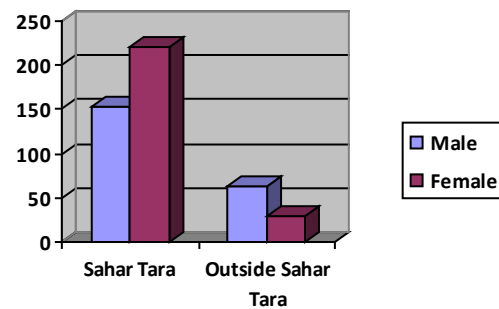
<sup>105</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 25.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



**Figure 2: Tichurong Valley**

Tara and entirely occupied by the Kami blacksmith caste (Dalit), whose members speak Nepali at home but are conversant in Kaike because of the employee-employer relationship they have with people from Sahar Tara and the other Kaike-speaking villages. In nine of the thirteen villages of Tichurong, Tibetan is spoken, slightly different from, but mutually intelligible with, the Dolpo Tibetan spoken in Upper Dolpa. Residents of Sahar Tara, Tupa Tara, and Tarakot, with the exception of some older people and small children, all speak Nepali and Tibetan in addition to Kaike. Because of the variation in elevation of the different villages in Tichurong, the kinds of crops grown also vary. Religious practices and beliefs differ in each village, although with the exception of Riwa, all of the villages are partly Buddhist and most proclaim Buddhism as their religion. Some practices and beliefs, however, are characteristic of Hinduism and others of shamanism or animism.<sup>107</sup> The extent to which this is true varies from village to village.<sup>108</sup>



**Figure 3: Number of Female and Male Sahar Tara Citizens Living Within and Outside Sahar Tara**

<sup>107</sup> According to the 2001 Nepal Census Data, 1518 people in Sahar Tara VDC are Buddhist, compared with 166 Hindus. No mention is made of Bön, shamanism, or animism.

<sup>108</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 23.

## Demographics

There are 373 residents in Sahar Tara, 220 females and 153 males, respectively. Additionally, there are people who were born in Sahar Tara who have temporarily or permanently migrated to other places in Nepal, as well as to Australia, the United States, and Belgium, for purposes of employment, education, or marriage. Of these, thirty are female and sixty-three are male, as seen in Figure 3 which is indicative of greater mobility among men. Table 4 shows the distribution of Sahar Tara citizens throughout Nepal and abroad. In all of Sahar Tara VDC, there are 339 households with 1511-1684 inhabitants,<sup>109</sup> depending upon the data that one consults. Children up to four years of age represent the largest population in Sahar Tara VDC with 233 people,<sup>110</sup> and the vast majority are under thirty-four years of age (1106 out of 1684 people).<sup>111</sup> The fertility rate is unknown.

**Table 4: Distribution of Sahar Tara Citizens, 2008**

Place	Male	Female	Total
Sahar Tara	153	220	373
Kathmandu	32	14	46
Bhaktapur	3	3	6
Dunai	8	7	15
Bhentara	1	0	1
Maikot	1	1	2
Tachen	1	3	4
Pokhara	12	1	13
Darjeeling	1	0	1
Dehradun	1	0	1
Australia	1	1	2
United State	1	0	1
Belgium	1	0	1
Total	216	250	466

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<sup>109</sup> The Tibetan & Himalayan Digital Library, "Nepal Census Data: 2001," <http://www.thdl.org/collections/cultgeo/nepal/census/index.php?selection=22> (accessed February 22, 2009).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

According to the 2001 Census Data, 1395 out of 1684 people in Sahar Tara VDC are literate. The data is further differentiated between reading and writing ability. This data is probably unreliable, based upon my observations and knowledge of the literate population in Sahar Tara.<sup>112</sup> Of the seven villages in Sahar Tara VDC, all have primary education government schools up to the fifth grade. Only Sahar Tara has a lower secondary school with grades up to class eight. It is only feasible, however, for students from the villages of Gumba Tara, Tupa Tara, and Tarakot to commute on foot to Sahar Tara and back home everyday to attend school after the fifth grade. There are no boarding facilities in Sahar Tara, and the farthest village in the VDC, Tachen, is a five to seven hour walk up river. In Chapter VI, I further discuss the educational system and its impact on cultural identity and language retention among Tarali children.

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<sup>112</sup> The Census Data claims a literate female population of 719 people compared to only 676 literate males in Sahar Tara VDC, which indicates that the data is extremely inaccurate. Consultation with any of the villagers will prove a larger male literate population, and a visit to any of the schools in the VDC will show a disproportionately larger number of boys than girls in attendance. Indeed, the Census Data contradicts itself by listing 160 male versus 121 female school attendees in the VDC.



## CHAPTER III

All modes of production produce and are enabled by particular political ecologies.

– Cindy Katz<sup>113</sup>

### Livelihood Systems

Sahar Tara Taralis are primarily dependent on subsistence agricultural production for sustenance, in their socio-economic relationships with people from other Tichurong villages, and to a decreasing extent, with people from Upper Dolpa. Cash is generated in two ways: men trade in sheep and goats primarily in the central Middle Hills town of Pokhara, and there is the relatively new phenomenon of income generation through the harvest of yarsagumba [*Cordyceps sinensis* (Berk) Sacc.]. The emphasis on trade in grains, salt, sheep and goats has decreased and is impacted by different socio-economic and political trends compared to when Fisher conducted research in Sahar Tara from 1968 to 1969. As he adeptly observed then and as remains true today, however, Taralis continue to adapt to and capitalize on changing economic and ecological circumstances while maintaining a distinct cultural heritage.<sup>114</sup> This resilience in the face of change is a function of socio-ecological adaptability, which is characterized by highly organized, collaborative social, economic, and labor transactions among villagers.

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<sup>113</sup> Cindy Katz, *Growing Up Global* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>114</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 156.

## Agriculture

Understanding subsistence agriculture as it practiced in Sahar Tara requires contextualizing the landscape in the Tichurong Valley within the larger physiographic and bioclimatic zone variations and geological history of Nepal discussed in Chapter II. Sahar Tara lies somewhere between the temperate monsoon and sub-alpine zones, but Taralis regularly travel, whether on a daily, monthly, or seasonal cycle, to higher altitudes. As in other places in the Middle Hills and high mountains, the land surrounding Sahar Tara is dramatically steep, with slope angles of cultivated fields approaching thirty-five degrees.<sup>115</sup> The fields are spread out across the hillside several thousand vertical and horizontal feet, as seen in Figure 4, and certain crops are grown in certain areas. Fisher records that in 1968-69 a man of average landholdings owned forty-one fields, two-thirds of which were less than thirty-five feet wide and have an average length of sixty-eight feet.<sup>116</sup> As Fisher emphasizes, however, each of these fields is further broken up into smaller plots “by a succession of stone retaining walls as little as four feet apart,” averaging ten feet in width.<sup>117</sup> The steepness of the slope and natural obstacles such as trees and boulders necessitate the division and retention of land in this way.

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<sup>115</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 50.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*



**Figure 4: Cultivated Fields Surrounding the Villages of Sahar Tara (upper right) and Tarakot (lower left) (Photograph by M. Daurio, November 2008)**

One family's landholdings consist of many fields spread out across the hillside because different crops are grown in certain areas. Making use only of rainwater, the northeast facing village of Sahar Tara grows a remarkable variety of grains, and vegetables to a lesser extent. This diversity of crops protects Taralis against insects, weather, and diseases, as does the fact that surplus grain is stored in the ground and in large wooden chests for future use. One woman told me she has eaten twenty year old grain, which expands more when it is cooked. Storing it for two to four years is more common.

Fisher reports that in 1968-69, it rained 98 out of 225 days during the growing season,<sup>118</sup> in contrast to Upper Dolpa as well as villages a few miles down river where drought causes grain deficits.<sup>119</sup> No chemical fertilizer has ever been used on this rocky soil, and two factors contribute to its continued fertility. One is the periodic moving of stone walls, necessitated by the erosive tendency of the soil which causes the walls to deteriorate over time. These walls are rebuilt several feet below their former locations and reinforced with soil from the former terrace, exposing earth which was buried and unused and therefore more fertile.<sup>120</sup> Second, manure is systematically applied on the fields. Manure is applied to all fields every year except fields where local millet, called *chinu chāmal* (*Panicum miliaceum*) and Japanese millet (*Echinochloa frumentaceum*) are planted.<sup>121</sup> Fields planted with *chinu chāmal* one year are fertilized with manure and planted with Japanese millet the next. The Japanese millet is never fertilized.

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<sup>118</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 55.

<sup>119</sup> A July 2008 emergency report issued by the Nepal Ministry of Agriculture Cooperatives (MoAC)/Government of Nepal (GoN) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) stated that despite national levels of normal crop production, hill and mountain areas in the Mid- and Far-Western Development regions were suffering from “severe food insecurity.” Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives/Government of Nepal and UN World Food Programme, “Report on Rapid Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA): Far and Mid West Hills and Mountains, Nepal,” (Kathmandu: World Food Programme Nepal, 2008), 1. The report found that areas of certain districts had been experiencing devastation of crops by recurring drought, pests, diseases, landslides, and hailstorms for the previous three years, and in 2007-2008 up to 80 percent of winter crops in some areas were destroyed by drought and hailstorms. Ibid. Dolpa was among the nine affected districts, with the VDCs of Dunai, Juphal, and Majhphal experiencing 40 percent crop loss. Ibid., 10. These three VDCs are all within one to three days walk from Sahar Tara.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>121</sup> Fisher records that this planting cycle occurred with *chinu chāmal* and sour buckwheat (*Fagopyrum tataricum*) rather than with Japanese millet. Ibid., 56. Although I recorded this information in two different places in my notes, it is possible I misunderstood. Or perhaps the crop cycles have changed in the last forty years.

Similar to the story explaining the origins of the Kaike language, discussed in Chapter V, Taralis also have a story about the origins of the crops found in Tichurong today. Unlike the story about the language, however, this story is not as well known, particularly among young people. It was told to me by two women in their early thirties. A long time ago, people had no way of planting anything or feeding themselves. One day a dove appeared and sang a song: “I have inside of me nine different seeds which will provide you with food if you plant them. If you kill me, you’ll find those seeds inside me.” The people gathered around the dove and decided they had no other recourse since they had no way of feeding themselves. When they killed the bird, they discovered nine different seeds inside its throat. From that time forward, people have used those seeds to cultivate *chinu chāmal*, barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), sour buckwheat (*Fagopyrum tataricum*), sweet buckwheat (*F. esculentum*), amaranth (*Amaranthus caudatus*), Japanese millet, French beans, corn, and wheat.<sup>122</sup>

Three varieties of *chinu chāmal* are grown, accounting for the differences in altitude of various fields. Also grown are Italian millet (*Setaria italica*) and marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*) as well as a variety of vegetables, including potatoes, pumpkin, greens, cauliflower, eggplant, and *kerala* (a Nepali vegetable). The government provides seeds for some vegetables, but grains are cultivated with seeds from the previous year’s crops. Marijuana seeds are harvested in order to extract oil for cooking. Potatoes, Fisher says,

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<sup>122</sup> The Latin names for these crops are provided by Fisher (See Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 197). Although these were the original names given to me by the two women who told the story, Fisher reports that corn was introduced to Sahar Tara only in the late 1950s (Fisher, 58).

were introduced eighty or ninety years ago by a *lama*<sup>123</sup> and now constitute a major part of Taralis' diet. Apples, peach, and walnut trees are scattered throughout the village, and a number of wild plants are occasionally harvested.<sup>124</sup> People used to hunt for game when Fisher lived in Sahar Tara.<sup>125</sup> I was told that since the beginning of the Maoist People's War, all guns were taken away. Others told me that people no longer hunt of their own volition.

Although most of the villages in Tichurong grow similar crops, there is also considerable variation among villages, accounted for by the specific elevation, aspect, and position related to length and angle of sun exposure. For example, chilies are grown in Tupa Tara, and leafy green vegetables were still in the ground when I visited long after it had become tenable in Sahar Tara, which is not only higher but receives less sunlight. In contrast, Tarali women from Sahar Tara travel to the district headquarters in December to buy their annual chili supply, grown at lower elevations near Tibrikot. Tachen is the only village in Tichurong with fundamentally different crop production, where only barley and potatoes can be cultivated.<sup>126</sup>

Rice cannot be grown in Tichurong, but it undoubtedly constitutes the staple for most people across Nepal. In many places in Nepal, people eat two meals per day, consisting of rice, *dāl* (lentils), and curried vegetables. In spite of its commonness, rice

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<sup>123</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 58.

<sup>124</sup> The apple trees have apparently been planted since 1969, because Fisher does not record their presence as he does other trees and crops.

<sup>125</sup> Fisher, email communication, March 2009.

<sup>126</sup> This pattern of cultivation is similar to the rest of Dolpa, which lies at higher elevations, as well as within the rain shadow of Dhaulagiri Mountain.

has a higher social status compared to other staples such as millet, barley, and corn. Indeed, in Sahar Tara, rice has been incorporated into important rituals and traditions. For example, when a mother's first child is born, her parents give her eight or nine chickens; twenty kilograms each of rice, *chinu chāmal*, and wheat; a gallon of marijuana seed oil; and butter. Similarly, when a person dies, that person's family distributes rice and bread to every household in the village. These practices associated with rice also existed forty years ago when Fisher was in Sahar Tara, but the status and use of rice has become substantially more prominent since that time. The government, with funding provided by the World Food Programme (WFP), theoretically distributes three kilograms of rice per month to each person in Dolpa. This is only enough for rice to serve as a supplement to people's diets, not to subsist on alone. The rice is flown in at great expense by helicopter to Dunai, the district headquarters, where people, primarily women, converge to pick up their allotment.<sup>127</sup> If a family has a young woman, either a daughter or daughter-in-law, she is sent to carry rice back for the whole family. If there is no woman available, sometimes horses are sent. Additionally, horses sent to the Terai for the winter will bring back rice in the spring. Rice is generally eaten at least once a day in Sahar Tara, and if there are guests present, it is the only grain that is served. Thus it is no longer a grain used just for special occasions but has become a daily consumption item among Taralis.

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<sup>127</sup> People who live in Upper Dolpa are clearly disadvantaged because it may take them as long as five days to reach Dunai, and in the winter, it may not be possible to travel at all. Because there is now a road to the border on the Tibetan (Chinese) side, however, rice coming from China is more accessible.

The government initiative of providing subsidized rice to each person in Dolpa is probably motivated by the fact that Dolpa is one of several Mid- and Far-Western districts where food deficits are common. In spite of good intentions, however, this subsidy has had various repercussions. First, it has created a widespread perception in non-rice growing areas that rice is the best grain to eat and those who cannot grow it are somehow disadvantaged. Second, it has undermined traditional systems of agriculture by increasing people's dependence on subsidized rice. Third, and related to the second point, it has produced a strategy of responding to drought and subsequent food deficits that is unsustainable, unrealistic, and skirts the real issue of how to provide the population with enough to eat by ecologically and economically appropriate means. White rice, compared to staples which can be grown in places like Dolpa, is among the least nutritious grains. Finally, the rice subsidy, in conjunction with other factors discussed in the next section, has negatively affected traditional trading circuits, in which, for instance, grain from places like Sahar Tara was traded with the people in Upper Dolpa for items such as salt and sheep and goats.

Part of the fallacy of development in Nepal has been the lack of consideration and undermining of local systems of knowledge and production.<sup>128</sup> The government's and international aid agencies' emphasis on mono-cultural agricultural production has made Nepali villagers vulnerable to adverse climatic conditions and insect infestations which

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<sup>128</sup> T. Partap, "Biological Diversity as an Issue in Sustainable Development of Mountain Agriculture," in *Sustainable Mountain Agriculture*, eds. N.S. Jodha, M. Banskota and T. Partap (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1992), 292 and S. Shrestha, and B. Katwal, "Farmers' Strategies in the Middle Hills of Nepal," in *Sustainable Mountain Agriculture*, eds. N.S. Jodha, M. Banskota and T. Partap (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1992), 464.



can more easily destroy a single crop compared to the variety of crops previously grown by these villagers. Fortunately, agricultural production in Sahar Tara still largely consists of the successful and adaptive system described by Fisher forty years ago which protects against natural disasters and adverse market forces. As Cindy Katz articulates, however, capitalism is not a torrent but rather works a gradual destruction of traditional knowledge and practice.<sup>129</sup> This greater dependence upon, and higher status accorded to, rice propels people in Sahar Tara to invest time and money in obtaining it. Already diets have changed substantially in the last forty years. A complete undermining of subsistence agriculture, although a distant possibility at this point, would disrupt those modes of social reproduction which are entwined in “critical practices of everyday life.”<sup>130</sup> Inevitably, this would also affect the transmission of traditional cultural-ecological knowledge and language.

### *Consumption and Wealth*

There is an overall perception and claim in Sahar Tara that because of the success of agricultural production there, everyone has enough to eat. Additionally, the legalization of the harvesting of yarsagumba has substantially increased household incomes, and women and men lament primarily how hard they have to labor as farmers. This sense of pervasive access to wealth and plentiful food reflects the egalitarian nature

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<sup>129</sup> Katz, *Growing Up Global*, 22.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

of Tarali society but perhaps belies a discrepancy between reality and the ideal, also noted by Fisher.<sup>131</sup>

Contradicting what Taralis informed me about the abundance of food and wealth for everyone in the village, one of the schoolteachers asserted that several families cannot meet their basic requirements. On the surface, it is difficult to determine differences in wealth because all of the houses are constructed in the same way with the same materials, people wear more or less the same clothing, and everybody's rooftop had a seemingly equal amount of drying grains when I arrived directly after the harvest season.

Differentiations become apparent when one learns the extent and mode of travel to Kathmandu or elsewhere in a given year; whether people send their children to boarding school in Dunai, Pokhara, or Kathmandu; the amount of land owned by a household; and the degree to which labor is farmed out to the Kamis (low caste blacksmiths) in Riwa, the closest village to the west. Out of around seventy households in Sahar Tara, four families do not own land or a house, and all of these families came from elsewhere and settled in the area.<sup>132</sup>

There are certainly differences in wealth and grain production among families, but nevertheless the majority of households produce an abundance of food when the weather conditions cooperate. This is not a typical pattern for areas in at least nine of the districts

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<sup>131</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 60.

<sup>132</sup> Fisher provides a much more comprehensive and quantitative assessment of the discrepancy in food consumption between what people claim they eat in a day and actual intake. While recognizing that there is indeed a general food surplus in Sahar Tara, as evidenced by the fact that Taralis plant low-yield crops, Fisher also calculates that there is a discrepancy of four bushels, or 8.3 percent, between what people claim they eat and what they actually do eat. Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 62. He records that 71 percent of all households produce a surplus of grains, and 12 percent are made up of two landless and eight households with no alternative source of income, respectively. *Ibid.*, 69.

in the Far- and Mid-Western Development regions, Dolpa included, in which drought, hailstorms, landslides, and pest infestations caused severe food deficits for three years, from 2005-2007.<sup>133</sup> When Fisher lived in Sahar Tara, the grain surplus required strategies of dealing with it, which took several forms: burying it, bartering or selling it for other necessary items, and engaging in long-distance trade.<sup>134</sup> These strategies are still utilized today, but the trading circuits have been altered by various factors, which will be discussed in the next section.

### *Collaboration and Egalitarianism*

Agricultural production in Sahar Tara is made possible by a well-established system of cooperation among community members which also serves to create the appearance of sameness in terms of wealth, level of food production, and social status. Fisher refers to this collaboration as reciprocity,<sup>135</sup> in which social and labor transactions are performed for others with the expectation that they will return the service in a pre-determined and socially regulated manner. In spite of being part of a society based on collaboration, Taralis, like everyone else in the world, stratify themselves hierarchically in terms of marriage and according to social, political, and economic categories.

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<sup>133</sup> MoAC/GoN and UN WFP, "Report," 1.

<sup>134</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 74-75.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.



**Figure 5: Women Pounding *Chinu Chāmal* (Photograph by M. Daurio, November 2008)**

Numerous instances of reciprocity exist. Here are just two examples. Prior to planting, the fields must be fertilized, fields which are spread out across several thousand vertical and horizontal feet around the village. Because men are prohibited from doing work which is polluting, it falls to the women to carry the manure in baskets on their backs to dump in the fields. Rather than one woman working alone to fertilize her fields, all of the able-bodied women gather and transport manure for one household's fields at a time, accomplishing the work much more efficiently and strengthening relationships in the act.

Similarly, when the *chinu chāmal* has been harvested, threshed, and dried, the husk must be pounded off manually by women in perhaps the most labor intensive task associated with agricultural production (Figure 5). Four women will gather at one woman's house for a day to pound the *chinu* from early morning until dusk. The women keep careful track of how much *chinu* they have pounded for this household, and they are entitled to labor reciprocated for the same amount by the woman of this household.

Reciprocity serves as a means of social control. More importantly, it acts as a cohesive agent which is crucial to the socio-ecological resilience found in Sahar Tara and exemplified by language retention and the maintenance of distinct cultural-ecological traditions in a constantly changing external world.

#### Trade

Trade among Taralis is generally limited to men except for that which takes place within Sahar Tara itself. The most consistent means of trading is in sheep and goats, and yarsagumba has achieved a prominent role as a new commodity. Because Fisher provides such a detailed account of the forms of trading in the years 1968-69, it is possible to present some analysis of change over time. There are a few factors which have had a major impact on the evolution of trading among Taralis in Sahar Tara. The most recent and significant element of change is the legalization of yarsagumba and subsequent influx of cash, discussed in detail in the next section. Stricter border closures with the Tibet Autonomous Region of China (hereafter referred to simply as Tibet) control the movement of goods and people between the two countries. There is also now a road on the Tibetan side to the border with Dolpa, which means that people in Upper

Dolpa have easier access to material goods from Tibet than they do from Nepal. This has also led to a changing relationship with people in Sahar Tara, with whom they have long maintained a mutually beneficial socio-economic association.

In 1968-69, there were two primary trading circuits, one in which Taralis from Sahar Tara traveled to Upper Dolpa, also called Dolpo, with surplus grain to barter for salt brought from Tibet. Some salt was used for household consumption, and some people traveled to lower areas of Nepal to trade this salt for rice, which they would bring back to the village.<sup>136</sup> Even while Fisher was in Sahar Tara, this circuit was declining owing to the penetration of cheaper Indian salt into the Middle Hills and to the decrease in the number of sheep and goats used to transport this salt from Dolpo. At that time, only six families had enough animals to constitute a herd, and around twenty-five households still used sheep and goats for transporting grain and salt.<sup>137</sup>

Today, there are three families with substantial sheep and goat herds, and they do not leave the village with them. Instead, they are mostly used for their wool, manure to fertilize the fields, and meat for people to eat.

Further decline of the salt-grain-rice exchange was caused by people selling for cash the same sheep and goats they used for transporting grain and salt, constituting the second trading circuit, which Fisher calls the commodities circuit.<sup>138</sup> This then allowed Taralis to buy non-locally available but desirable material goods in lower areas of Nepal

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 97-98.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 100-101.

both for their own consumption and for trade in Dolpo.<sup>139</sup> Those who could not afford the initial costs associated with this livestock trade sold woolen goods instead. Wool coming primarily from Dolpo was cleaned and spun by Taralis in Sahar Tara and then woven mostly by women from Dolpo who used to spend winters in Sahar Tara.<sup>140</sup> These blankets, cummerbunds, and sweaters were then sold in the Middle Hills in the following year's trading journey.

Trade in sheep and goats continues, and an estimated twenty to fifty men from Sahar Tara employ themselves for eight or nine months out of the year in this way. Beginning in August or September, the men will journey to the Tibetan border or near it<sup>141</sup> and buy as many as 500 animals. They either retrace their steps to Sahar Tara and go over the Jangla pass to Pokhara, or they venture down the Kali Gandaki Valley, selling some livestock as they go, as Fisher described.<sup>142</sup> If they manage to sell their herd along the way or in Pokhara in a short amount of time, they may do this circuit several times in one year.

During the months of October, November, and December when I was in Sahar Tara, there were indeed noticeably fewer men compared to women present in the village, and surely this trading cycle must account for much of the male absence.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>141</sup> This is a journey of twelve to thirteen days on foot and five to seven days on horseback.

<sup>142</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 102.

There is also a limited trade in horses, but they are primarily used for transporting goods from the Terai back to Sahar Tara for household consumption. An estimated 300 to 400 horses were sent over the Jangla pass to the Terai in 2008, and only one man accompanied his own horses. Otherwise, Taralis hire Kamis from Riwa and workers from elsewhere to care for their horses throughout the winter in the Terai.

I was not present in Sahar Tara long enough to make viable comparisons based on Fisher's thoroughly documented and quantitative research on trade. It is nevertheless clear that apart from the trade in livestock,<sup>143</sup> several socio-economic and geopolitical factors have changed the nature of trade among Taralis in Sahar Tara since 1968-69.

Since 1959, the border with Tibet has been restricted by the Chinese. Currently, I am told that it is open only twice a year for a week each time with a twenty kilometer no-man's land so that shepherds can maintain their traditional grazing grounds. I do not know how often it was open when Fisher lived in Sahar Tara, but a newer development is the construction of the road on the Tibetan side. This is part of a general expansion of transportation infrastructure by the Chinese Government in what used to be isolated regions in western Tibet and along Nepal's northern borders.<sup>144</sup> Compared to trading with the Taralis, it is much easier and closer for people from Dolpo, or *Dolpo-pa*, as they call themselves, to obtain rice, other foodstuffs, and material goods from across this border to supplement their limited potato and barley harvests. Additionally, the decline

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<sup>143</sup> This trade is concentrated in the town of Pokhara and surrounding areas, compared to the late 1960s when it was more dispersed across the Terai, such as in Butwal and even as far as Kanpur, Kalimpong, and Kolkata in India. Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 77.

<sup>144</sup> Kenneth M. Bauer, *High Frontiers: Dolpo and the Changing World of Himalayan Pastoralists* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 187-188.



in the salt trading circuit and subsequent decrease in the number of Taralis traveling to Dolpo to sell grain probably forced the *Dolpo-pa* to rely more heavily upon these cross-border transactions.

As of the beginning of this century, according to Kenneth Bauer, people from the Tarap Valley in Upper Dolpa continued to maintain their relationships to Tichurong by living in Tichurong villages over the winter and earning seasonal income by weaving woolen goods.<sup>145</sup> Because Taralis prefer the higher quality salt from Tibet to that available from India, some *Dolpo-pa* bring salt carried on yaks to trade for grain when they come to Tichurong. By the time I left in early December, fewer than a dozen *Dolpo-pa* had arrived, and they all intended to return home within a few days or weeks. This would be the first year, I was told, that no *Dolpo-pa* would winter over in Sahar Tara. A young man from Gumba Tara informed me that *Dolpo-pa* had not come to his village for a number of years, so the number of *Dolpo-pa* residing for the winter in Tichurong has been gradually declining. How this will affect the trade in wool and labor for woolen goods and the trade in salt in exchange for grain remains to be seen, but certainly Taralis and *Dolpo-pa* will both continue to create new strategies enabling them to access the most beneficial social and economic opportunities available.

Indeed, this is already apparent with the introduction of yarsagumba as a legalized, commercial crop, discussed in the next section.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 116.

## Yarsagumba

Yarsagumba [*Cordyceps sinensis* (Berk) Sacc.] is a *Thitarodes* caterpillar which is attacked by the spores of the *Cordyceps* fungus shortly after it emerges from its cocoon and is eventually mummified and killed. The fungus completes its life cycle over a five to seven year period. It grows four to twelve centimeters above the surface of the ground and out of the forehead of the caterpillar in spring or early summer, when it is harvested.<sup>146</sup> It is found above 3500 meters in the Himalayan region<sup>147</sup> and is sold primarily to China, where it is used variously as an aphrodisiac and as treatment for different ailments.<sup>148</sup>

Because it is highly desirable, yarsagumba is sold for extravagant prices. As Dolpa accounts for fifty percent of Nepal's total harvest,<sup>149</sup> Dolpa residents have a geographical advantage. It is, for example, a mere three hour walk above Sahar Tara to the harvesting grounds. In the 2008 harvesting season, 20,000 people from the neighboring district of Jajarkot alone traveled to Dolpa to pick yarsagumba.<sup>150</sup> According to local sources, it fetched NRS. 800,000 (\$10,000) per kilogram in 2007 and NRS.

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<sup>146</sup> Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources, "Yartshagumba: Cordyceps Sinensis," (Kathmandu: ANSAB, 2000), 2. <http://www.ansab.org/UserFiles/YARSAGUMBA.pdf> (accessed March 30, 2009).

<sup>147</sup> Ngwang Sonam Sherpa, "Indigenous Peoples of Nepal and Traditional Knowledge," paper presented at *International Workshop on Traditional Knowledge* held in Panama City 21-23 September 2005 (Kathmandu: United Nations, 2005), 7.

<sup>148</sup> ANSAB, "Yartshagumba," 3.

<sup>149</sup> Visit Nepal Network Staff Writer, "Yarsagumba - the Gold Rush," (Kathmandu: Visit Nepal Network, n.d), [http://www.visitnepal.com/nepal\\_information/yarsagumba.php](http://www.visitnepal.com/nepal_information/yarsagumba.php) (accessed February 21, 2009).

<sup>150</sup> MoAC/GoN and UN WFP, "Report," 2.

600,000 (\$7,500) per kilogram in 2008. This year the price has already plunged to NRS. 75,000 (\$945) per kilogram,<sup>151</sup> despite the fact that it is still pre-harvest season.

It was illegal to harvest yarsagumba in Nepal until 2001, when the government lifted the ban but collected NRS. 20,000 (\$252) in royalty per kilogram.<sup>152</sup> In 2008, according to a government forester in Dunai who is responsible for collecting it, the government royalty was NRS. 10,000 (\$126) per kilogram. Everyone in Dolpa is required to take their harvest first to Dunai where the royalty is deducted, and then to Kathmandu in order to sell it. The reality is far different. Buyers from Tibet travel to Sahar Tara to purchase the harvested yarsagumba directly from people without it ever passing through the district headquarters. This constitutes a temporary migration pattern in which Tibetans and/or people from Upper Dolpa travel to Lower Dolpa to offer cash for a highly desirable commodity. Taralis from Sahar Tara need not travel anywhere, and no further exchange of goods is necessary to obtain cash.

Because of the potential for an immediate gain in wealth, all members of each family except small children and older people leave the village for one to two months to harvest the fungus. Although people leave after planting seeds in the fields, no further agricultural work can take place until their return. By default, there is no school in session during harvesting time, and because there are no students, teachers attempt to reap a small return as well.

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<sup>151</sup> Kantipur Staff Writer, "Yarsagumba Sale Takes a Nosedive," *Kantipur*, March 24, 2009, <http://www.kantipuronline.com/capsule.php?&nid=186165> (accessed April 6, 2009).

<sup>152</sup> In 1992, before legalization, the price of Yarsagumba was NRS. 315(\$ 4) per kilogram. Sherpa, "Indigenous Peoples," 7.

Some residents earn money by carting supplies with horses to the harvesting camps located above the village. People who are living in the camps are willing to pay exorbitant amounts, particularly for alcohol. Homemade beer and liquor sells at double the price of what it sells for in Sahar Tara, and beer brought from Dunai or the Terai sells for NRS. 300 (\$3.80) a bottle at camp.

As mentioned above, the selling price is decreasing on a yearly basis. It is unknown how long yarsagumba will continue to be a lucrative cash commodity. Based simply on what people in Sahar Tara have told me, it has significantly raised household income levels. Further research on actual poverty reduction, impact on crop cycles, traditional trading circuits, and children's education would be interesting and beneficial. Clearly, however, the Taralis of Sahar Tara are accustomed to changing markets and socio-political circumstances. Their skills in adapting to varying conditions within their social, economic, and ecological capacities are also a form of resilience, the latter characteristic exemplified by the maintenance of cultural-ecological and spiritual traditions. These are discussed in detail in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER IV

### Government and Politics

A brief and simplified political history of Nepal is provided in this chapter in order to understand Sahar Tara's role in Nepal as a remote, rural village occupied by an Indigenous group of people. In 1796, the territorial unification of Nepal occurred under King Prithvi Narayan Shah, and in 1847 the Ranas came to power and ruled for 104 years until 1951.<sup>153</sup> This is also the year Nepal opened to the outside world. Previously only the ruling Ranas were allowed to travel outside the country, and few people were allowed in.

The first general elections were held in 1959, and B.P. Koirala was voted to power as the first prime minister. His government was dissolved by King Mahendra less than two years later. King Mahendra imposed the Panchayat system on Nepal for the next thirty years, a system in which all political parties were banned.<sup>154</sup> The Panchayat rule was overthrown in 1990 following the People's Movement, which also restored a multi-party democracy and instituted a democratic constitution.

Continued disillusionment with the government caused by corruption, extreme poverty, and oppression of certain groups, however, led to the beginning of the Maoist People's War in 1996, which lasted until April 24, 2006 and claimed 13,000 lives in the

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<sup>153</sup> Nepal Election Portal, "Nepal's Political History" (Kathmandu: n.d.), <http://www.nepalelectionportal.org/EN/political-development/political-history.php> (accessed March 1 2009).

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

violence between the army and Maoist guerillas.<sup>155</sup> Additionally, in 2001, the Crown Prince massacred various members of his family, including the King and Queen. Subsequently, the former King's elder brother Gyanendra became King, which caused turmoil throughout the country and delayed elections. King Gyanendra, following historical precedent, dissolved Sher Bahadur Deuba's elected government and imposed his own, which resulted in more failed elections and three different prime ministers in a short period of time.<sup>156</sup> On the first of February in 2005, King Gyanendra appointed himself chairman of the cabinet that he had formed, motivating the sidelined political parties to form an alliance with the CPN (Maoist). Subsequently, in November 2005, a twelve-point agreement was jointly signed by seven political parties and the CPN (M), providing a means for the CPN (M) to enter the democratic process.<sup>157</sup> Millions of people expressed their demands for the creation of a constituent assembly, a new constitution, and an end to the monarchy, which eventually led King Gyanendra to relinquish his power on April 24, 2006.<sup>158</sup>

Constituent Assembly elections were finally held on April 10, 2008 after an extended series of delays over nearly two years and bypassing two other scheduled election dates in June and November of 2007.<sup>159</sup> The Constituent Assembly consists of

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> The Hindu Staff Writer, "Nepal Decides to Hold Crucial Election on April 10," *The Hindu*, January 11, 2008, <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/holnus/00320080111721.htm> (accessed March 3, 2009).

601 members, 240 of whom are chosen by direct vote, 335 through proportional representation, and 26 who are nominated by the new cabinet.<sup>160</sup> The CPN (M) won 220 seats of the total 575 elected seats,<sup>161</sup> a sweeping victory. By May, in the first session of the Constituent Assembly, 560 out of 564 members voted to abolish the monarchy and declare Nepal a federal democratic republic.<sup>162</sup> It was not until August 15, 2008 that Pushpa Kamal Dahal-Prachanda, the former Maoist rebel leader, was elected prime minister in a vote of 465 to 113 against Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba.<sup>163</sup>

The Constituent Assembly still has not written a constitution, although the National Coalition Against Racial Discrimination managed to put together a recommended constitution within a couple of months. The Coalition would like to see this constitution implemented with the goal of ensuring that the rights of Indigenous people are prioritized. The current government only has a two year term, and the fact that nearly a year into this term a new constitution has yet to be produced does not speak well for the UCPN (M) government's commitment to implementing and enforcing legal provisions to address issues such as poverty, corruption, and oppression - the same issues over which Nepal was mired in war for ten years.

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<sup>160</sup> Manesh Shrestha, "Maoists Early Leaders in Nepal Elections," *CNN Asia*, April 13, 2008, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/04/13/nepal.election/index.html#cnNSTCText> (accessed March 3, 2009).

<sup>161</sup> *Nepal News* Staff Writer, "Maoist CC Decides to Stake Claim of Government Leadership," *Nepalnews.com*, April 29, 2008, <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/apr/apr29/news16.php> (accessed March 3, 2009).

<sup>162</sup> *Nepal News* Staff Writer, "Nepal Becomes A Federal Democratic Republic," *Nepalnews.com*, May 28, 2008, <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/may/may28/news18.php> (accessed March 3, 2009).

<sup>163</sup> Nepal Election Portal, "Nepal's Political History".

## Indigenous Nationalities

Colonial and imperial powers have a long history of debilitating impact on Indigenous cultures, whether in the form of introducing devastating diseases, criminalization of their traditions, or dispossession of Indigenous lands.<sup>164</sup> The oppression of Indigenous people in Nepal, while similar in many ways to the oppression of Indigenous people around the world, is also unique to that country and must be placed within its proper historical context.<sup>165</sup>

The history of subjugation of Indigenous people in Nepal can be traced to the fourteenth century when the rulers of Nepal provided state level protection of Hinduism in response to the increased Muslim hegemony in India and the subsequent spread of Christianity after India became part of the British Empire.<sup>166</sup> One result of this was the dividing of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley into sixty-four castes by Jayasthiti Malla (1382-1395). Subsequently, Ram Shaha of Gorkha in Nepal imposed certain regulatory behaviors regarding purity on high and low caste groups, and the Sen rulers of Palpa lent support to this caste-based structuring of society during the Malla Period.<sup>167</sup> However, not all localities in Nepal were affected by these actions.

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<sup>164</sup> Barbara Brower and Barbara Rose Johnston, eds. *Disappearing Peoples? Indigenous Groups and Ethnic Minorities in South and Central Asia* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>165</sup> Whelpton cautions against the oversimplified division of Indigenous and non-Indigenous based on the dichotomy between those of Tibeto-Burman ancestry and those of Indo-Aryan ancestry, arguing that most of the languages and cultures in Nepal have been “shaped by influences both from the north and the south” and that nearly every group migrated from elsewhere at some point. Whelpton, *A History of Nepal*, 3.

<sup>166</sup> Tulsi Ram Pandey and others, *Forms and Patterns of Social Discrimination in Nepal* (Kathmandu: UNESCO, 2006), 16.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



Krishna Battachan characterizes these fourteenth century activities as the first of multiple historical markers which shaped the contemporary oppression of Indigenous peoples in Nepal and which Battachan refers to as Hindu Bahun-Chhetri domination of Indigenous nationalities. This domination is in fact a manifestation of internal colonialism and is responsible for shaping the current status of Indigenous peoples in Nepal. The second occurred in the sixteenth century when King Drabya Shah attacked the Magar King of Lig-Lig Kot, and later subjugated the Khadka King of Gorkha in AD 1559. Third, in 1796 King Prithvi Narayan Shah disrupted or destroyed 22 kingdoms and 24 principalities in the process of unifying the various territories now comprising the country of Nepal. This initialized the continuous degradation of Indigenous autonomy over subsequent centuries.<sup>168</sup> In 1854, Junga Bahadur Rana implemented the *Muluki Ain*, or National Code, which legally restructured Nepali society into four hierarchical castes, forcing many Indigenous nationalities into a Hindu and Sanskritized social system for the first time.<sup>169</sup> It was during this 104 year period of Rana rule that some Indigenous land was confiscated and/or redistributed and that certain Indigenous nationalities were either forced into low status or oppressed positions in society or denied certain privileges or rights, such as when Tamangs were prevented both from joining the British Indian Army or from taking up government posts.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Krishna Bhattachan, *Indigenous Peoples*, 23.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

The previously mentioned self-identification of some Tibeto-Burman groups with the caste system, such as Kaike speakers' affiliation with Magars, is explained by Whelpton: "A non-caste people coming into contact with high-caste Hindus and Untouchables could associate with the former only if they joined them in avoiding physical contact with the latter."<sup>171</sup> This observance of the caste hierarchy in order to access those in power continues unabated among Kaike speakers of Nepal, who do not allow the neighboring Kamis of Riwa village entry into their homes. Similarly, Taralis' lower Buddhist status within a Hindu-dominated society is mitigated by external demonstration of allegiance with Hinduism, as in the important ritual in Sahar Tara of a boy's first haircut, a decidedly Hindu ritual and cause for celebration, feasting, and great expenditure of money.<sup>172</sup> According to Whelpton, this Sankriticization can be traced to Gorkhali rule when different Hindu rituals were adopted by various traditionally Buddhist or animist groups to ensure Gorkhali state patronage, explaining that "everywhere non-Parbatiyas were more likely to take Sanskrit personal names and to invite Brahmans to perform some of their rituals."<sup>173</sup> Indeed, Fisher records the practice of the residents of Sahar Tara having two names, one a Buddhist name conferred on them by a *lama* at birth and one a Hindu name later adopted and used in most of their interactions, describing it as a "conscious repression of a status that is a positive liability

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<sup>171</sup> Whelpton, *A History of Nepal*, 32.

<sup>172</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 146.

<sup>173</sup> Whelpton, *A History of Nepal*, 57.

to him as long as he lives and operates in Hindu areas.”<sup>174</sup> In my experience, the majority, though not all, of the people in Sahar Tara used their Hindu names within the village and in their interactions with each other. There were a few individuals who exclusively had Buddhist names, including some who spent part of the year in

<b>Endangered</b>	<b>Highly Marginalized</b>	<b>Marginalized</b>	<b>Disadvantaged</b>	<b>Advanced</b>
1. Kusunda	1. Majhi	1. Sunuwar	1. Chhairotan	1. Newar
2. Bankariya	2. Siyar	2. Tharu	2. Tanbe	2. Thakali
3. Raute	3. Shingsha	3. Tamang	3. Tingaunle Thakali	
4. Surel	4. Thudam	4. Bhujel	4. Baragaunle Thakali	
5. Hayu	5. Dhanuk	5. Kumal	5. Marphali Thakali	
6. Raji	6. Chepang	6. Rajbangshi	6. Gurung	
7. Kisan	7. Santhal	7. Gangaai	7. Magar	
8. Lepcha	8. Jhagad	8. Dhimal	8. Rai	
9. Meche	9. Thami	9. Bhote	9. Limbu	
10. Kuswadiya	10. Bote	10. Darai	10. Sherpa	
	11. Danuwar	11. Tajpuriya	11. Yakkha	
	12. Baramu	12. Pahari	12. Chhantyal	
		13. Topkegola	13. Jirel	
		14. Dolpo	14. Byansi	
		15. Fri	15. Yolmo	
		16. Mugal		
		17. Larke		
		18. Lohpa		
		19. Dura		
		20. Walung		

Source: NEFIN 2008.

Kathmandu. These were almost always women, however, and I speculate that the use of Hindu names is much more important for men than for women, the former who tend to be more active in trade and travel more widely.

The caste system was abolished in the revised National Code of 1963 under the Panchayat system, and in 1971, Nepal ratified the International Convention on the

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<sup>174</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 95.

Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and Untouchability (ICERD).<sup>175</sup>

However, as Battachan asserts, it has never been practically eliminated.<sup>176</sup> Accompanying Panchayat rule from 1960-1990 was the idea of national unity, which was encouraged in linguistic, religious, and cultural uniformity.<sup>177</sup>

Awareness of the marginalized status of Indigenous nationalities (*ādibāsi janājati*) in Nepal is steadily increasing, along with legal and grassroots advocacy in the form of favorable government policies and non-governmental organizations which keep track of government actions as well as sources of research, publications, and social action regarding Indigenous rights and interests. The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) has identified fifty-nine different Indigenous nationalities and categorized them into five clusters according to their level of marginalization based upon variables such as literacy rate, housing, and occupation, among others.<sup>178</sup> As shown in Table 5, these are endangered, highly marginalized, marginalized, disadvantaged, and advanced based on economic or other advantages accessible to certain groups. Newar and Thakali, the two Indigenous nationalities represented in the advanced group, for example, are traditionally successful merchants and traders and also enjoy greater governmental representation. The Magars belong to the disadvantaged group, which is the second least marginalized group on the scale from endangered to advanced. Magars

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<sup>175</sup> Pandey and others, "Social Discrimination," 18.

<sup>176</sup> Bhattachan, *Indigenous Peoples*, 23.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>178</sup> Keshav B. Karmacharya, *Socio-Economic Status of Indigenous Peoples* (Kathmandu: Nepal Integrated Research System, 2006), 1, <http://nefin.org.np/download-archive> (accessed February 28, 2009).

constitute the largest Indigenous nationality in Nepal, with a population of 1,622,399, 7.4 percent of the country's population.<sup>179</sup> People in the three Kaike speaking villages in Tichurong indefatigably identify as Magar. This is probably a result of their geographical, political, and economic position at the crossroads of Hindu and Buddhist culture which impelled them to continuously amend their social identities. As previously explained, identifying as Magar ensured a relatively advantaged place for Kaike speakers within the Hindu caste system. Two linguists, one who is a professor at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu and one who is a doctoral candidate in linguistics and studying Kaike at Tribhuvan, believe that Kaike speakers currently benefit from identifying as Magar because it associates them with the largest Indigenous nationality in Nepal, hence providing more political clout.<sup>180</sup> In my own view, that Kaike speakers are lumped in with this larger Magar population belies the unique status of their language, location, culture, and socio-economic condition. The special status of the Kaike language and the fact that its speakers are few in number merit Kaike speakers' distinction as an autonomous group. Self-identification, however, is an important aspect of the sovereignty of Indigenous groups, and Kaike speakers must be able to classify themselves as they determine. Within the larger Magar ethnic group, Kaike speakers should be able to assert their independent standing in order to address their site-specific issues and concerns.

Although Nepal has ratified more than two dozen international covenants or declarations related to human rights, lack of implementation and enforcement continues

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<sup>179</sup> B.K. Rana, "Recent Change in Language Communities of Nepal," *OGMIOS Newsletter* 3.02, no. 26 (2005), <http://www.ogmios.org/265.htm> (accessed 27 February 2008).

<sup>180</sup> Dan Raj Regmi and Ambika Regmi, personal communication, 2009.

to be a problem.<sup>181</sup> Some of these declarations are not legally binding, and some important covenants have yet to be ratified. These include the ILO Convention 169 of 1989 and Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ratification clearly supported by organizations representing Indigenous nationalities in Nepal.<sup>182</sup> In 2006, the government officially recognized the fifty-nine Indigenous nationalities and formed the National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) to address and deal with Indigenous issues.<sup>183</sup>

Nonetheless, Nepal's historical tendency of promoting and endorsing the dominant Indo-Aryan culture and its associated religion, caste system, and Sanskrit-based education and language has adversely affected the rights of Indigenous peoples to speak their languages, practice their cultures, and assert their rights to land and resources.<sup>184</sup> Representation in government has been virtually non-existent, although this has been slowly changing since 1991, following the People's Movement of 1990 which overthrew the Panchayat system and restored multi-party democracy. In 1991, Indigenous people made up 30.2 percent of the Parliament; in 2008, their representation increased to 34 percent, while representation of Dalits, who are untouchables, increased from zero to nine percent in the same time period.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Bhattachan, *Indigenous Peoples*, 39.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> G. Chin Khan Muan, *Indigenous Peoples' Human Rights Report, Nepal* (Chiangmai: Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact Foundation, 2007), 1.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> ShivKumar, "Nepalmā Ādibāsi Janajati," 7.

The Maoist insurgency, while primarily class-based, also opposed discrimination based upon religion, caste/ethnicity, language, region, and gender.<sup>186</sup> One would therefore expect the new UCPN (M) government to ratify all relevant covenants and declarations as well as implement new laws and enforce existing ones favorable to Indigenous peoples. The full impact of UCPN (M) rule in Nepal remains to be seen, although it is clear that the insurgency stimulated a burgeoning Indigenous rights movement. Evidence exists in the form of the many organizations<sup>187</sup> and projects specifically addressing the rights of Indigenous peoples. NEFIN's Janajati Empowerment Project (JEP) is a case in point, formed to increase the "the participation of Nepal's disadvantaged ethnic peoples in socioeconomic and political processes at central and district levels."<sup>188</sup> Recently, the government assembled a list of ethnic and Indigenous nationalities for which quotas in government jobs will be established, although initially the list lumped certain groups with others, such as the Tharus of the Terai with the Madhesis. Prime Minister Dahal has promised to amend the list.<sup>189</sup>

The Nepali Government prior to the UCPN (M) rise to power also made some commendable provisions, such as the formation of the Multilingual Education Program (MEP), which has launched programs among five endangered language communities in which primary school children are taught in their mother tongue. People have the legal

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<sup>186</sup> Bhattachan, *Indigenous Peoples*, 37.

<sup>187</sup> NEFIN, Nepal-U.S. Indigenous Peoples' Forum, Global Federation of Indigenous Peoples of Nepal, National Network of Indigenous Women, among others.

<sup>188</sup> Turin, *Linguistic Diversity*, 35.

<sup>189</sup> *Nepal News* Staff Writer, "Government to Come Up With Separate List of Indigenous Groups," *Nepalnews.com*, March 3 2009, <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2009/mar/mar03/news11.php> (accessed March 3, 2009).

right to education in their mother tongue in Nepal,<sup>190</sup> but few cases of this exist because of lack of enforcement. According to Yogendra Prasad Yadava, there are no more than fifteen mother tongues used as a subject, medium, or both in primary education in Nepal.<sup>191</sup> The issue of language in Nepal will be further explored in the next chapter.

Within the context of Sahar Tara, the greatest challenge for Kaike speakers as one of the Indigenous groups in Nepal is the possible annihilation of their social and cultural identities, of which their language is a part, in the face of changes which are generally perceived as positive trends in modernization and development.<sup>192</sup> This is the latest version of imperialism: embracing a model of development without regard to local perspectives and knowledge nor the appreciation of the diversity of cultures and languages which embody this knowledge.

### History of Tichurong

Although the people of Sahar Tara, Tupa Tara, and Tarakot have their own idea of how they came to be settled in Tichurong and speak the Kaike language, there are no written historical records explaining the anomaly of their situation. Thanks to Fisher's thorough review of previously unexamined Nepali government documents in Kathmandu, a history of the Tichurong area is available. As Fisher points out, this historical setting is important to understand within the context of Sahar Tara's geographical and political-

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<sup>190</sup> Amrit Yonjan-Tamang, Director, Multilingual Education Program, personal communication, 2008.

<sup>191</sup> Yogendra Prasad Yadava, *Linguistic Diversity in Nepal: Situation and Policy* (Kathmandu: Social Inclusion Research Fund, 2009), 2.

<sup>192</sup> Brower and Johnston, eds., *Disappearing Peoples*, 23.



economic position between the Tibetan Buddhist highlands and the Hindu lowlands.<sup>193</sup> The Malla kings ruled over western Tibet and much of western Nepal in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with two capitals at Sinja in Nepal and Taklakot in Tibet, respectively.<sup>194</sup> Toward the end of the fourteenth century the Malla kingdom collapsed for unknown reasons, and around the same time, various Rajput chieftains fleeing the Muslim invasions in India arrived in western Nepal and began appropriating areas for themselves.<sup>195</sup> As mentioned previously, these migrations represent the beginning of colonial usurpation by outsiders of various autonomous regions and precipitate Nepal's tendency toward "Hindu Bahun-Chhetri domination."

One of these rajas, Balirāj, was given a principality by the Raja of Jumla and then possibly rose to power as king of Jumla himself in the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>196</sup> He was known as far as China, signing a religious treaty with that country.<sup>197</sup> Many of the smaller kingdoms to the east and west of Jumla paid tribute to him.<sup>198</sup> Fisher speculates that Tichurong, probably once belonging to the Malla kingdom, in the second half of the fifteenth century belonged to the principality of Parbat, directly to the east of

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<sup>193</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 28.

<sup>194</sup> Giuseppe Tucci, *Preliminary Report on Two Scientific Expeditions in Nepal* (Roma: Is. M. E. O., 1956), 112.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>196</sup> D.R. Regmi, *Modern Nepal: Rise and Growth in the Eighteenth Century* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961), 5.

<sup>197</sup> Tucci, *Preliminary Report*, 122.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

Jumla.<sup>199</sup> Between AD 1440 and 1475, Rudra Sen, already ruler of Palpa, became ruler of Parbat as well.<sup>200</sup> Until the time the grandson of Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered Jumla in 1788, there were fourteen successors to the kingdom Balirāj had ruled. During this time, relatives of the rulers of this kingdom became petty princes in its different principalities, including Tichurong.<sup>201</sup> The thirteenth successor of the Balirāj kingdom was “Suratha Śāh,” and his brother migrated to “Tiprkot Tara”<sup>202</sup> which Tucci speculates refers to Tarakot, the smallest of the three Kaike-speaking villages but which, Fisher points out, almost always exclusively appears on maps.<sup>203</sup> Now, over twenty years after Fisher’s book was published, this continues to be true even on Google Earth, although Sahar Tara is the seat of the VDC and is a much larger village compared to Tarakot. Giuseppe Tucci records that Balirāj was the inheritor of the territory held by Gaganirāj, the eastern boundary of which was “Tārikkot,”<sup>204</sup> and Fisher surmises that this series of Hindu rulers displaced the Buddhist outlook and rulers who previously reigned in this area.<sup>205</sup> Interestingly, Fisher discovered that during the Gorkha reign (circa AD 1790) in Kathmandu, characterized by a Hindu-centric government, the King of Nepal continued the reign of the Buddhist raja of the kingdom of Mustang over Tsharka, up the Barbung/Bheri River from Dolpa. He also asked him to convey information about

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<sup>199</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 29.

<sup>200</sup> Regmi, *Modern Nepal*, 28.

<sup>201</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 29.

<sup>202</sup> Tucci, *Preliminary Report*, 122.

<sup>203</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 30.

<sup>204</sup> Tucci, *Preliminary Report on Two Scientific Expeditions in Nepal*, 123.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

Tarakot to Kathmandu.<sup>206</sup> While the Hindu Gorkha kings retained jurisdiction over Tichurong, the administrators of their rule were Buddhist.

Royal edicts dictating an imposition of taxes on salt, wool, cloth, goats, woolen blankets and scouting expeditions to locate minerals were documented beginning in the nineteenth century, but Fisher asserts their implementation could only have been enforced by loyal, royalist local administrators.<sup>207</sup> In his examination of various documents issued by the royal court of Nepal, Fisher found a pattern of official bias toward Hinduism, particularly in the nineteenth century and in spite of some efforts made to mitigate the feudal exploitation of lower classes by the aristocratic elite.<sup>208</sup>

He also reports that kingdoms in the vicinity of Jumla exerted a level of political control over Tichurong from the thirteenth century until the Gorkha victory in 1786 after which Tichurong belonged to Tibrikot District, both places becoming increasingly Hindu-centric over this time period.<sup>209</sup> The spread of Hinduism and its accompanying caste system is evident all across Nepal during this time. It is important to recognize the implications of this expansion of the Hindu dominant ideology not only for Indigenous languages, cultures, and land ownership but also for the continuous cultural adjustments and adaptations which communities like those in Tichurong were obligated to make in order to remain socio-economically viable. As Fisher points out, this is also true to a

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

lesser extent in the context of Buddhist rule which is less documented but certainly present in a more unofficial authority role. For example, Nyima Tshering, a wealthy man from Dolpo, settled disputes in Tichurong until his death in 1963.<sup>210</sup> The important distinction between Hindu and Buddhist rulers' jurisdiction over Tichurong, in whatever form, are the traditional cultural and religious ties to the Tibetan Buddhist region of Dolpo,<sup>211</sup> which do not exist with the Hindu-dominated lowlands. Exploitation by wealthy or powerful Buddhist rulers could certainly occur. However, cultural or religious modifications which were made in response were not in opposition to historical traditions or an attempt to remain socially viable in a political sphere upon which communities were economically dependent.

Considering the adjustments the Sahar Tara community has made to remain viable, such as identifying as Magar or adopting the Hindu ceremony involving a boy's first haircut, it is remarkable that people from here and from Tupa Tara and Tarakot have managed to preserve their language as long as they have, even while conducting social and economic transactions with neighboring and far-away villages in Nepali or Tibetan. In the next chapter I discuss the Kaike language in relation to traditional knowledge systems and the state of endangered languages in Nepal.

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 35.

## CHAPTER V

### Language and Cultural-Ecological Knowledge

Cultural knowledge systems encompass ecological knowledge and are encoded in language.<sup>212</sup> This is especially true for cultures with non-written languages or where the majority of people are illiterate, as is the case with the Kaike speakers of Tichurong. Additionally, many scholars recognize the relationship between language and worldview. David Wilkins relates that a group's understanding of its place in the cosmos is embedded in language,<sup>213</sup> and Luisa Maffi asserts that language not only represents knowledge but is the "main tool for humans to elaborate, maintain, develop, and transmit knowledge."<sup>214</sup> According to Peter Mülhäusler, languages are imbued with the knowledge of the past as well as the present,<sup>215</sup> therefore representing an accumulation of ecological observations and adaptations over time. Furthermore, because one primarily learns language orally, this is also the major means of transmission for accumulated ecological knowledge, according to Maffi<sup>216</sup> and Ngwang Sonam Sherpa.<sup>217</sup> Similarly, Jeffrey Wollock asserts that language helps to define human behavior and practice,

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<sup>212</sup> Posey, "Biological and Cultural Diversity," 387.

<sup>213</sup> Wilkins, "Linguistic Evidence," 90.

<sup>214</sup> Maffi, "Introduction," 6.

<sup>215</sup> Mülhäusler, "Ecolinguistics," 143.

<sup>216</sup> Maffi, "Introduction," 6.

<sup>217</sup> Sherpa, "Indigenous Peoples," 8.

implying that socio-cultural beliefs and ways of knowing are conveyed through the medium of language.<sup>218</sup>

### Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

There are more than 6000 languages in the world, 4000-5000 of which are spoken by Indigenous peoples. UNESCO estimates that 2500 of these languages are in immediate danger of extinction,<sup>219</sup> and ninety percent of the world's languages are in danger of becoming extinct within this century.<sup>220</sup> This level of linguistic diversity is remarkable because the diversity between human groups is not that great. Our common human ancestor lived as recently as 140,000 years ago, and Daniel Nettle calculates that if a generation is twenty-five years, all of the more than 6000 languages have evolved in a time period represented by 5600 generations.<sup>221</sup> Because the vast majority of the world's languages are spoken by Indigenous people, this has obvious negative implications for the future of Indigenous languages and their associated knowledge systems.

Language loss is one permutation of declining cultural diversity. Interestingly, there is compelling evidence illustrating the coincidence of areas high in both biological and linguistic diversity. Paul Oldham, for example, notes that 4635 of the world's 6867

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<sup>218</sup> Jeffrey Wollock, "Linguistic Diversity and Biodiversity," in *On Biocultural Diversity*, Luisa Maffi, ed. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 255.

<sup>219</sup> Posey, "Biological and Cultural Diversity," 379.

<sup>220</sup> Bradley and Bradley, eds., *Language Endangerment*, xi.

<sup>221</sup> Daniel Nettle, *Linguistic Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

distinct ethno-linguistic groups inhabit the 238 ecoregions<sup>222</sup> of primary importance as designated by WWF.<sup>223</sup> Indigenous communities have long understood and been aware of their relationship to their environments. There is increasing recognition, however, among those concerned with the state of the world's biological diversity and with Indigenous rights, that loss of Indigenous environmental knowledge systems represents a loss of "experience acquired over thousands of years of direct human contact with the environment."<sup>224</sup> In other words, language loss, particularly among Indigenous communities, is conterminous with loss of knowledge systems encompassing both culture and ecology.

### *Languages in Nepal*

The greater Himalayan region, which stretches 3500 kilometers from Afghanistan in the west to Myanmar in the east encompasses one sixth of the world's languages; approximately 600 languages.<sup>225</sup> Over 400 of these languages are spoken by groups of people fewer than 100,000.<sup>226</sup> In Nepal alone, 123 languages are spoken, of which over 100 are mother-tongue languages. The 2001 Nepal Census records ninety-two

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<sup>222</sup> An ecoregion is defined by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) as "a relatively large unit of land or water containing a characteristic set of natural communities that share a large majority of their species, dynamics and environmental conditions." See the WWF website, <http://www.wwf.or.th/faq/response.cfm?hdnQuestionId=2392002171412>

<sup>223</sup> Paul Oldham, *Negotiating Diversity: A Field Guide to the Convention on Biological Diversity* (Lancaster: Lancaster University, 2002), <http://www.cesagen.lancs.ac.uk/virtual/biodiversity/section1/cultural.htm> (accessed February 4, 2008).

<sup>224</sup> Berkes, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Perspective."

<sup>225</sup> Turin, *Linguistic Diversity*, 1.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

languages.<sup>227</sup> A large number of these will be lost within a generation, similar to the state of the rest of the world’s languages, of which over half will probably not be passed on to the next generation.<sup>228</sup> Mark Turin, however, asserts that the loss of language in Nepal is concurrent with the “revival of ethnic identities often closely related to linguistic attributes.”<sup>229</sup> Indeed, the National Coalition Against Racial Discrimination (NCARD) lists language as second on its list of issues of racial discrimination in Nepal.<sup>230</sup>

**Table 6: Language Division in Nepal**

Language Family	Language Group	Percentage Speakers	Number of Speakers
Indo-European	Indo-Aryan	79	17,982,769
Sino-Tibetan	Tibeto-Burman	18.4	4,183,995
Austro-Asiatic	Austriac	0.2	40,260
Dravidian	Dravidian	0.1	28,615
Other	-	-	-
Unknown	-	2.2	503,295

The 2001 Nepal Census classifies Nepal’s officially recognized ninety-two languages into four language families. These families are Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Austro-Asiatic, and Dravidian.

**Source: Yadava, 2003 based on 2001 Nepal Population Census**

As seen in Table 6, the Indo-Aryan group within the Indo-European family represents the largest number of speakers in Nepal, followed by the Tibeto-Burman group within the Sino-Tibetan family, represented by fifty-seven languages, “the largest number of distinct

<sup>227</sup> This number is disputed and reflects the subjective nature of linguistic surveys as well as inconsistency in data collection. For a discussion of these discrepancies see Turin, *Linguistic Diversity*, 1.

<sup>228</sup> Brower and Johnston. *Disappearing Peoples?*, 14.

<sup>229</sup> Turin, *Linguistic Diversity*, v.

<sup>230</sup> Nepal National Preparatory Committee, "Racial Discrimination in Nepal: A Summary," in *WCAR NGO Networking Meeting* (Kathmandu: NCARD, 2001), 3.



mother tongues of any linguistic grouping,”<sup>231</sup> but with fewer speakers compared to the Indo-Aryan group. For a country as small as Nepal, the number of both language families and distinct and individual languages represented is remarkable, but recognition of and appreciation of this diversity is not reflected at the policy level in Nepal.<sup>232</sup>

Although it is certain that many of the minority languages in Nepal<sup>233</sup> are endangered, the extent to which this is true has not been quantified.<sup>234</sup> According to Turin, a language is considered endangered based on the “extent to which children are still learning the language as their native tongue,”<sup>235</sup> rather than the number of people who speak it. In Nepal, the status of its many languages is largely unknown or at least is based on census data that is not always consistent. Language enumeration has been a part of the Nepal census since 1952/54, but the numbers reported have varied widely every ten years the census is conducted.<sup>236</sup> In the 2001 Census, some languages were still recorded as unknown. Although more provisions were made for enumerating mother tongues and second languages, there still was no documentation of multilingualism or the return of a language.<sup>237</sup> An increase in the use of Nepali (currently spoken by 48.61

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<sup>231</sup> Turin, *Linguistic Diversity*, 5.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>233</sup> Minority languages are defined by those languages with fewer than 100,000 speakers. See Turin, *Linguistic Diversity*, 5.

<sup>234</sup> Noonan asserts there are 115 Indigenous languages out of 140 which are endangered and that only 35 languages in Nepal have been documented. See Michael Noonan, “Language Documentation.”

<sup>235</sup> Turin, *Linguistic Diversity*, 5

<sup>236</sup> Yadava, "Language," 140.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

percent of the population)<sup>238</sup> and a decrease in the use of other languages are revealed in the census data from 1952/54 to 2001.<sup>239</sup>

A nationwide linguistic survey to be conducted by trained linguists is being developed by the Department of Linguistics at Tribhuvan University in cooperation with the Summer Institute for Linguistics (SIL). The survey will seek to better understand: the level of endangerment of Nepal's many languages; the convergence and divergence of language families in daily use; and bilingual and multilingual proficiency, among other important documentary objectives.<sup>240</sup>

Importantly, considering the context of the Kaike language, Yogendra Prasad Yadava notes the detrimental effect on mother tongues from an increase in mass media and in literacy as implemented by a Nepali-medium educational system.<sup>241</sup> Indeed, formal education in combination with idealization of Western models of modernization may represent the greatest threats to the Kaike language. This issue will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>240</sup> It should be noted here that the process of documenting endangered languages is in itself problematic and controversial. Jane Hill argues that enumeration itself is a "gesture of power" rendering those being counted "governable" and legitimately questions whether researchers can successfully assist community activists in advocating for and preserving endangered languages without "attracting resources from dominant communities." See Jane H. Hill, "Expert Rhetorics" in "Advocacy for Endangered Languages: Who Is Listening, and What Do They Hear?" *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (2002): 127. Ultimately, the community must be able to decide for themselves the extent and context of documentation as well as determine the outcomes resulting from it.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 158.

## Kaike: The Fairy Language

Kaike belongs to the Tamangic language of the Bodish section of the Bodic branch of the Tibeto-Burman language group.<sup>242</sup> Kaike is a glossonym, the name of the language,<sup>243</sup> but cannot be used to refer to the people. Kaike is one of over 100 mother tongues spoken in Nepal.<sup>244</sup> For reasons not entirely clear, Kaike is spoken only in three villages of Dolpa district: Sahar Tara, Tupa Tara, and Tarakot. Although Kaike is exclusively spoken at home and usually within the village, the majority of people from these communities are also fluent in Nepali and Tibetan, with the exception of small children and some elderly people. It is unknown how long Kaike has been mutually unintelligible from any other language, but the linguist Merritt Ruhlen says this process probably takes from 500 to 1000 years in most cases.<sup>245</sup>

Current estimates about the number of Kaike speakers are difficult to decipher. Van Driem<sup>246</sup> asserts Kaike is spoken by 2000 people in several villages in “Dolpo” [sic] district.<sup>247</sup> The 2001 Central Bureau of Statistics Report claims that while the Tarali population is 2000, only 794 people (39.7 percent) speak the language as their mother

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<sup>242</sup> Ambika Regmi, "The Nominal and Adjectival Morphology in the Kaike Language" (Master's thesis, Tribhuvan University, 2007).

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>244</sup> Turin, *Linguistic Diversity*, 5.

<sup>245</sup> Merritt Ruhlen, *A Guide to the World's Languages*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, 6.

<sup>246</sup> George Van Driem, *Languages of the Himalayas*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>247</sup> Dolpa and Dolpo are often used interchangeably, although Dolpo generally refers to the region of Upper Dolpa. This is how I use Dolpo in this paper.

tongue, three of whom apparently live in Lamjung district.<sup>248</sup> As yet, there has been no census taken of Kaike speakers living in the Kathmandu Valley, even though according to my crude estimates, there are fifty-two people from Sahar Tara alone living in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur (see Table 4, page 31), which does not account for migrants from Tupa Tara or Tarakot. Because Sahar Tara is the largest of the three Kaike-speaking villages with 373 people, it is impossible that the villages of Tupa Tara and Tarakot make up the rest of the population of 2000. It is feasible that there are only 794 speakers of Kaike in Nepal distributed primarily among Sahar Tara, Tupa Tara, and Tarakot, but an assessment is needed of the number of mother-tongue speakers in neighboring villages, particularly Gumba Tara. Also interesting to consider from a linguistic standpoint is the village of Riwa, populated entirely by Kamis, or people from the blacksmith caste. As noted above, although they speak Nepali at home, because of an ongoing working relationship with Taralis in which the Kamis perform work in exchange for grain, cloth, or cash, they are also fluent in Kaike. Kaike is not their mother tongue, but perhaps it should be included as a second language in any linguistic survey that is undertaken in this area.

The unreliability of data available about the number of Kaike speakers reflects the immense need and utility of a comprehensive linguistic survey of Nepal as proposed by Yadava of the Department of Linguistics and by SIL. In order to determine the forces behind possible endangerment and whether the Kaike language is endangered, an accurate census must be taken of Kaike speakers not only in Tichurong but in all of the

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<sup>248</sup> Regmi, "The Nominal and Adjectival Morphology in the Kaike Language," 1.

places in Nepal where its speakers have migrated. This would also assist in understanding to what extent desires for a better education for one's children or a perceived better quality of life are driving Taralis to emigrate to places outside of Tichurong, and how these migrations are affecting both language retention and cultural identification among younger generations.

During Fisher's tenure in Sahar Tara, he found that the Kaike language was held in low regard because it is "unsophisticated and unexpressive."<sup>249</sup> Considering this perspective, it is remarkable that it survives forty years later and has persisted through continuous contact with non-Kaike-speaking populations. The retention of Kaike through space and time suggests a level of choice, or social selection, on the part of Taralis to maintain their language. According to Nettle, computer simulations show that without the element of social selection, a "very low level of inter-group contact destroys local diversity."<sup>250</sup> Based on Fisher's population estimates of Sahar Tara, the number of people living in that village has remained approximately the same. He records that everyone was able to speak Kaike during his time there.

Although Ambika Regmi's Tarali informants in Kathmandu have told her that only the elderly and adult women continue to speak it and that there is little intergenerational transmission,<sup>251</sup> I did not find this to be true. On the contrary, children I met below the age of five years old were able to speak nothing but Kaike, and the

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<sup>249</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 130.

<sup>250</sup> Nettle, *Linguistic Diversity*, 54.

<sup>251</sup> Regmi, "The Nominal and Adjectival Morphology in the Kaike Language," 13.

language was used exclusively by all members of the community except at the school, occasionally among young men who would sometimes speak to each other in Nepali, and when there were people present from a non-Kaike-speaking village of Tichurong. In the latter situation, Tibetan would be used. Additionally, contrary to the low regard of the language recorded by Fisher, Taralis appear to have developed a genuine interest and esteemed consideration for their language. Fisher records that there are no songs in Kaike,<sup>252</sup> which was affirmed while I was there but lamented as an aspect of their language and culture that has disappeared. One young man speculated that there must have been songs in Kaike at one time, and another woman told me that there used to be a song sung during the *Chait puja* (worship performed during a certain ceremonial period in Sahar Tara) which was so long that it would last the time it takes to reach Tupa Tara, a half hour's walk away. This was sung by a *patum*, or priest. During Fisher's tenure, the *patum* had disciples who, when they died, took this song with them. It was never passed on, and there is no longer a *patum* in the village. The role has been taken up by a man from each family when it is his family's turn to host and perform the ritual duties associated with the largest local festival the Taralis celebrate, during which time he will sing a short song while beating a drum and visiting each house in the village. Fisher also learned that Kaike numbers only go up to twenty, but this was contradicted when one woman recited to me designation of days beyond 100. For example, *suntal* means the 150th day.

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<sup>252</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 130.

The Taralis value the uniqueness of their language now more than during Fisher's tenure in Sahar Tara. Perhaps this is a result of the Indigenous rights ideology encouraged by the Maoist People's War as well as efforts by Indigenous rights' organizations to raise awareness about the status of Indigenous nationalities and provide legitimacy and value to Indigenous languages and knowledge systems. However, the Maoists were not generally supported in Sahar Tara. It is more likely that Taralis' own observations of language loss following emigration to Kathmandu has affected their regard for the Kaike language. Only a few people believe the Kaike language is currently endangered. In particular, those who have moved to Kathmandu either for business purposes or to provide a better education for their children are the people most invested in taking measures to preserve the language. For example, although nobody in the village was opposed to my research project, and indeed most people were flattered that I was interested in the Kaike language, it was the Tarali people living in Kathmandu who perceived the project through the lens of language preservation. Ironically, it is mostly the children of these Kathmandu emigrants who will likely be the first to discontinue the use of the Kaike language. This is because the language will cease to be relevant for those removed from a place-based upbringing and its associated livelihood systems.

Tarali perspectives on the Kaike language differ according to several factors. As explained above, those who live outside of Sahar Tara tend to be more aware of potential trends of endangerment. There is also a notable gendered outlook, which, similarly, might be related to exposure outside of Sahar Tara. Most women I spoke with about the matter had no sense that the Kaike language would ever disappear because the majority of them have never left the village. In contrast, several young men who have traveled to



**Figure 6: Young Men Drawing a Map of Sahar Tara (Photograph by M. Daurio, November 2008)**

and lived in Kathmandu noted changes in the language. One young man in particular, who is studying painting specific to Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Kathmandu, acknowledged the possibility of language loss. He explained that there is a noticeable trend when speaking Nepali, during which English words are frequently incorporated in conversation. Similarly, he says that when speaking Kaike, sometimes Nepali words are substituted. He said that he and his friends sometimes speak in Nepali when they are together rather than Kaike. Similar sentiments were expressed by a thirty year old male Dunai storeowner originally from Tachen whose father's mother is from Sahar Tara. He believes Kaike is an endangered language for four reasons: 1) More exposure to other cultures and languages which has caused Kaike to be mixed with other languages; 2)



modernization and the adoption of Western ideas and behaviors; 3) emigration of children to Pokhara and Kathmandu for education; and 4) the fact that Kaike has no writing system.

In contrast, the older men and men in their mid-thirties in Sahar Tara with whom I spoke adamantly denied the potential for language loss as well as for mixing Kaike and Nepali. Indeed, one older man in his seventies told me this was impossible. Several men in their thirties insisted that language loss could only occur if everyone left the village. As long as there is a village, there will be Kaike.

Because of their higher educational attainment, mobility, and social leeway in adopting new modes of dress and behavior as well as in how they allocate their time, young men (Figure 6) are the primary agents of change in Sahar Tara. It is interesting that they are also most aware of external influences impacting preservation of the Kaike language.

Certain English words have permeated the Nepali spoken by some in the village, most likely those who have spent time in Kathmandu. Ironically, however, they do not realize they are using English words, and a non-Nepali speaking English speaker would probably not recognize them as English either. In particular, “first” has replaced *pahile* in some circumstances, and “last” has replaced *antim*. Even those who are illiterate in both Nepali and English used these words, although usage was not widespread throughout the village. These instances imply that some language changes occur subconsciously, without the user necessarily recognizing that certain words belong to

another language. Whether there is also a tendency to insert Nepali words while speaking Kaike requires further study.

Regardless of gender, age, level of education, and residence, everyone with whom I spoke supports efforts at language preservation, including teaching in Kaike at the school, creating a written system for the language, and publishing materials in Kaike. It is unclear whether this implies a subconscious acknowledgement of changes in Kaike within their lifetimes, but certainly there has been a positive shift regarding the language by its speakers since Fisher's research. Although lacking at the policy and implementation levels, there is at least greater societal recognition of the value of Indigenous languages and cultures, encouraged by various organizations advocating for Indigenous rights. Compared to forty years ago when Fisher conducted his research, more Sahar Tara residents are emigrating, particularly to Kathmandu and Dunai, and also sending their children to boarding schools. There are even more who split their time between Sahar Tara and Kathmandu. Greater regard for the Kaike language may stem from observations of language loss as a result of these migrations. Exposure to other ethnolinguistic groups who have retained their languages may also encourage Kaike speakers to value their own.

Yadava encourages the implementation of comprehensive mother-tongue instruction while delaying the introduction of international languages such as English.<sup>253</sup> This is a well founded recommendation. In the United States, American Indian children

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<sup>253</sup> Yogendra Prasad Yadava, *Linguistic Diversity in Nepal: Situation and Policy* (Kathmandu: Social Inclusion Research Fund, 2009), 4.



**Figure 7: Partial Map of Field Area Names Drawn by Boys, Grades 6-8 (Photograph by M. Daurio, November 2008)**

who were educated in Diné (Navajo) and learned English as a second language performed almost two grade levels above other Diné children who began school in English. Similarly, in Hilo, Hawai'i, children who went to Hawai'ian immersion schools had a zero percent dropout rate, and their college attendance was greater compared to non-immersion-school children.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Ellen L Lutz, "Saving America's Endangered Languages," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (2007), 3.

As is revealed in Taralis' own origin story about Kaike, explained below, the language is strongly rooted in the Tichurong Valley. It has been perpetuated until now largely because it continues to be relevant to the Taralis. They have, for instance, twenty to forty names in Kaike for areas encompassing different fields and twenty-four names for different areas of forest. The village of Sahar Tara itself is divided into twenty areas with different names indicating geographical location vertically and horizontally across the hillside. Everyone knows which houses are included under which area. This wide-ranging knowledge of environment and landscape extends to children, who produced a map of these names seen in Figure 7.<sup>255</sup> It is only by engaging in the systems of agricultural production which encompass social identity construction and religious and spiritual expressions of the community's relationship to their land that the Kaike language is contextual and relevant. For those children growing up in Kathmandu without participation in this socialization process, Kaike will cease to be applicable.

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<sup>255</sup> As part of my research I was interested in the differentiated perspectives of men, women, and children, examining the ways gender and age shape one's relationship with the landscape. Cultural mental mapping provided a basis for translating the intangible into a more explicit medium for purposes of examining the role of education and intergenerational transmission in retaining cultural-ecological knowledge systems. See Nigel Crawhall, *The Role of Participatory Cultural Mapping in Promoting Intercultural Dialogue - 'We Are Not Hyenas'* (Paris:UNESCO, Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue, 2007), 6, <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/files/37746/12197593145/The%20role%20of%20participatory%20cultural%20mapping%20in%20promoting%20intercultural%20dialogue.pdf> (accessed February 25, 2009). Three different groups in Sahar Tara produced maps: a group of women of all ages; a group of young men; and a group of boys in the sixth to eighth grades. The women's group provided a gendered perspective on sense of place compared to the young men's group. Young men are the primary agents of change in Sahar Tara, so their map also provided an interesting measurement of changing perspectives of place. Although I would have preferred to have both girls and boys make maps, I was assigned to work with the sixth to eighth grades as a volunteer at the local school. There were no girls in these grades. A map drawn by older men and women would also have been illuminating.

## *Kaike Origins*

“Kai” means fairy, and “ke” means language,<sup>256</sup> implying the holy genesis of the language according to its origin myth. Fisher records this legend in his book *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, and the version I was told differs only slightly. It was told to me by my host, a thirty-one year old woman. She recorded it in both Kaike and Nepali, and I translated the story from Nepali to English.

In the beginning, how did our country come to be? In this place, how did this come to be? In the beginning, what happened was that near India,<sup>257</sup> a big war took place. And near India, after this war had started, was a pregnant girl. Saying to herself, “this child is in my stomach. Am I going to die or...,” she escaped from India. And after escaping, she was followed by a soldier.<sup>258</sup> The pregnant girl was ahead, and the soldier came behind. Coming farther, the girl arrived at the Byas River.<sup>259</sup> A long time before there lived a king at this place. The escaped girl beseeched the king, “I am running away from somebody trying to kill me. I am with child. My child’s... If I am killed, my child will be killed. I will be killed. Please give me a place to hide, king,” said the girl. The king, who had never told a lie in his life, had to tell a lie for the girl that day. So the king, after having been beseeched by the girl, hid her away. After she was hid, the king sacrificed a chicken and spread the blood around outside. Later, the soldier arrived at the Byas River and asked the king, “Hey King, I have come here after a girl who has escaped. Have you seen this girl?” The king responded, “Nobody has come here. I haven’t heard anyone’s voice or seen anyone. I am alone here. I have one daughter who has just given birth, and I have killed a chicken. Look at the blood here. Nobody has come here,” said the king. After this, that soldier turned around and left.

The next day or so, the girl left. She came to Tarakot, below here. Two days later the child was born, and it was a son. After the son was a little

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>257</sup> In Fisher’s version, the woman was fleeing fighting roughly two days’ walk to the west during the time of the Kalyal rajas. See Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 35.

<sup>258</sup> Fisher was told two soldiers were sent to pursue her, and the king locked her in one of two palaces under his jurisdiction. The soldiers asked to search both palaces, and the king told them that they could search everywhere but the locked room, in which was his pregnant daughter. The soldiers made him swear on the sharp edge of a sword that the woman in the room was his daughter and not the woman they were pursuing before they left. See Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 36.

bigger...now the mother...they had many cows. The son would take the cows to Gumba, where there was a big flat area. In this area, there was a big lake of milk, and the boy would only take his cows there to graze.

And going there, what did he see? Three goddess sisters.<sup>260</sup> With his own eyes, he saw them descending from the sky. They would bathe in the lake of milk and then fly back into the sky, those sisters. They would always come to the lake to bathe and then fly away into the sky. The boy with his cows would see this. "I'll tell my mother when I get home today," the boy would say, forgetting after he arrived. The next day he would forget again. Then one day he decided to take a stone with him in his pocket to remind him to tell his mother. So from the flat area where the lake of milk was, he picked up a stone and returned home.

When they were eating some food, the stone fell out. After this, the mother said, "Son, you and I are the only people. I escaped and came here. We two live here. Today are you going to kill your mother? Why have you brought a stone?" the mother asked. The son replied, "No, mother, it's nothing. It's just that at the place I take the cows to graze, there is a huge lake of milk. At that lake of milk, I saw with my own eyes three goddess sisters; three goddesses fly down from the sky to bathe in the lake of milk. After bathing and cleaning themselves well, they fly away again. For several days I have kept saying that I have to tell my mother about it, but I kept forgetting. And today, in order to remind me to tell you, I have brought this stone with me. I only brought it with me to remind me, not to kill you, but to make you understand at your side."

The mother replied, "Son, there is not one other person in this place. There is nobody else in this house, nobody but mother and son. Now, you have to grab a hold of one of those sisters so we can make her a daughter-in-law."

"Mother, how can I do that? They can fly into the sky, and how can I, a person bounded to the earth, catch one of them?" the son asked. The mother replied, "Son, wherever is the place in that lake where they bathe, go and sit there. Sit there and pretend that you are sleepy. After pretending to fall asleep, quickly grab one of the girls. After you touch them, you will contaminate them because they are goddesses and we are people. After you touch them, they will not be able to fly. So catch one of them and bring her here, okay?" the mother instructed.

In the next day or so, the son again took the cows to graze. Just as his mother had instructed, he sat by the edge of the lake of milk. And he pretended to fall asleep. Then, from the sky above, the three sisters came and bathed. And first, the eldest sister bathed and went. The second sister also bathed and went. And at the last, the boy grabbed a hold of the youngest sister. He said to her, "I am just a human, and I have contaminated you." And she couldn't fly.

The boy brought the girl to his mother's side. After bringing the girl to the mother's side, the goddess did not say a word. Today she didn't speak, tomorrow she didn't speak, never did she speak, that goddess. She didn't say a word to the mother and son.

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<sup>260</sup> Fisher was told a version of the story in which there are seven goddesses. See Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 36.

The mother said to her son, “Oh, son, she doesn’t speak. The daughter-in-law is very pretty, and she is also a goddess. Today we have to sacrifice a chicken and worship her. Who knows, maybe she will speak then.” So they killed a big rooster. They brought a mat and put down a white cloth. On the son’s head they wrapped a white cloth, and the daughter-in-law wore nice clothes. The two were put together, and on a plate they put the meat from the rooster. The head of the rooster they placed in the center, and here and there other meat was placed. And they also put meat in the rooster’s mouth. The mother asked that the daughter-in-law’s voice be brought from anywhere it could, and while doing *puja*, the daughter-in-law spoke for the first time. “Oh ho, what are you doing?” And she spoke Kaike, our own Kaike language was spoken by the daughter-in-law. The goddess who flew from the skies to earth and the earth to the skies said, “What are you doing?” in the Kaike language. “Tai ke ma je,” the daughter-in-law said in Kaike. “Tai ke ma je,” and she laughed. After she spoke, the mother, son, and daughter-in-law, these three people spoke this goddess’ language, God’s language, language that came from the skies to the earth and the earth to the skies. From then on, the Kaike language we speak is that. And the daughter-in-law who didn’t talk spoke after *puja* was done. After this, they became a family of three people.

And the son and daughter-in-law conceived three sons. And those sons grew up and came up from Tarakot to Sahar Tara. After they came here, they stayed here and lived. The three sons said, “There is nobody in this world, no castes, no names, nothing. If we wanted to marry, how would we marry?” So the three sons created clans for themselves, in order to marry. For one, they assigned the name Rokaya, another was Budha, and another Garthi. After these three clans were formed, one son went to Tibet. One went to India and married. And another brought a girl from near Rukum, near Deurali. They all brought women back and married them and three clans were created, Rokaya, Budha, and Gharti. And after they married, many people were conceived. And many people lived in Sahar Tara, in this place. And the Kaike language was taught by a goddess, our Kaike language. Tupa, one, Sahar Tara, two, and Tarakot. The Kaike language exists in these three villages. And that’s it.

In addition to the three clans mentioned above, there is a fourth clan named Jhankri, the origin of which is explained in Fisher’s book. One day, one of the three sons, who was a shepherd, followed a female goat which ran off from the rest of the herd everyday. Near the present day village of Tupa Tara, he discovered a baby boy in a hollowed out section of a bamboo tree, to whom the female goat was giving her milk. After returning home and discussing the situation with his family, they decided to bring



**Figure 8: View of Gumba Tara and the Flat Area Where the Lake of Milk Was Located (Photograph by M. Daurio, November 2008)**

the boy home. He is the ancestor of the Jhankri, whose descendants do not eat she-goats in honor of the she-goat who fed their ancestor in the bamboo tree.<sup>261</sup>

The details attached to the story explaining the origin of the Kaike language illustrate its significance for the Taralis, perhaps most cogently apparent in the language's godly foundations. Additionally, although linguists and anthropologists would insist that Taralis originated from Tibet, their own belief in ancestral ties to India or Jumla,

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<sup>261</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, 38.



depending upon the version, indicates the importance of their self-identification with a Hindu people and place.

Most interesting, however, is the way the story serves to situate the Taralis in the valley of Tichurong both temporally and spatially and to exemplify their profound relationship with this area. It is also a reflection of the depth of their environmental knowledge of the area. For example, the village of Gumba Tara (Figure 8) is located where the lake of milk used to exist, a large flat area on a ridge where relatively fertile fields are half-encircled by houses. Today, as one young man informed me, the rocks found in these fields are round and smooth like those which have been worn by water. The soil is sandy, indications that there did indeed exist a body of water at one time, or perhaps a lake of milk.

#### Situated Knowledge

People in Sahar Tara not only possess extensive knowledge of the fields and forests surrounding the village, which is encoded linguistically, they are also bound spatially within the village by a number of sacred sites. Typical of Buddhist communities in Nepal, the symbolic entrance to Sahar Tara both below and above is marked by a *chorten*, a religious cenotaph. The trails leading to the east and west and to the villages of Gumba and Tupa, respectively, are marked by smaller *stupas*. These are visible upon close inspection in Figure 9, a map drawn by a group of young men and copied and translated into English from Nepali by me. It is my reproduction seen here.

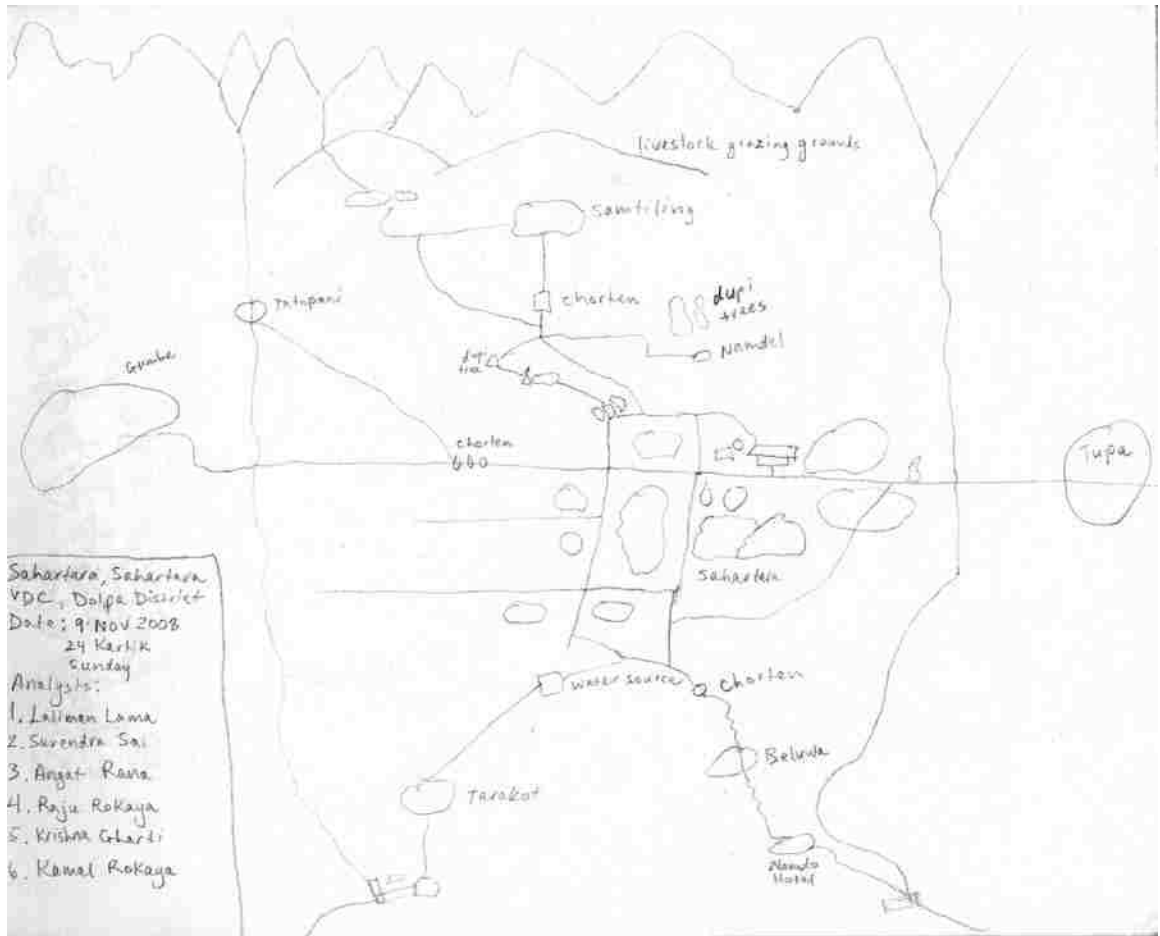


Figure 9: Map Drawn by Group of Young Men

Additionally, Sahar Tara is partially ringed by sacred trees spread out across the landscape which are sites of *puja* during certain times of the year. The map in Figure 10 drawn by a group of women illustrates both the location and type of these trees inhabited by deities. This map is also a reproduction.

*Rungpikhi* and *Rungpachā* are deities described as the older and younger brother, respectively, who inhabit two of the trees near Sahar Tara. Both of them are worshiped during *Rung*, a month long Indigenous festival usually occurring around January or February. Each household has two flagpoles, one mounted with Buddhist prayer flags and replaced when it gets old. The other flagpole, called *Tarjuā*, which is mounted with

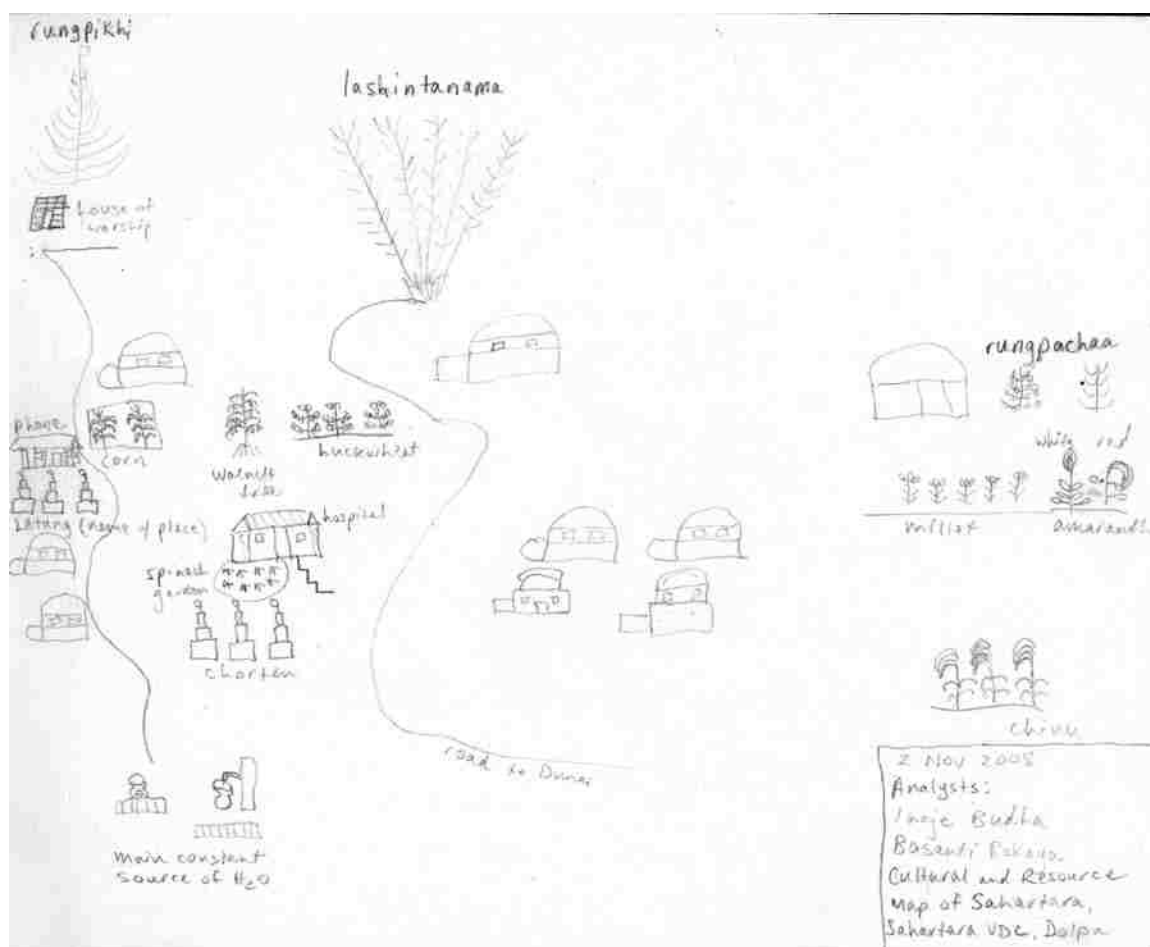
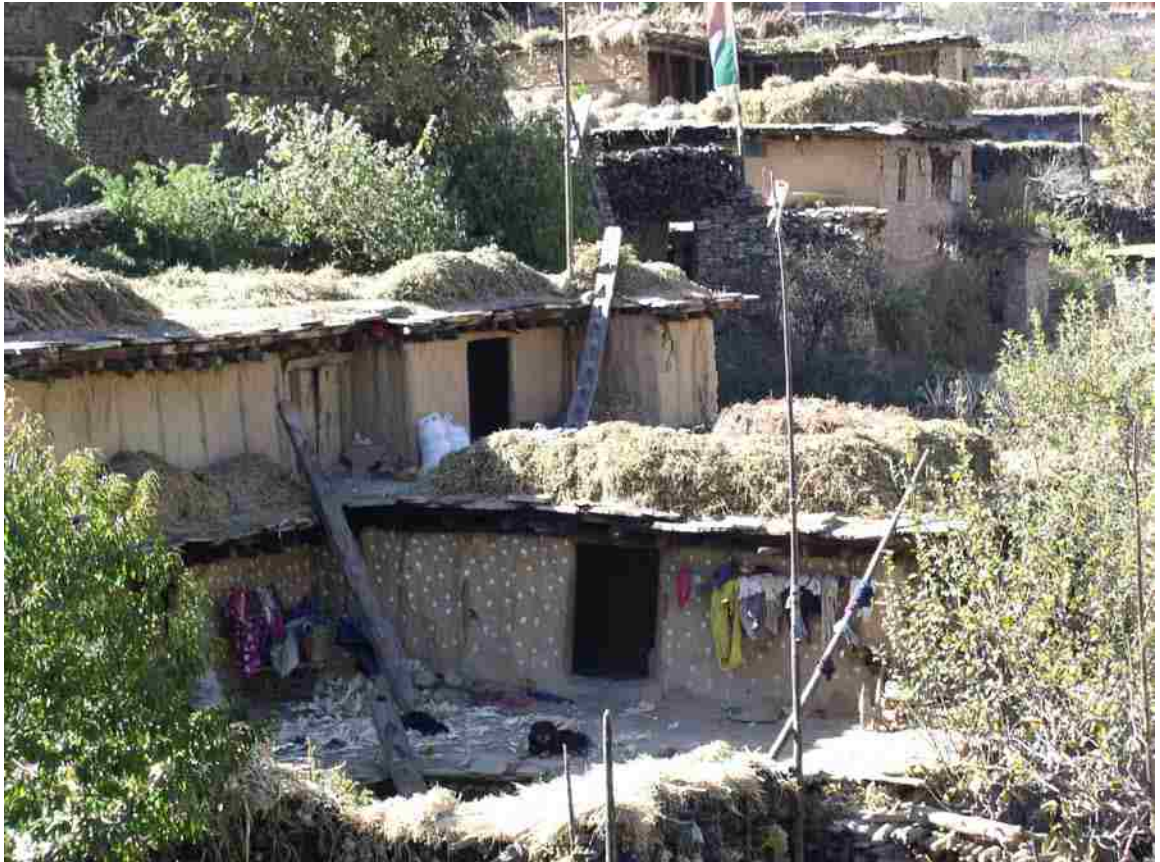


Figure 10: Map Drawn by Group of Women

juniper branches and a local flag, is replaced annually during *Rung*. The festival's beginning is marked by the mounting of a new pole, which is determined by a particular alignment of the stars. When the constellations *Rungpachā* (Seven Sisters) and *Kārmā* (I do not know the English equivalent) appear to touch in the sky, indicating the presence of one of the major deities, *Jobatā*, it initiates a four day *puja* beginning at *Rungpikhi*. The next morning the new flagpole is erected. *Jobatā* resides at the Kang glacier, to the east of Gumba Tara. If the glacier were ever to melt, inhabitants believe their villages would all be destroyed.



**Figure 11: Typical house With Three Levels, On Each of Which Resides a Deity (Photograph by M. Daurio, November 2008)**

In order to perform *puja*, holy water is collected in either seven or nine bottles from the stream in between Tupa and Sahar Tara, and these are placed in certain locations inside one's house for four days, trapping the deity there for this length of time before he is let go.

Another deity, *Chiseru*, resides below Sahar Tara and is considered the friend of *Rungpikhi* and *Rungpachā*. *Chiseru* is worshiped to ask for rain or in times of too much rain, for the rain to stop. People make special food during this time and take it to *Chiseru* to offer it to the deity and share food with each other. Similarly, *Lashin Tānamā*, who resides in a tree directly above the village and is considered the father deity among the

tree dwelling deities, is worshiped during the Nepali month of *Baisākh* to induce it to rain. The deity *Lashin Tānamā* flew in and settled in the tree, which was here before the arrival of people. At another time, a sheep is sacrificed at *Lashin Tānamā*, whereas this is not allowed at *Chiseru*.

In addition to the deities inhabiting trees around the village, each household is made of up three levels (Figure 11), on each of which resides a deity. The uppermost and lowermost level deities (*Chān* and *Lamu*, respectively) must be worshiped with the help of a *lama*. The deity residing on the middle level, *Risumgombo*, can be worshipped on one's own. In the map of Sahar Tara drawn by a group of women, each house clearly has three levels. This was not an important depiction in the map drawn by young men, but it was in the map drawn by sixth, seventh, and eighth grade boys, seen in Figure 12. There is also a fire deity residing in the fire pit in each household. When I inquired whether the women would welcome the installation of stoves with a stovepipe releasing the smoke outside, I was told that even if a stove were installed, the fire pit must remain so as not to offend the deity.

There are also three deities who reside in the Himalayas and come to Sahar Tara three times a year and possess the bodies of shamans, or *dhāmis*. Each *dhāmi* has his own house where only *puja* is performed, and villagers go to the *puja* house during the three times of the year to ask questions of the deities. Interestingly, these three deities have only Nepali names, *Mastā*, *Deurali*, and *Lāthi*, respectively. *Deurali* and *Lāthi* are brother and sister, and once, shepherds lit a fire in the grass near *Deurali*'s home in the Himalayas, igniting all the fire around. Six of his other sisters were old enough to



**Figure 12: Village Map Drawn by Sixth to Eighth Grade Boys. Most of the Houses are Depicted With Three Levels (Photograph by M. Daurio, November 2008)**

recognize fire and ran away, but the seventh was too young to know better and became engulfed in the flames. From that time on, she was no longer able to speak, and so she is called *Lāthi*, which means mute.

Clearly, Sahar Tara residents worship a plethora of deities who exercise control over individual health, climate, and community cohesion and who reside in tactically important places such as trees surrounding Sahar Tara, in the Himalayas towering above, and in individual households. Additionally, people have a strong working knowledge of the stars and constellations, alluded to earlier. Although watches do exist, time is also assessed according to the constellation *Mintun*, which is the Big Dipper. The most

important star, however, is *Karchen*, who sometimes dwells in a woman's stomach for ten months, tricking the woman into thinking she is pregnant. When the woman gives birth, the room is illuminated with a bright light, but there is no baby. Other times, a baby will be born and die as an infant, and it is said the baby is taken to this star to live. One day in the third week of November during my stay in Sahar Tara, one woman noted that *Karchen* had not risen in the east that morning as it usually did. Perhaps, she speculated, the star was residing in somebody's stomach, pretending to be a child.

Sahar Tara is a society dependent on its agricultural output and hence also the weather and other forces of nature. It is also a society with extensive environmental knowledge systems, and this knowledge is revealed in both small and individually reckoned ways as well as within a larger socio-cultural context. The above-mentioned descriptions and examples illuminate communal strategies for coping with life, death, and illness and for situating one's self within one's community and within one's environment. These strategies are often expressed and transmitted through language. On a daily basis, people make sense of, and occupy, their world through private conversations, in passing observations, and in diminutive actions, all positioned within a larger cultural framework. Full moons are marked by lighting oil lamps; women whistle as they winnow to call the wind to them to help blow away the chaff from the grain; on a cloudy day women speculate someone's climbing the mountain Deurali and causing the advent of clouds.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Deurali is also commonly called Dhaulagiri. Climbing mountains for the sake of climbing mountains was looked upon with some disdain and a vague sense of offending the deities residing in the Himalayas as well as common sensibilities. *Jobatā*, one of the most powerful deities, resides at the Kang glacier located up a tributary southeast of the village of Gumba Tara. One day in the early morning when I accompanied a group of young women to collect firewood an hour-and-a-half above Sahar Tara, they pointed out the glacier to me and said the deity would kill those who venture there. Another woman told me that long ago a man from Gumba reached the glacier and found an abundance of turquoise in the center.

On the first windy and cold day I experienced in the village, I was told that this kind of weather either clears out clouds after it rains, brings clouds of rain, or takes an old person, meaning that old people die on days like these. Similarly, after relating a dream I had had the night before to my host, I was told that when the leaves are falling from the trees, which was during this time, people have many dreams. Even if they are bad dreams, they do not cause any harm.

### *The Gender Factor*

Because of gender-assigned social behavior and labor roles, men and women move through their lives and their land differently, conceptualizing and enacting sense of place in both convergent and divergent ways. During the three times of year when a *dhāmi* is alternately possessed by the three deities from the Himalayas, for instance, both the *dhāmis*, those playing the musical instruments, and those inside the *puja* house making bread are always men or older boys. It is the women who ask questions of and make offerings to whatever deity is possessing the *dhāmi* at the time. Thus the men guide and execute the ceremonial procedures while the women interact directly with the deity on behalf of themselves and their families. Interestingly, the deity, channeled through the *dhāmi*, is sometimes a woman, sometimes a mute, and sometimes speaks in Nepali, even if questions are asked of him in Kaike.

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He brought some back with him to Gumba, but the next morning when he awoke, all of the turquoise had returned to the glacier of its own volition. Again he traveled to the glacier and returned with turquoise, only to have it disappear again by the next morning. Finally, he put a piece of turquoise in his shoe, which effectively contaminated it (note the similarity in this story and the origin story of the Kaike language regarding contamination), it having touched his feet. It is said that someone still has that piece of turquoise somewhere.



Perhaps most revealing about the function of gender in shaping worldview and relationship to place are the different maps created by a group of young men and a group of women, respectively (see Figures 9 and 10). Several comparative differences are immediately apparent. The men's map was drawn from a more distant perspective and heavily focused on pathways and Sahar Tara in relation to other villages, alpine grazing grounds, and bodies of water. Men tend to have a higher level of education than women and engage in trading activities, both of which involve traveling great distances. In addition to all having some level of education, most of these young men had lived in Kathmandu at some time, but so had several of the women who participated in drawing their map. Furthermore, as far as I am aware, none of these six men were traders themselves and so did not travel in this capacity. There are, perhaps, more relevant factors. Men have more spare time than women because women perform the majority of the work in the village, allowing men to travel more widely. Sahar Tara has a men's volleyball team, for example, which traveled to a village two days walk over a high pass to compete in a tournament. They were gone several weeks when I was in Sahar Tara. Even if women did play volleyball, which they do not, they would never be able to leave their responsibilities as mothers and laborers for this long. Additionally, men's work involves shepherding animals, and a few men take a pack train of horses to the Terai for the winter, coming back in the spring with rice, oil, and other supplies.<sup>263</sup>

The women's map, which six women participated in making, shows a greater amount of detail within the village itself, depicting houses with three levels whereas the

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<sup>263</sup> This last year (2008), only one man accompanied his own horses. The rest of the horses were taken by hired help.

men just drew proportional polygons to represent where houses are and how many. The women meticulously drew representations of the sacred trees previously discussed, whereas the men simply placed these trees on the map without acknowledging their sacredness or their type. The women also drew various crops where they grow in and near the village, specifically sweet buckwheat, potatoes, marijuana, beans, and apples. No illustrations of crops exist in the men's map. Women are wholly involved in the production of food from beginning to end, whereas most men only do the plowing of the fields. Interestingly, both men and women included the only permanent source of water in the village, even though the vast majority of villagers use another tap that sometimes freezes in winter or is washed out in the monsoon but otherwise provides water consistently. The permanent source, a spring, is located about five minutes walk below the village and frequented by cows and horses on their way to and from grazing in the surrounding fields.

The differences in the two maps illuminate the gendered division of labor, the occupation of divergent social and physical spaces by men and women, the role of women as transmitters of cultural-environmental knowledge, and the role of men as harbors of change. The latter is evident in appearances, as well. All of the women wear *lungis*, or sarongs, and a cummerbund. If it is warm, they wear t-shirts or tank tops with this, over the top of which they wear a *choli*, a Nepali shirt which ties together in four places, for warmth. They also have old, valuable *lungis* which are passed down from mother to daughter and also given as bridal presents from the groom's family. They usually wear these once a year during the four day *puja* for *Rung*, the month-long festival. The young men invariably wear t-shirts, jeans, and fashionable jackets,

accompanied by sunglasses. They are indistinguishable from their Kathmandu counterparts, whereas the women would stand out as villagers in the city. Women are also the primary caregivers within the family. Information about livelihoods, spirituality, and relationship to both place and the community as expressed both linguistically and behaviorally is conveyed principally through mothers. One mother, whose son has lived and studied in Kathmandu for the past seven years, expressed her desire for a writing system for Kaike so that he can learn about deities, the village, and the language.

The realm of work constitutes the primary mechanism for gendered responsibilities. Both men and women travel to the fields and the forests in different capacities beginning at an early age, and children's worldviews are also shaped by these gender-specific tasks and experiences. Men usually take care of animals because women are religiously prohibited from causing animals to suffer. Whereas women must collect firewood on their backs, men are able to use horses to bring wood back to the village. There are three shepherds in Sahar Tara, and all of them are men. Men engage in trade both near the Tibetan border and in Pokhara and the Terai. Men plow the fields and fix terraces but do little else in the fertilizing, planting, harvesting, drying, threshing, pounding, pressing, and winnowing process of subsistence agriculture. Of course some men do more and some do less. Women perform all of these tasks, in addition to those associated with running a household: laundry, fetching water, cooking, cleaning, rubbing in fresh applications of cow manure on a roof or wall, picking up the monthly supply of rice from the district headquarters, and worshiping household deities and important Buddhist Lamas. This extensive division of labor according to gender also results in social segregation, in which women spend the vast majority of their time with other

women and men with other men. Thus men's and women's perspectives of and progression through their lives, their village, and the cultural-ecological landscape are simultaneously informed by the same broad values, beliefs, and traditions and by highly gender-specific worldviews.

### *Children's Perspectives*

While staying in Sahar Tara, I volunteered at the local school, primarily as an English teacher. I was assigned to work with the sixth- to eighth-grade classes, which were comprised of approximately five boys, because there were no girls in these higher grades. During this time, one of the exercises that I conducted was to have the boys create maps, one of their village (Figure 12, page 94) and one partially representing the different areas of fields having names in Kaike (Figure 7, page 83). These maps illustrate several critical points: they serve as evidence of effective inter-generational transmission of cultural-ecological knowledge; they indicate gendered perspectives among Sahar Tara children regarding space and place; and they depict the autonomy of children's worldviews. The map in Figure 7 is an intricately detailed geographical representation not just of field area names but also of the location of certain crops. Sahar Tara children have more experiential knowledge about the food which sustains them than most American adults, as exemplified by their accurate drawings of walnut trees, *chinu chāmal*, Japanese millet, and amaranth, among others.

Interestingly, the boys drew the school disproportionately large and central relative to the rest of the village, a building which is absent from the women's map and barely apparent on the young men's map. The houses, similar to the women's map, are

mostly drawn with three levels, and the boys were meticulous in drawing every family's house, even pointing out to me in which house I was staying. Boys, and children in general, travel the village paths more than anyone else to fetch water from the tap, to follow a herd of horses up the hillside, to chase water buffalo (during the slaughtering season), and to engage in play. In the top right corner, they also drew a section of forest and the kinds of animals found in the forest. Their map illustrates the intersection of play and work worlds, the mobility of children in Sahar Tara, and their absorption as male children of gendered knowledge systems, those passed on by both the men and women in their lives.

### Implications

Taralis negotiate their social and spiritual lives through highly developed adaptive knowledge about the environment, mitigated by natural forces, deities, and intimate historical ties to the land. As explicitly revealed in the story about the origins of the Kaike language, Taralis define themselves and their collective history in the Tichurong Valley concurrent with their conceptualization and cognition of the landscape. This is also expressed in the abundance of Kaike names with which they categorize and compartmentalize their spatial understandings of where they live and work.

Taralis situate themselves on their land and in their environment through site-specific traditions of remembering in the form of oral histories and social narratives, highlighting the important role of language in perpetuating these traditions. These histories and narratives are reinforced and observed through ceremony and engagement

with the metaphysical and spiritual, affirming the idea put forth by Pearce and Louis<sup>264</sup> and Oliveira<sup>265</sup> that Indigenous sense of place is often articulated through performance. In Sahar Tara, people worship a variety of deities in socially mandated and community-wide ceremonies, while other deities are worshiped individually and privately, such as *Risumgombo*. This sustained “place-making,”<sup>266</sup> though occurring within a socio-cultural context, is negotiated simultaneously at the individual, familial, and communal levels.

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<sup>264</sup> Pearce and Louis, “Mapping,” 114.

<sup>265</sup> Oliveira, “Ke Alanui,” 7.

<sup>266</sup> Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 7.

## CHAPTER VI

### Children and Education

Perspectives on education in Sahar Tara are ambiguous. Education provides opportunities for socio-economic advancement as well as the skills to function well in greater Nepali society, necessary for a community reliant on trade and interaction with people from Upper Dolpa as well as with people from the lowlands. Basic levels of literacy would also serve people at the village level, particularly in empowering women to take on new roles in the fields of education, health, and village leadership. It is well known, however, that formal education is detrimental to Indigenous language retention, and in Nepal education and literacy promote the use of both Nepali and English.<sup>267</sup> I spoke with the director of an international non-governmental organization in Nepal implementing literacy and conflict mitigation programs and local market development in the Mid- and Far-Western regions. He told me that consultations with communities in these areas revealed that all of them preferred literacy development and skill training in Nepali rather than in the local languages.

In the case of Sahar Tara a desire for better education necessarily draws parents and/or their children primarily to Dunai or Kathmandu, although some are scattered as far as Darjeeling, Dehradun, Australia, and the United States. This out-migration for purposes of education presents one of the greatest challenges to retention and

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<sup>267</sup> Sonia Eagle, "The Language Situation in Nepal," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 20, no. 4 (1999): 321.

maintenance of cultural identity and language and is characterized by lack of viable choices. At the village level, access to and attendance at school differentially impacts the socialization of female and male children in Sahar Tara.

### History of Education in Nepal

The history of formal education in Nepal is inextricably linked to religion. Before there were secular schools, there were both Hindu and Buddhist systems of education to train young people in religious traditions.<sup>268</sup> The Buddhist schools enrolled a son from each family, regardless of whether he was going to become a priest or not, a system which continues today in many Buddhist communities across Nepal. The Hindu schools were aimed more specifically at training future priests.<sup>269</sup> In Sahar Tara, the children who are in Dehradun and Darjeeling as well as several of those in Kathmandu are studying at Buddhist monasteries.

According to Hugh Wood, until the fourteenth century, Nepal was at the center of a scholarly exchange among India, Tibet, and Nepal, with scholars traveling to one of these respective countries to enhance their knowledge in science, literature, or the arts, or in pursuit of spiritual guidance.<sup>270</sup> The strengthening of the caste system during the reign of King Jayathiti Malla saw the formation of guilds “and a greater emphasis on

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<sup>268</sup> Hugh Wood, "The Development of Education in Nepal," *Studies in Comparative Education* 5 (1965): 9.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.



occupational training.”<sup>271</sup> Prithvi Narayan Shah provided education to children whose fathers were killed in war, which was the first form of state-sponsored education in Nepal. However, he was also responsible for destroying the traditional religious institutions of education by appropriating their wealth to pay for his military exploits.<sup>272</sup>

Policies which marginalized the majority of Nepalis were evident during the Rana period. From 1846-1950, education for the masses was forcefully opposed while the Rana rulers’ children were educated within the British education system by tutors imported from India or England. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Ranadip, one of the Rana successors, opened up a school to other Rana children and introduced Sanskrit,<sup>273</sup> establishing a precedent for the Sanskritization of education.

Deva Shamsher Rana, educated in India, rose to the post of prime minister in 1901 and promptly ordered the opening of vernacular schools in every village with more than fifty pupils. One hundred and fifty schools were successfully opened before he was exiled by his brothers and the schools were closed.<sup>274</sup> Toward the end of Rana rule, Padma Shamsher Rana declared access to education a constitutional right before he too was exiled and this right was removed. His successor, Mohan Shamsher, the last of the Rana rulers, was overthrown in 1951 amid growing demands for a democratic government and all of its associated benefits.<sup>275</sup> Not only did the number of educational

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 11.

institutions increase rapidly after 1951, the country was subject to dramatic change as well, a result of open borders and a swift influx of foreign aid, beginning a long tradition of the latter which continues today.

Enrollment in school and representation of students, teachers, and lecturers is largely fractionated along caste lines, although some argue that social stratification is gradually eroding with increasing representation of lower caste groups.<sup>276</sup> Overall, and as described in Chapter II, the educational system in Nepal has largely failed the majority of the population, with a literacy rate for women well under fifty percent and less than one percent of the population enrolled in institutions of higher education as of 2003.<sup>277</sup> Among school-aged children, 1.6 million never attend school and forty-six percent of those who do drop out before grade five.<sup>278</sup> Schools are plagued by poor infrastructure, and teachers experience low morale owing to low pay and difficult living and working conditions. Gender, caste, class, and geographical disparities are significant, and there is a fifty to seventy percent failure rate on national school board exams.<sup>279</sup> According to Open Learning Exchange Nepal, “students from public schools and from schools in

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<sup>276</sup> Dharam Vir, *Education and Polity in Nepal: An Asian Experiment* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1988), 75.

<sup>277</sup> Nanda R. Shrestha and Keshav Bhattarai, *Historical Dictionary of Nepal* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2003), 127.

<sup>278</sup> Open Learning Exchange Nepal, “Why Open Learning” (Kathmandu: n.d.), <http://www.olenepal.org/why.html> (accessed March 17 2009).

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

remote areas are severely disadvantaged in terms of the quality of education they receive.”<sup>280</sup>

To address these pressing concerns, the government launched the Education For All (EFA) National Plan of Action in 2003, which seeks to eliminate gender disparity and provide equal, high quality education to all regardless of caste, gender, or location by the year 2015. A full description of the goals is provided in Appendix III. The seventh amendment to the Education Act in 2001 mandated that children had a right to primary school education conducted in their mother tongue. One of the conclusions of the report was that the seventh amendment is not being implemented owing to lack of resources and a mechanism to enforce this right.<sup>281</sup> The report also recognizes the importance of educational systems relevant to local communities, and makes provisions for this through the local development of curriculum and pedagogical changes.<sup>282</sup>

During my stay in Sahar Tara, several of the eight teachers at a time were in Dunai or in neighboring districts receiving educational training. One of them needed to prepare a report on a case study that he had conducted on the reasons why certain children in Sahar Tara do not attend school regularly. He was also required to write a post-training evaluation. The training focused on a participatory approach to teaching. Whether this training is associated with the mandates of the EFA is unclear, but it was obvious that these teachers were receiving training in unconventional teaching

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Nepal National Commission for UNESCO in collaboration with UNESCO, *Education for All National Plan of Action* (Kathmandu: His Majesty's Government, Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003), 13.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 46.

methodology, especially for Nepal. However, there remained a disconnect between the content of the training and its implementation in Sahar Tara, which I will discuss in detail in the next section.

Recently, the UCPN (M) government imposed a five percent tax on private schools, of which there are approximately 9000 in Nepal,<sup>283</sup> opened variously as business, social work, or foreign-sponsored boarding school ventures. This was done ostensibly in an effort to raise money to reinvest in remote areas of the country, according to Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai.<sup>284</sup> It was surely also a means of targeting schools perceived to cater to the privileged and wealthy, and the government encouraged students to transfer to the public school system. Although some private schools are established simply as a money-making strategy, many others provide an excellent education, have ties to traditional religious educational systems, and offer access to education for communities in remote areas that would not otherwise have it.

### The Educational Setting in Sahar Tara

As the seat of the Village Development Committee (VDC),<sup>285</sup> Sahar Tara is the only village with a lower secondary school (sixth to eighth grades). All other villages in

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<sup>283</sup> RTT Staff Writer, "Maoist Teachers in Nepal Force Closure of Private Schools," *RTT News*, March 6, 2009, <http://www.rttnews.com/ArticleView.aspx?Id=874766&SMap=1> (accessed March 17, 2009).

<sup>284</sup> Kalpit Parajuli, "Nepal's Maoist Government against Private Schools," *Asia News*, February 18, 2009, <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=14515&size=A> (accessed March 17, 2009).

<sup>285</sup> Each of the seventy-five districts in Nepal contains many VDCs, which are responsible for village-level administrative duties and infrastructure development in five sectors: water, agriculture, roads, health, and education. Dolpa has 23 VDCs. VDCs are funded directly by the federal government of Nepal and report to the District Development Committee located at district headquarters. VDCs are made up of nine wards. See Asian Development Bank Institute and UN Capital Development Fund, *Local Government*

the VDC have primary schools, which only go up to the fifth grade. If a student would like to attend school beyond the fifth grade, he/she is obliged to walk to Sahar Tara for schooling or enroll in a boarding school in Dunai or Kathmandu. It is five hours of fast walking between the two most distant Tichurong villages, and only four of the villages in Tichurong are close enough that a student could feasibly attend school and return home in the same day.<sup>286</sup>

There are eight teachers at the school in Sahar Tara, including the headmaster, and each teacher specializes in a certain subject area, such as Nepali, English, or mathematics. Two of the eight teachers are from Sahar Tara, and the rest are from different areas of the Terai region.<sup>287</sup> The Terai is not only flat and hot and humid, but Hinduism is the predominant religious affiliation, and the teachers<sup>288</sup> clearly perceive a rift between themselves and the residents of Sahar Tara. Although three of them have

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*Infrastructure and Service Delivery: A Case Study of the Decentralized Financing and Development Programme – Nepal* (Kathmandu: ADBI & UNCDF, 2003), 2-4. [http://www.uncdf.org/english/local\\_development/uploads/thematic/adb/UNCDF\\_Nepal.pdf](http://www.uncdf.org/english/local_development/uploads/thematic/adb/UNCDF_Nepal.pdf) (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>286</sup> Tachen is the most distant village from Sahar Tara within Sahar Tara VDC and also considerably higher elevation. By November, the school in Tachen had closed owing to the cold, and the teachers had departed for their homes. The Sahar Tara school remains open until January, when the teachers and students have a two month break during the cold winter months. There is also a month off during the Dasain and Tihar holidays, the two most significant and celebrated Hindu holidays in Nepal. Additionally, two months out of the year there is no school in session by default. This is when yarsagumba, or *Cordyceps sinensis* (Berk.) Sacc., is harvested from the high altitude alpine grassland found three to four hours' walk above Sahar Tara. During this time, most people, except for the very young and elderly, camp at the harvesting area and collect the fungi to sell at extremely profitable rates. When I arrived in Sahar Tara, school was not in session because of Dasain and Tihar, and some of the teachers were a week late in arriving, being forced to walk from the Terai for seven days owing to lack of transportation, a difficulty that I also encountered.

<sup>287</sup> Although each teacher is married and has at least one child, the teachers reside in Sahar Tara without their families and return home during the two month winter holiday. Most of them also return home during the Dasain and Tihar holiday, but at least two of them, in turn, always remain in Sahar Tara during this time, ostensibly to look after the school.

<sup>288</sup> Only one of the six non-Sahar Tara teachers is Buddhist.

lived in Dolpa for over a decade, they continue to describe its residents as backward and are bored with village life. Except for the one female teacher, who incidentally resided at the same house as I did in the village, all of the teachers lived in government housing next to the school.

School is held from ten in the morning until one in the afternoon, followed by an hour break. During this time, the teachers often roast *chiura*, flattened rice, as a snack for the students. School is supposed to resume from two until four in the afternoon, but it is rare for the majority of students to return after the break. Some will stick around for the snack and then leave. Only one student, a seventh grade boy, consistently returned for the afternoon session. According to the headmaster, approximately thirty to thirty-five students attend school in Sahar Tara daily, but he estimates that around 120 students should be attending. Not only do students generally not show up for the afternoon session, there is also no consistent daily attendance. During my volunteer experience, it was rare when all five boys would show up for school on the same day. In general, there are a disproportionately larger number of boys who attend school regularly, compared to girls. In one of the teacher's five years in Sahar Tara, not one girl has gone on to pass the School Leaving Certificate (SLC), the equivalent of grade ten.

The reasons for poor attendance are many. Sahar Tara is primarily a subsistence agricultural society, and the work involved in food production, harvesting, and processing as well as in animal husbandry is both labor intensive and requires the cooperation of all family members except for young children. Because work is highly gender-segregated in Sahar Tara, with most responsibilities falling to women, the fewer number of girls in school, as well as their more frequent absence, is largely explained by a greater workload.

Figure 13 shows a group of girls skipping school to collect firewood, all of whom asserted they would rather be doing this than going to school.

Additionally, there is a certain level of apathy associated with education that permeates the Sahar Tara community. Of course this is not true for everyone, and there are entire families who move to Kathmandu and other places to provide their children



**Figure 13: Girls Skipping School and Collecting Firewood for Their Families (Photograph by M. Daurio, November 2008)**

with a better education as well as those who send their children to boarding or government schools elsewhere at great cost.

In the latter case, parents are separated from their children for most if not all of the year,<sup>289</sup> and sometimes these children never return to live in the village. The woman I stayed with is a case in point. She sent her son to Kathmandu to attend a Buddhist boarding school from the age of four. He is now eleven years old and has only returned to Sahar Tara once in seven years. As previously mentioned, a number of children and young adults live and study in Buddhist monasteries in Kathmandu, Dehradun, and Darjeeling. Many parents within the village do not actively enforce their children's attendance at school so that the choice is largely left to the children themselves, many of whom decide to spend the day with their friends instead of going to school. Considering the harsh discipline meted out by several of the teachers, including whacking children with a stick or hitting them on the back, it is not surprising that children choose the freedom of their friends' company.

Those from Tichurong with a higher level of education and those who live primarily in Kathmandu generally place more value on education than those who live in Tichurong and have a low level of education. Again, however, this is not exclusively the case, and some of the most outspoken advocates of education are young women who either never had the opportunity to go to school or made choices similar to the girls in Figure 13 to spend time with their friends rather than go to school. Now, after years of hard labor and many more ahead, they wish they had had an education.

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<sup>289</sup> It is not, however, unusual among people in Sahar Tara to live apart from their families for various reasons. Many of the men are absent from the village the majority of the year, living in Pokhara and the Terai to sell sheep and goats that they buy in Tibet.



From Tichurong, there are only two men who are currently studying for their Master's degree. One man, originally from Tāchen, runs a store in Dunai and returns to Kathmandu periodically for his business and his studies. The other man is from Gumba Tara and recently began his studies in Cyprus. The two schoolteachers who are from Sahar Tara have their Bachelor degrees, a three year program in Nepal, and they are the only two to my knowledge with higher education who have returned to live in the village. Others live exclusively in Kathmandu or conduct business periodically in Dunai. Only one woman born in Sahar Tara is pursuing higher education in Kathmandu.

#### *Place-based Livelihoods and Education*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a major factor in the retention of the Kaike language among Taralis in Sahar Tara is its continued relevance to their lives. As a place-based community whose livelihood depends on successful interaction with and adaptation to the specific ecological conditions of Tichurong, language acts as a mediator in articulating socio-ecological relationships. This adaptive knowledge is transmitted across generations through Kaike and the continued reenactment of ceremonies, worship, and a particular physical and geographical occupation of space. The system of education that currently exists in Sahar Tara and across Nepal increasingly serves as a barrier to this socio-ecological structure of resilience. At the same time that higher value is accorded to formal education and also to capitalist, Western notions of modernization and development, the opportunities for obtaining an education continue to be severely restricted for remote, rural areas in Nepal. People in Sahar Tara are left with poor choices: formal education presents political, economic, and social opportunities within the macrocosm of Nepal, but it is only accessible outside of the microcosm of Sahar Tara.

The education that is available in the village is poor in quality, inconsistent, and does not properly prepare students for higher educational pursuits. The choice to pursue higher and/or better quality education is inevitably the choice to separate one's child from the cultural-ecological context in which village lives are based and individual and community identities are formed. Children's migration out of Sahar Tara produces a transformation in social reproduction which creates a rift between what children learn and the knowledge and skills that would serve them in the village.<sup>290</sup>

Researchers who examine Indigenous health say that self identity in relation to one's community and relationship to land may be important determinants of well-being.<sup>291</sup> The right to self-determination to freely pursue economic, social, political, cultural, and educational development is a prerogative of every community. In the context of education, this right is threatened because their worldviews and relationships to one another and to their land are not respected by the Nepali government.

The way that Taralis situate themselves in their particular cultural and ecological landscape is reflected in daily rituals and discussed, remembered, and articulated anew through language that emerged out of that place. Access to education in their mother tongue and without having to leave their land or community is the right of every child and family. Removing children from this landscape of language and traditional systems

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<sup>290</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the changes wrought in Howa, Sudan following the disruption in the subsistence economy by an agricultural development project, see Katz, *Growing Up Global*, 32.

<sup>291</sup> Clive Nettleton, Dora A. Napolitano and Carolyn Stephens, "An Overview of Current Knowledge of the Social Determinants of Indigenous Health," (paper presented at the International Symposium on the Social Determinants of Indigenous Health, Adelaide, Australia, April 29-30 2007), 5.

of knowledge to pursue an education in places where this knowledge ceases to be relevant is an extreme disservice to the people of Sahar Tara.

## CHAPTER VII

### Discussion

This paper seeks to explore relationship with place as it is encoded, expressed, and transmitted in language among Kaike speakers in Sahar Tara. An exploration of livelihood systems, spiritual beliefs and practices, and social narratives illuminates the ways Taralis conceptualize their place in the cosmos, in Tichurong, and in Nepal. Social memory about place takes the form of cultural-ecological knowledge orally transmitted through language and performative practices. The gendered division of labor and gender-specific social roles differentiate among men and women and young and old in the adaptive learning process. This research was particularly concerned with how gender and age shape worldviews, illustrated primarily in the maps drawn by three different groups of people.

Taralis situate themselves in their landscape through culturally specific and linguistically coded experiences. Their worlds are strongly delineated, and these boundaries are both named and imbued with spiritual significance. Houses, fields, and forests are grouped into areas and assigned names. Different deities inhabit multiple spaces, from the fire pit in every house to the invisible Himalayas towering over the other side of the mountain. Their successful and highly adaptive system of agricultural production is understood through oral histories, as is the origin of the Kaike language, through which they continuously articulate their personal and social relationships with each other and with the land.

These oral histories constitute Taralis' collective social memory, which is also differentiated according to gender and age. The village maps drawn by three different groups consisting of women, young men, and boys, respectively, exemplify this varied knowledge acquisition. Women, more than men, maintain spiritual and religious beliefs and practices. Their spiritual rendering of the world is evident in their map replete with sacred sites and accurate representations of specific fields and trees. The young men, in contrast, are the mediators of change, reflected in their sense of themselves and their environment within a much larger geographical context. Both the women's and young men's maps are made up of limited symbolic representations, whereas the boys' map is the most detailed. The school is disproportionately large and central, but each path, house, forest and field area is meticulously situated. Their map is a reflection of both their work and play worlds, which are often intermingled. They are already preparing themselves for the mobility that they will possess as men. The different maps illustrate how sense of place is articulated individually, socially, and culturally, and experienced in different ways throughout one's life.

Largely missing from the cultural mapping exercises were the voices of elders. Although informal interviews were conducted with various elders in Sahar Tara regarding perceptions of changes, the Kaike language, and livelihood systems, a map drawn by people representing this group would have provided a comparative analysis of age-related understandings of place. However, this did not prove to be the most appropriate method for extracting perspectives from the older generations of people in Sahar Tara. Nevertheless, there is great potential for further mapping in general to

elucidate answers to other research questions and explore relationships between social roles and sense of place.

Research on local knowledge systems and social interactions was framed within the larger socio-economic and historical-political context of Nepal. Specifically, I described the internal colonialist strategies by which the territories of Nepal were amalgamated by Prithvi Narayan Shah; the subsequent centuries of Hindu and Sanskrit-dominated doctrine and policies; the subjugation of Indigenous groups, livelihoods, and knowledge systems; the rise of an Indigenous rights movement in Nepal encouraged by the Maoist People's War; and the history of, and challenges associated with, the educational system.

In spite of living in a remote location, the Taralis of Sahar Tara have long engaged in trade with people from Tibet and Upper Dolpa as well as from the lowlands of Nepal and into India. This negotiation between two worlds, one Buddhist and one Hindu, has profoundly affected and continues to influence the choices Taralis make about their lives. Their self-identification as Magars, for example, assigns them an acceptable rank within the caste system, a system which has dominated the political, social, and economic spheres of the country since its beginning. The caste system is ultimately about status,<sup>292</sup> and maintaining the highest status possible requires persistence. For instance, the Taralis depend upon subsidized rice and greater cash expenditure on rice from the Terai, even when they are able to produce a grain surplus in most years. This signifies the

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<sup>292</sup> Although this makes it sound rather benign, in fact one's status as dictated by the caste system in Nepal has dire implications for one's life. It heavily influences access to education, health care, infrastructure and determines one's livelihood, whom one may marry, and even with whom one may associate.

importance of constantly renegotiating and upholding one's position in society, illustrated by the status associated with rice versus other grains. Being able to eat rice instead of other grains is an indicator of wealth. Ironically, in order to obtain rice the Taralis depend partly upon government handouts, but this is not seen as problematic.

Taralis have a highly successful agricultural production system. While this system relies primarily on the same set of crops and practices for its maintenance, it is also subject to changes. These changes represent adaptive choices which, in most cases, serve to make Tarali cultural-ecological knowledge more resilient. For example, the introduction of potatoes and corn, both within the last 150 years, has altered cultivation and consumption habits considerably, but to the Taralis' advantage.

The harvest of yarsagumba has generated significant cash income in Sahar Tara, and the impact on education, trading circuits, social relations, and traditional agricultural cycles requires additional research. However, based upon initial observations and discussion, the harvesting of this fungus largely represents a cash bonus without hugely disrupting agricultural production. The market for yarsagumba continues to fluctuate and, with such an influx of people from outside of Dolpa to harvest the fungus, it is unknown how long the demand will continue to outstrip the supply and produce such a high selling rate. Nevertheless, the Taralis' capacity for social and ecological adaptation simultaneously fosters successful agricultural production and trading as well as important cultural traditions.

Ironically, the greatest threat to language retention and cultural identity is formal education. Significantly, education removes children from the culturally formative,

place-based experience of growing up in Sahar Tara and also introduces ideas of modernization antithetical to cultural identity and language retention. Because of poor infrastructure and educational opportunities only up to the eighth grade for people in Sahar Tara, parents are obligated to send their children to boarding schools, primarily in Dunai or Kathmandu, to obtain a complete and higher quality education. Accumulation of cultural-ecological knowledge and language acquisition are place-based experiences. The removal of children from the social and environmental setting in which these experiences occur, to schools outside of the village, precludes them from the traditions, beliefs, and performative practices which embody the adaptive knowledge necessary for continued social-ecological resilience. Furthermore, the skills and knowledge learned at schools outside of the village setting render pursuing one's livelihood in Sahar Tara unviable. At the moment, a small percentage of children are placed in boarding schools. However, greater societal emphasis on education and literacy without associated local educational options will likely encourage increased out-migration.

Further research is needed regarding the impact of formal education upon the preservation of the Kaiké language, traditional livelihood systems, and socio-ecological resilience. Currently, Taralis are presented with limited choices, and greater exploration regarding self-determination as a factor in making decisions about education would provide a basis for the introduction of better options.

Within the discipline of geography, this thesis offers an empirical contribution by identifying the theme of the out-migration of children and problematizing assumptions about formal education. A theoretical approach to the geography of missing children as a result of out-migration would be a worthwhile research endeavor both in Nepal and



beyond. Comparative research regarding children's mobility and the spatiality of their lives would be interesting in illuminating differences among rural and urban children and children growing up in place-based communities versus communities with no traditional or historical connection to the land. Further examination of the contradictory processes involved in Taralis' simultaneous regard for their language and distinct cultural heritage and the devaluation of their local livelihood systems would also be useful.

This thesis has attempted to establish the significance in Sahar Tara of using language about and in the landscape to articulate personal and cultural identities, and to transmit cultural-ecological knowledge from one generation to the next. I paid particular attention to experiences of, and expressions about, the landscape through livelihood systems, cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices, and differentiated social roles. Appreciating these interactions within the context of Sahar Tara can provide a basis for making recommendations in Nepal regarding the importance of mother-tongue instruction in education, of supporting sustainable livelihoods, and of encouraging decentralized and locally relevant approaches to change. Greater localized and site-specific considerations of how important cultural-ecological knowledge is embodied, expressed, and transmitted through language unveils the implications associated with Indigenous language loss around the world in relation to cultural preservation. It also highlights the cumulative and adaptive ecological knowledge inherent in many Indigenous knowledge systems which are valuable in promoting greater understanding regarding symbiotic relationships between human beings and their environment. Framing the research within the context of Nepali history and politics, this thesis also serves to oppose internal colonial assimilationist strategies and instead supports

Indigenous self-determination in the pursuit of cultural and linguistic autonomy not only in Nepal but anywhere around the world where such a threat is prevalent.

## Appendix A: Glossary of Nepali Terms

*ādibāsi janājati* – indigenous nationalities

*akāsha gera* – milky way (*kujar kyalbo* in Kaike)

*antim* - last

*Bāhun/Brāhman* – high priest caste

*Bāisakh* – Nepali month

*Chait* – a month in the Nepali calendar; *Chait puja* refers to *Rung*, the Indigenous month long festival in Sahar Tara

*Chhetri/Kshatriya* – second highest and warrior caste, or wearer of the sacred thread

*chiura* – flattened rice

*chorten* – religious cenotaph; often used interchangeably with *stupa*

*dāl* - lentils

*Dālit* – untouchable caste; this term used in the Middle Hills; the *Kamis* (blacksmiths) of Riwa village are *Dālits*

*Deurali* – deity residing in the Himal; brother to *Lāthi*

*dhāmi* - shaman

*Dolpa-pa* – meaning people of Dolpo, or Upper Dolpa

*dupi* - juniper

*Kaike* – language spoken by people living predominantly in three villages in Dolpa district in Nepal

*kerala* – Nepali vegetable

*Khasas* – migrants who entered subcontinent either via the steppelands of western Eurasia or the Iranian plateau and probably reaching the Himalayas west of Nepal around 1,000 BCE

*Lāthi* – deity residing in the Himal; sister to *Deurali*

*Mastā* – deity residing in the Himal

*pahile* – first; before

*Parbātiya* – “people of the mountains”; linguistic ancestors of the Khasas and culturally dominant group of the Nepali state occupying the Middle Hills

*patum* – priest

*puja* - worship

*Saptarishi* – Seven Sisters constellation; *Rungpachā* in Kaike

*stupa* – literally “heap” from Sanskrit; a mound-like structure containing sacred Buddhist relics; often used interchangeably with *chorten*

*Sudra* – lowest caste in three tiered caste system; farmers, laborers, artisans

*Tarali Kham* – another name for the Kaike language

*Tarali* – a Kaike, or Tarali Kham, speaker

*Vaishya* – third highest and merchant caste

*varna* - literally meaning color, used to mean caste

## Appendix B: A Glossary of Kaike Terms

*Chān* – deity residing on the uppermost level of a house

*Chiseru* – deity inhabiting tree below Sahar Tara

*choli* – Nepali shirt which ties together in four places

*Hangyimpu* – unidentified constellation name, described as five stars in a line

*Jobatā* – major deity residing at the Kang glacier to the east of Gumba Tara

*Karchen* – bright star appearing in eastern horizon in the morning; *Durbatārā* in Nepali

*Kārmā* – unidentified constellation

*kujar kyalbo* – literally “king of the sky;” Milky Way (*akaasha gera* in Nepali)

*Lamu* – deity residing on the lowermost level of a house

*Lashin Tānamā* – father deity inhabiting tree directly above Sahar Tara and worshiped to induce it to rain or to stop raining during the Nepali month *baisākh*

*lungi* – sarong or wrap-around

*Mintun* – Big Dipper

*Risumgombo* – deity residing on the middle level of a house

*Rung* – month long indigenous festival usually occurring around January and February

*Rungpachā* – deity inhabiting tree to west of Sahar Tara where *puja* is performed during *Rung*; considered brother to *Rungpikhi*; also the name of a constellation, Seven Sisters in English, *Saptarishi* in Nepali

*Rungpikhi* - deity inhabiting tree to east and above Sahar Tara where *puja* is performed during *Rung*; considered brother to *Rungpachaa*

*suntal* – 150th day

*Tarjuā* – pole erected annually during *Rung* and mounted with a local flag and *dupi* branches

## Appendix C: Education For All National Plan of Action Goals

In April 2000, the World Education Forum on Education for All (EFA) was held in Dakar, Senegal, and the country of Nepal was represented. During this time, the Forum adopted the Dakar Framework for Action (DFA), Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments. Six major EFA goals formulated by this Forum to be achieved by the year 2015 are listed below. See Nepal National Commission for UNESCO in Collaboration with UNESCO. *Education for All National Plan of Action*. Kathmandu: His Majesty's Government Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003.

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs.
4. Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girl's full and equal access to and achievement in, basic education of good quality.
6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

## Appendix D: Methodology

What people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth. – Keith Basso<sup>293</sup>

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International and Terralingua produced a booklet<sup>294</sup> outlining an ecoregion-based approach to conservation and to working with Indigenous communities. Although I am not using ecoregions as criteria in my research, the outline is relevant because it addresses designing a participatory process for working with Indigenous peoples. Briefly, they recommend first spending significant time familiarizing oneself with the community, their organizations, decision-making mechanisms, and social structure; presenting one's research as transparently as possible and embracing a process that emphasizes mutual learning and respect; and determining whether the community thinks the research is relevant for them.

These aforementioned recommendations correspond with Fikret Berkes' three guiding principles for conducting research with Indigenous peoples, which mandate that it is collaborative, that the researcher recognize that his/her written documentation of Indigenous knowledge will inevitably be incomplete unless he/she comes from that community and has lived that knowledge, and that the researcher must approach the work prepared to question his/her own values.<sup>295</sup> Local knowledge is founded on place-based experiences, and obviously my brief

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<sup>293</sup> Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom*, 7.

<sup>294</sup> Terralingua and WWF International, *Indigenous and Traditional Peoples of the World and Ecoregion-Based Conservation: An Integrated Approach to Conserving the World's Biological and Cultural Diversity*. (Gland: WWF International), 2000.

sojourn in Sahar Tara cannot begin to imitate the integrated and adapted knowledge systems of its members. Similarly, RDK Herman emphasizes that legitimizing Indigenous sciences requires recognizing and deconstructing the cultural and historical forces which created the “rational” epistemology still prevailing as the dominant epistemology in geography, an argument supported by Leanne Simpson.<sup>296</sup> This allows incorporating knowledge systems which are simultaneously informed by spirituality and “understood in terms of flows of energies (and sometimes entities) across a permeable boundary between manifest and unmanifest realities.”<sup>297</sup> Louis recommends approaches for using Indigenous methodologies specifically in geographic research, which involves acknowledging that most geographic research with Indigenous communities has been associated with colonialism or has misrepresented or misappropriated Indigenous knowledge. She outlines the need for more institutional support for developing and implementing Indigenous methodologies.<sup>298</sup>

As much as possible, I attempted to conduct research with the community in Sahar Tara following Berkes’ principles as well as those outlined by the WWF and Terralingua, which reiterate the importance of respect, reciprocity, benefit to the community, and partnership.

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<sup>295</sup> Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management* (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis), 1999.

<sup>296</sup> Leanne R. Simpson, "Anticolonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge," *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3 & 4 (2004): 374.

<sup>297</sup> RDK Herman, “Reflections on the Importance of Indigenous Geography,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (2008): 75.

<sup>298</sup> Renee Pualani Louis, “Can You Hear Us Now?”



## Research Strategies

Applying these methodological considerations, I developed specific research approaches outlined by researchers who have had extensive and long term experience working with Indigenous peoples.<sup>299</sup> In particular, my methodological approach contained multiple variables: 1) participant observation; 2) informal interviews; 3) identification of three different groups of people to take part in participatory mapping sessions; 4) meetings with respected members of the community and ongoing consultation; and 5) secondary sources such as government and non-governmental organization documents.

### *Participant Observation*

Because the relationship people in Sahar Tara have with their environment is largely defined through their livelihood systems, participant observation constituted a critical part of my research methods. It was also the least intrusive and most appropriate method for observing gender and children's roles, learning about local livelihood practices, and gaining a sense of the multifaceted nature of human-environment interactions.

Undoubtedly, I have a much better sense of women's lives and perspectives because of the gendered nature of Sahar Tara society which dictated that most of my leisure time was spent with other women. In most cases, it would have been inappropriate for me to accompany men as they herded animals or went into the forest to cut wood. There was some men's work that took place within the village, however, and I was able to observe this and also to engage men in conversation about it. One example is the butchering of water buffalo, sheep, and goats, which generally takes place once a year and which occurred during my stay in Sahar Tara.

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<sup>299</sup> These include Fikret Berkes and Iain Davidson-Hunt, Keith Basso, Leanne Simpson, Renee Pualani Louis, Sumitra Manandhar Gurung, Neela Mukherjee, and RDK Herman, among others.

Although there were some tasks I was incapable of performing, such as carrying a 100 pound load of wood with a tumpline, I engaged in nearly every level of work, leisure, and religious activities which occurred during this mostly post-harvest period. These included collecting and storing firewood, fetching water, threshing, winnowing, harvesting potatoes, dishwashing, babysitting, attending or participating in *pujas*, and visiting other villages on errands, among other activities.

Participant observation is an effective means of understanding the daily lives of people within a community and presents opportunities for contextual conversations with people about habitat, relationship to land, and livelihood systems.<sup>300</sup> Importantly, participant observation provides a venue for understanding place-making within the context of the ideas and practices by which it is realized,<sup>301</sup>

### *Informal Interviews*

Because a structured interview process would have made interviewees feel uncomfortable by heightening the dichotomies between researcher and researched and literate and illiterate, I chose to conduct informal interviews. These took the form of conversations where interviewees guided the dialogue based on my initial questions. An additional advantage to these informal interviews was the opportunity to have conversations with people regarding topics which were contextually relevant at the time. For example, while gathering manure with a woman in one of the fields above the village, I would be able to appropriately ask about agricultural production, gender roles, property ownership, etc.

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<sup>300</sup> Neela Mukherjee, *Participatory Rural Appraisal Methodology and Applications*, Studies in Rural Participation, vol. 1.2 (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1993), 45-48.

<sup>301</sup> Keith Basso, *Wisdom*, 7.

Informal interviews were conducted not only in Sahar Tara but also in Kathmandu, Dunai, and several neighboring villages of Sahar Tara. Interviewees were identified in several ways: snowball sampling, a deliberate effort to interview people of different ages, gender, and areas of expertise, and circumstantially. In the latter case, for example, I would meet people at the water tap and have the opportunity to ask them questions while they did laundry.

Table 7: Informal Interviews, 2008

Residency	Aged 15 and below		Aged 16-35		Aged 36-60		Aged 61 and above		Total
	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	
Kathmandu	0	0	2	5	3	7	0	0	<b>17</b>
Dunai	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	<b>4</b>
Sahar Tara	5	5	13	11	13	18	5	4	<b>74</b>
Tupa Tara	3	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	<b>7</b>
Tarakot	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	<b>4</b>
Gumba Tara	0	0	1	1	4	0	1	0	<b>7</b>
Riwa	2	2	4	0	2	0	0	0	<b>10</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>123</b>

Most interviews took place with Kaike speakers in all locations, but I also spoke with linguists, professors, activists, students, and development workers. I divided people into different age groups, representing children, young adults, middle aged, and elderly, respectively, taking into consideration Nepal's average life expectancy of approximately 62 years. Table 7 provides a list of all interviewees. In some cases I did not know the age of the interviewee and had to estimate. In Kathmandu, two of the women aged 16-35 were Kaike speakers, whereas five of the men in the same category were Kaike speakers. The others are represented by three male linguist professors at Tribhuvan University, a female doctoral candidate in linguistics studying the Kaike language at Tribhuvan, the male director of the Magar Studies Centre and a male professor in public health involved in the Centre, a male former consultant for an international development organization working in Dolpa, a female geographer and social

activist, a female forester and development worker, and a female Magar activist working for the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN).

In Dunai, one of the male interviewees in the 36-60 year and one in the 16-35 year age group are non-Kaike speakers. Both belong to the dominant Bahun-Chhetri castes.

In Sahar Tara, one of the female interviewees in the 16-35 year age range is a schoolteacher from the Terai area of Nepal, and three of the male interviewees in the 36-60 year age group are also schoolteachers from the Terai. Five of the men in the same age category were visiting from Dho in upper Dolpa, as were two of the women in that age group. Three of the people I spoke with in Gumba Tara are Kaike speakers.

Of course, some interviews were more thorough than others and also represent a series of continued conversations over the period of my stay, rather than just a single meeting. This is the case with approximately 22 people.

Again because of the gender-segregated nature of Sahar Tara society, informal interviews conducted with women tended to have more depth compared to those conducted with men. However, informal interviews were also conducted with the group of young men who drew a map, with the male schoolchildren who also participated in map making, and with several older men who are respected members of the community.

### *Cultural Mapping*

The basis of cultural mapping is the representation of cultural and natural landscapes from Indigenous or local perspectives.<sup>302</sup> Among other things, it has been used to document

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<sup>302</sup> Nigel Crawhall, *The Role of Participatory Cultural Mapping*, 2.

landscapes of dying languages.<sup>303</sup> Cultural mapping provides insight into how Indigenous people understand and relate to their land as well as opportunities for expression from different elements within the community. In Sahar Tara, for example, I was interested in the differentiated perspectives of men, women, and children, examining the ways in which gender and age shape one's relationship with the landscape. Mapping also provides a basis for translating the intangible into a more explicit medium for purposes of education and intergenerational transmission, among other objectives.<sup>304</sup>

Participatory mapping (PM) is not necessarily the same as cultural mapping but can be used in conjunction with it. PM has been used with success in Latin America, Africa, and Asia as a collaborative research methodology in development initiatives,<sup>305</sup> resource management,<sup>306</sup> and land-use planning.<sup>307</sup> PM encompasses two kinds of mapping: one includes participatory action research mapping (PARM) and participatory rural appraisal mapping (PRAM), both of which are used as social action or development tools. Participatory research mapping (PRM) is used specifically for research.<sup>308</sup> Sumitra Manandhar Gurung, who has used PM practices successfully with Indigenous groups in Nepal, asserts that Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) affirms Indigenous knowledge systems and enables participants to act as partners and teachers in

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>305</sup> Mukherjee, *Participatory Rural Appraisal*, 48.

<sup>306</sup> Humphrey W. Kalibo and Kimberly E. Medley, "Participatory Resource Mapping for Adaptive Collaborative Management at Mt. Kasigau, Kenya," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 82 (2007): 145-158.

<sup>307</sup> Richard Chase Smith and others, "Mapping the Past and the Future: Geomatics and Indigenous Territories in the Peruvian Andes," *Human Organization* 62, no. 4 (2003): 357-368.

<sup>308</sup> Peter H. Herlihy and Gregory Knapp, "Maps of, by, and for the Peoples of Latin America," *Human Organization* 62, no. 4 (2003): 303.

the appraisal process.<sup>309</sup> Perhaps the highest level of PM occurs when community members receive training in order to join a field research team, deconstructing the researcher-researched dichotomy and allowing for a truly collaborative research process.<sup>310</sup> However, as Richard Mather points out in relation to his experiences using photomaps in communities in Nepal to support participatory community forest efforts, “all participatory methods are vulnerable to distortion and inequality.”<sup>311</sup>

Mapping has also been used to ascertain social identities associated with place and a “cultural appraisal of the environment”, as in Karl Offen’s experiences mapping Miskitu land claims with that community in northeastern Nicaragua.<sup>312</sup> Similarly, John Pickles argues that identity formation is in part a “spatialized historical process of mapping occurring at many scales simultaneously.”<sup>313</sup> In this sense, a given space embodies many different meanings for different people and at various scales.

In Sahar Tara, three groups of people were identified in consultation with members of the community to participate in creating mental maps of the village. The groups were as follows: a group of women of all ages, a group of young men, and a group of boys in the sixth to eighth grades. These groups were selected as a result of various factors. Most of my time was spent with women, as previously mentioned. The group of women who participated in map-making

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<sup>309</sup>Sumitra Manandhar Gurung, *Notes on Participatory Rural Appraisal for TALC* (Makwanpur: PLAN International, 1997), 1.

<sup>310</sup> Derek A. Smith, "Participatory Mapping of Community Lands and Hunting Yields among the Bugle' of Western Panama," *Human Organization* 62, no. 4 (2003): 332-343.

<sup>311</sup> Richard A. Mather, "Using Photomaps to Support Participatory Processes of Community Forestry in the Middle Hills of Nepal," *Mountain Research and Development* 20, no. 2 (2000): 154-161.

<sup>312</sup> Karl H. Offen, "Narrating Place and Identity, or Mapping Miskitu Land Claims in Northeastern Nicaragua," *Human Organization* 62, no. 4 (2003): 382-392.

<sup>313</sup> John Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping, and the Geo-Coded World* (New York: Routledge), 2004.

consisted of women of different ages and educational levels. It began with three women and culminated in a much larger group providing input and watching. The group of young men represented the group most susceptible to outside influences because they tend to have higher levels of education than the women and travel more extensively either because of work or education. They are the only group of people whom I sometimes overheard speaking in Nepali among themselves instead of exclusively in Kaike, as was the case with all other people in Sahar Tara. Lastly, the group of male schoolchildren was chosen simply because I had established a rapport with them while volunteering several times a week at the local school. The headmaster and other teachers had suggested I work with the older grades teaching English, and as the school only goes up to the eighth grade, I taught pupils in the three highest grades, who were all boys. Because of the particular roles boys play in the village as herders, horsemen, and woodcutters, the map they made offered a distinct perspective of how they view their world. The boys also made an additional map illustrating Kaike field area names.

The three groups of people in Sahar Tara – women, young men, and children – were identified for purposes of elucidating their relationships to the landscape and giving each group the opportunity to “place” their social identities in the village on the map. To make the process as collaborative as possible, I included community members in providing input and choosing groups of people to make maps and left the originals in Sahar Tara, taking only photos or copies back with me. When these maps have been both digitized and georeferenced, they will be given back to the community for review and storage.

Map-making with these groups served two purposes. First, it provided a medium for translation which allowed me as an outsider to analyze conceptualizations of space and place according to gendered and children’s perspectives. The map-making process itself also

facilitated dialog among these groups of people regarding relationship to land and provided insight regarding the processes of social identity formation.

My consultation with community leaders prior to conducting fieldwork, my attempts to understand Sahar Tara livelihoods through participant observation, my conversations with over 100 men and women representing different age groups, and the implementation of the participatory mapping process with several groups of people served to ground my research with the needs and desires of the community and involve them in participatory processes of cultural articulations of place.

The methodological approaches upon which this research is based were chosen because they were deemed most appropriate for doing research with Indigenous communities, because they allowed for collaboration in the research process, and because they offered the most effective, least intrusive contexts for communication and interaction.



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